

A Qualitative Study of Women's Long-Term Experience of Trauma More Than Ten Years After Exiting Domestic Abuse

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Coercive control is a global phenomenon that has a serious impact on victims' mental, physical, sexual, and financial wellbeing (Palermo et al., 2014; Asay et al., 2016; Lausi et al., 2021). However the long-term impacts on women who had left coercive control relationships more than ten years previously has received scant attention (Lawn & Karestan, 2021). The aim of this research is to explore women's experiences and perceptions of the impact of a coercive control relationship on their lives more than 10 years after they left those relationships. To understand the long-term impacts this research focused on gaining access to the knowledge and understanding of the women who had left those relationship ten or more years gain understanding of their perception of ongoing role coercive control continues to have in women's lives years after they exited those relationships and thereby open the possibilities for policy and procedural changes to prevent long-term harm.

It presents an overview coercive control through a feminist and trauma focused lens to understand the effects of coercive control in both the private and the public domains and the impact of the dominant hegemonies through a feminist analysis of patriarchy. It traces the development of policy and service provision concerning domestic abuse, now referred to as coercive control, in Ireland since the late 1960s. It acknowledges that the changes in Ireland took place within a global context of activism for civil rights and that 1960s saw the growth of many such movements in Europe and America.

Ethical approval was gained for a qualitative study for generating and collecting research data about the experiences of coercive control as perceived by women. A loosely-structured interview schedule was used for in-depth interviews with seven women who fitted the study criteria. Furthermore, the study criteria included the participants receiving a copy of the analysis of the findings to read to ensure that their words were appropriately heard and contextualized in the analysis.

The transcribed interviews were thematically explored in three phases: the relationship; breaking free and their current lives. The key findings illustrate that the women who experienced coercive control continue to live with the trauma they experienced with the perpetrators and that it continues to significantly affect the women's lives physically, psychologically and financially. Furthermore, it emerged that the effects of their help-seeking encounters within the public domain, especially within the judicial and financial sectors, reactivated and exacerbated the traumas they experienced within the private sphere. Moreover, they indicated that in their experience public discourse pertaining to coercive control continues to blame and shame the victim resulting in their only sharing their experiences of the abuse they experienced with a small trusted group of friends.

This research acknowledges the significant changes that have occurred within systems while recommending how they could be expanded across systems but also society in general by taking into consideration the experiences of victims. Those changes to meet the current needs that the women experiencing coercive control, or those who continue to experience the long-term consequences of having lived in those relationships, could make significant differences to the physical, emotional, financial and quality of life in general to the significant number of women who are victims of coercive control.