



INTIMATE  
PARTNER  
VIOLENCE

**IPV**

**CODIFYING**

**COERCIVE CONTROL**

### CRIMINALIZING CONTROLLING BEHAVIORS IN A RELATIONSHIP

For decades, law enforcement agencies worldwide have seen intimate partner violence almost exclusively in physical terms, measuring its severity in individual beatings and injuries.

By **CRIMINALIZING** behaviors many previously considered merely unpleasant, domestic abuse advocates hope these laws will transform how society views acceptable power dynamics in relationships and how we tackle abuse (Nugent, 2019).

Domestic abuse and child abuse are affirmed as Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES) (Felitti, et al., 1998).

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March 2021 ©

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### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This policy brief is written in support of **Jennifers' Law**, honoring Jennifer Magnano and Jennifer Dulos, and the hundreds of Connecticut protective moms who have been victims of coercive control. **Jennifers' Law**, a CT law proposed by Senator Alex Kasser, would expand the statutory definition of domestic violence to include an offender's pattern of coercive and controlling behavior, known as coercive control. Coercive control encompasses psychological, financial, legal abuse, and use of the children as pawns with the "tactics used by offenders deployed to hurt and intimidate victims (coercion) and those designed to isolate and regulate [victims] (control)" (Stark, 2012).

In 2007, Jennifer Magnano's four month struggle to be free from her abusive husband came to a violent end when she was murdered in front of her young children. Her husband then turned the gun on himself. In 2019, Jennifer Dulos went missing, this amid very contentious divorce and custody proceedings on the part of her separated partner. Jennifer had informed the court of her fear for her safety, as well as fear for the physical safety and emotional well-being of her children.

Research shows that coercive control, often a non-physical abuse, is a key factor in most domestic violence cases and in cases where victims and their children are murdered.

### Jennifers' Law

1. Revise the legal definition of Domestic Violence/Abuse in the civil law statute to include **coercive control**, often a non-physical form of abuse.
2. Revise the dissolution of marriage statute Sec. 46b-40 to include DV as a factor. This is imperative, particularly as a consideration in custody dispositions, since the legal system is often manipulated by perpetrators, another tactic to harm the adult victim and subsequently harming the child victims, a form of child abuse.
3. Revise the child custody statute Sec. 46b-56 to elevate DV (currently factor #14) to become the primary factor, to be examined and adjudicated first.
4. Make electronic applications for restraining orders available as a permanent option.

Acknowledging **coercive control** as the foundation of domestic abuse is paramount in understanding how to prevent injuries and death to adult and child victims. In the last ten years, England, Wales, Scotland, Ireland, Taiwan, and Ontario, Canada have expanded their domestic violence laws to include **coercively controlling** behaviors. Connecticut would join California and Hawaii in moving forward with this important piece of legislation.

## Coercive Control

is described as a non-physical form of abuse, but it can be a predictor of serious violence. In a review of **358 homicides** in the UK, it was found that **controlling or obsessive behaviors was present in 92% to 94% of the cases** (Monckton-Smith, et al., 2017).

Studies have demonstrated, that **a pattern of coercive controlling behaviors can precede, motivate, or increase the likelihood of violence** in relationships (Crossman, et al., 2016).

Offenders who exercised control over their partner's daily activities were **more than 5 times** more likely to kill them (Zahn, 2003).

*A National Institute for Justice Study found:* **In 70 to 80 percent of intimate partner homicides, no matter which partner was killed, the man physically abused the woman before the murder.** The research affirms that **a way to decrease intimate partner homicide is to identify and intervene promptly with abused women at risk.** **Half of all female homicides are killed by an intimate partner** (Petrosky, et al., 2017).

## INTRODUCTION

**Coercive control** is a term that is used to describe the controlling nature of an abusive relationship and encompasses the aspects of power and control, physical and non physical, with intent to harm another emotionally and to exert control over another.

***COERCIVE CONTROL is the GOLDENTHREAD*** running through risk identification and assessment for domestic violence" (Myhill & Hohl, 2016).

In most parts of the world, law, policy and prevention work addressing domestic violence is created based on a "violence model," which fails to take into account the "well-documented fact that physical abuse almost never consists of an isolated incident." Almost half of all reported domestic violence cases involve serial abuse in which victims reported daily assaults, physical and non-physical, over the lifespan of the relationship, with abusers using coercive control (Stark, 2012).

*The National Coalition Against Domestic Violence (n.d.)* states that 72% of all murder- suicides involve an intimate partner & 94% of the victims of these murder-suicides are female.

(Domestic Violence Abuse Intervention Project 1980's)



Physical abuse, the abuse recognized by our criminal justice system, (the "violence model") (Stark, 2012), leaves a bruise and is horrifying, oftentimes requiring medical intervention. However, other abuses that are covert, such as sexual abuse, psychological abuse, financial abuse, legal abuse, use of the children as weapons in multiple ways, including attempts to harm the adult victim and the adult victim's relationship with the child victims, are based on the need for control by the offender.

Studies have demonstrated that a pattern of coercively controlling behaviors **can precede, motivate, or increase the likelihood of violence in relationships** (Crossman, et al., 2016). Sometimes called **the "problem with no name"**, coercively controlling behaviors committed by offenders, such as economic exploitation or deprivation and entrapment, **would be considered crimes if only committed by strangers and are rarely identified as such** (Stark, 2012).

**Abuse [coercive control] is a pattern, a war of attrition that wears a person down,”** says Laura Richards, a British criminal behavioral analyst who helped pass the 2015 law in England making coercive control against the law (Richards, 2020).

***There is an association between child domestic homicide and adult domestic violence***, since child domestic homicide is often preceded by adult domestic violence (Bourget, et al., 2007).

**Women make up 95% of those who experience coercive control and 74% of perpetrators are men** (Johnson, et al., 2008). The [adult] victims **AND** their children, *child victims*, are trapped under the perpetrators coercively controlling domination (Katz, et al., 2020).



Since this abusive behavior takes place repeatedly and continuously and when multiple reports are made, oftentimes with no visible physical violence, "many abused women appear in family court, child welfare or health care systems carrying what Evan Stark calls "pseudo-psychiatric labels" that imply they are the problem, not the abuser (Stark, 2012).

***An evident gaslighting by the system intended to protect the victim.***

Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is the most prevalent disorder associated with IPV (Johnson and Zlotnick, 2009). Intensity, duration, and perception of the battering experience is a significant factor in the severity of the PTSD symptoms (Jones, et al., 2001). Domestic Violence and child abuse are considered Adverse Childhood Reactions (ACES) (Filetti, et al., 1998).

**Since 2008, 821 children have been murdered by a divorcing/separating parent** (Center for Judicial Excellence, 2022).





## POST SEPARATION ABUSE

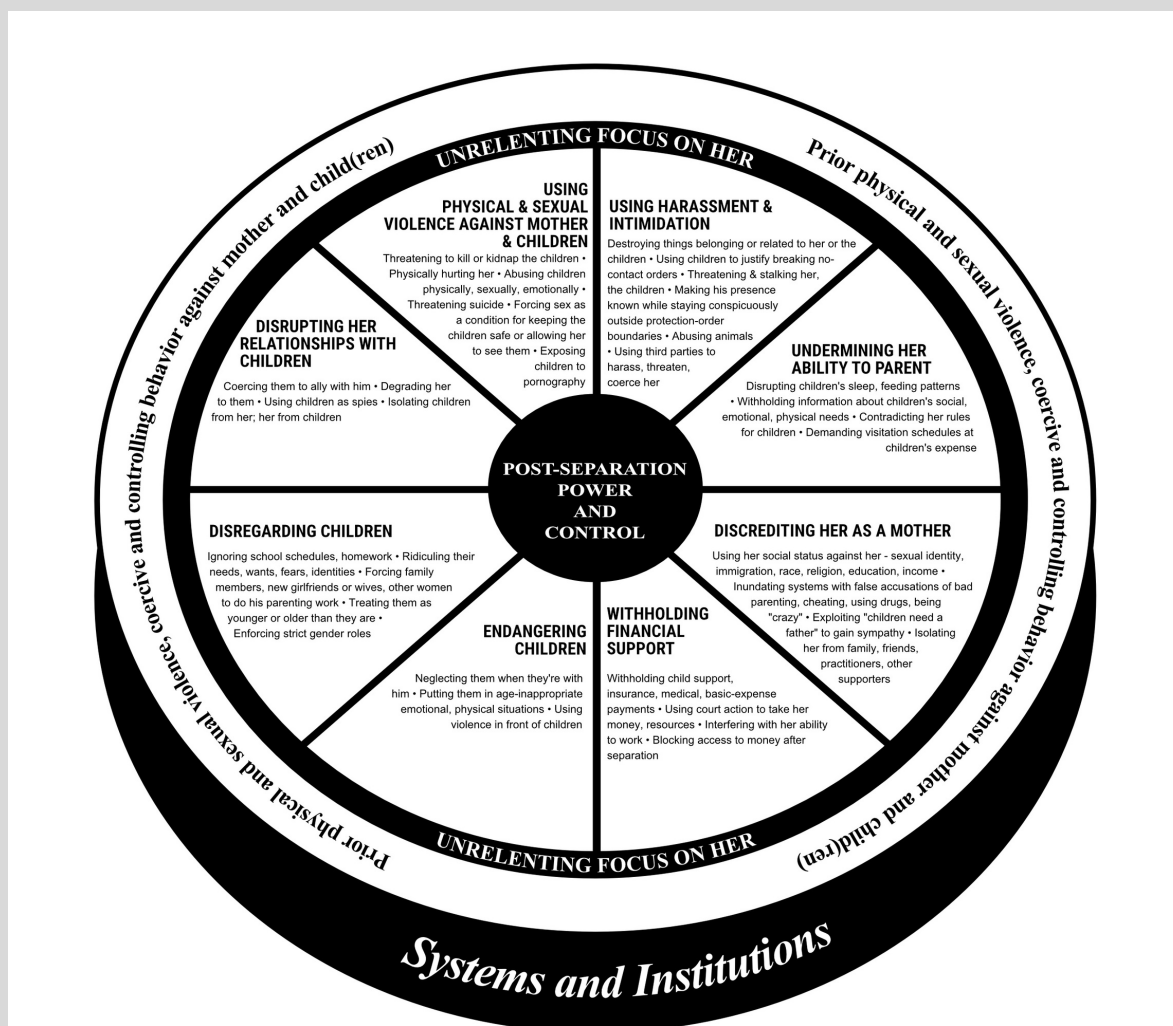
The concept of Post Separation Abuse (PSA) is now becoming widely recognized as an abuse that occurs at the time the victim has exited the abusive relationship. The **coercive control** intensifies, the offender realizing the loss of control over the victim.

Post separation is also the time when the victim is most at risk for injury or death since the coercive control that was already occurring, intensifies. Sharp-Jeffs, et al., (2017) reported that when victims removed themselves from the immediate control of an abusive partner, over 90 percent experienced post-separation abuse. This PSA is often against the backdrop of the dissolution of the relationship and heightened risk that adult victims and their children enter child custody proceedings. The offender sets their sights on the child(ren) to exert control and to subsequently harm the children (Jeffries, 2016). Up to 50% of disputed custody cases involve domestic violence (Morrill, et al., 2005).

Research from the State of CA domestic abuse database found over 18 months, of 231 female domestic abuse victims, "1/5 of homicide victims with restraining orders are murdered within two days of obtaining the order" (Vittes & Sorenson, 2008, p. 195).

Batterers are more likely to seek custody of children than non-batterers. A recent study (2019) found that child abuse claims are under-validated considerably, putting children a great risk. Research suggests that federally funded program evaluations should be mandated to explore whether abuse is an underlying reason why a mother may resist a father's access to their children (Meier, et al., 2019).

**It takes a victim of IPV on average seven attempts to leave an abusive relationship & research affirms that the most unsafe time for a victim is when she exits the relationship** (The National Domestic Violence Hotline, 2013).



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