



MEN AND THEIR EXPERIENCES OF COERCIVE CONTROL

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AIMS OF THE TALK

- To consider what we know about coercive control
- Explore men's experience relating to:
 - Control in current relationships
 - How this control continues post-separation (e.g., through parental alienation)
- Explore men's "recovery" from these experiences including a brief reference to barriers to help-seeking
- Conclude on gaps in the current legislation

CONTROL

- Foundation of feminist theory – posited to be a male phenomenon.
- Emotional abuse, controlling behaviour, psychological aggression – big overlap
- Includes financial control, humiliation, trying to control their behaviour, restrict time with family and friends
- Bates, Graham-Kevan and Archer (2014); Bates and Graham-Kevan (2016)

EMERGENCE OF MALE VICTIMS

- Some of the traditional models have not allowed for male victims
- “When a woman slaps her husband in the heat of an argument, it is unlikely to be interpreted by him as a serious attempt to do him physical harm. In fact, it is likely to be seen as a quaint form of feminine communication” (Johnson, 2008)
- Common criticisms of current research include “lack of context”

BATES (IN PRESS)

Verbal and
Physical
Aggression

Control

Sexual
aggression

Barriers to
seeking help

Post-
separation
abuse

VERBAL AND PHYSICAL AGGRESSION

- “...throwing anything she could get her hands on from tv remotes to ornaments. I used to get punched, slapped and kicked as well”
- “In the evening after any argument, always as I was about to fall asleep, she would bring up the whole argument up again. I soon learnt to just apologise for anything and everything because if I didn't I wouldn't be allowed to get any sleep.”
- “There will be slapping, scratching, pushing, pulling, blocking exit from a room, spitting, sometimes kicking or throwing things.”
- “70% of the time it would be verbal with shouting and threats. 30% would involve violence. Normally when I was unaware. Sleeping or in the shower, bath or toilet.”
- “She has woken up in the middle of the night hitting me”

LACK OF RETALIATION

- “I was raised to never ever ever hit a woman, so I never fought back, I just covered my face and backed away from her the best I could”
- “I grew up witnessing DV towards my mother and so I would never lay my hands on a woman”
- “I was and am too afraid even to defend myself, i know that if i do and any injury occurs, there's no way i could prove self defense.”
- “No I didn’t respond, because I was scared”
- “I have never attacked her or fought back at all. I have tried to restrain her at times to prevent her from attacking me. The problem with that is that she would then show me bruises a couple of days later and tell me that she could report me to the police for assault and that they would believe her story. Unfortunately that is true. It eventually got to the point where I would just cover my face and not even try to restrain her.”

SEXUAL AGGRESSION

- “Sex used as a form of abuse and control”
- “...waking up to find myself handcuffed to the metal bedframe. She proceeded to torture me (insertion of vibrators into my anus, lots of small cuts with a craft knife, squeezing and hitting testicles) and then got infuriated because I was not getting an erection (obviously too terrified and in too much pain) and gave me a good punching and left me there.”
- “I opened my diary and she had placed a letter in it stating that she was pregnant and had come off the pill deliberately...I felt totally violated”
- “She stopped taking her pill and attempted to get pregnant against my wishes”
- “She also was in complete control of our sex life - she decided if, when, and how we had sex... She also controlled when/if I was allowed to orgasm, and would be violent if I didn't comply.”

CONTROL - ISOLATED

- “She controlled my friendships and controlled my contact with my family...This would include logging onto my emails and sending emails to my family pretending to be me”
- “Yes, she totally manipulated the relationships I had with my own family trying to avoid contact with them or not seeing them and feeding me negative comments about them all the time...it was gradual you see and like the frog warmed up gently in the pan you do not see the abuse of the relationship creeping up and taking over you.”
- “I have no friends now, my wife insisted I stop socialising as I was now with her and if I loved her I would not want to spend time with anyone else.”
- “I was afraid to go spend time with friends because I didn't know what kind of minefield I'd be walking into when I got back home.”
- “what I have come to realise is that she was deleting a lot of messages from friends that I was getting. Because some of them were saying we have been sending you this message and that message and I never got them. So, she had actually got into my phone and deleted messages from friends and deleted a few friends off my Facebook page as well”

CONTROL - THREATS AND MANIPULATION

- “I mean she developed a thing where she would actually take off her wedding and engagement ring...she would take them off and leave them off for sort of days or weeks...that would always sort of strike fear.”
- “if I actually tried to argue with her about anything whereas she would just turn around and say “fine, I am just going to leave and take the kids”, and then she would storm upstairs quite often at 10, 11, 12 o'clock at night and pull this poor 3 or 4 year old out of bed, and say “right that's it we are leaving”
- “I knew in their face that they already knew what I was telling them, and the only way they could have known was through my ex –wife. So, she used my child abuse constantly, as if... it was controlling”
- “I now know you're going into a relationship you don't share fuck all like that...it's dangerous, you're giving somebody too much ammunition. And she used it against me yeah, because that was my greatest fear was my daughter being taken from me and that's what happened”

FALSE ALLEGATIONS

- “she once injured her hand... she punched me in the face too hard...and then the doctor offered for her to press charges against me, and she made sure that I knew about that when we got in the car. She said that the doctor has gave her his card, and that anytime that she wants all she has to do is call this doctor and the doctor will help her press charges against me for assault, and I said “but you hit me in the face, and broke your hand on my face”, and she said “it doesn’t matter...and she used that as a threat all the time, she said “all I have to do is call the doctor”. She also used to say that all she has to do is put a bruise on her body and just bang herself again a door jam or something, and she just have to say that I did that”

CONTROL AROUND MONEY AND CHILDREN

- “She had control of my wages and gave me £20 per week from them”
- “In the end she had all my online banking passwords and my money always seemed to disappear before id got it.”
- “She kept telling me that she would kill out children and me if I ever left her or if I did not comply with whatever it was that she wanted”
- “I'd have to bring proof of purchase for milk when she would send me to the shops and ring her when in the shops to prove that I was there and only there, I wasn't allowed to take my daughter to school because of all the single mothers there.”

GASLIGHTING

- “Yes I was constantly told I had remembered everything wrong and that I was mentally unwell for thinking these bad thoughts and that she only loved me.”
- “This was part of the control. When you only hear one voice it dominates”
- “Yes, I didn't know that was a real thing, and didn't know it was called gas lighting, but it describes exactly what she did - that's the nail on the head there.”
- “It absolutely occurred. I would put something somewhere and she was the only person who could have moved it or would have because the kids would have never touched it. when I couldn't find it, she would find it somewhere that wasn't even close to where I was sure I left it. She would tell me I was the crazy one”
- “ I would begin to doubt my own sanity and perception of reality.”
- “Yes, lots and lots. This went on again and again, and I ended up essentially a wreck, not trusting my own memory or interpretation of events, constantly uncertain of myself and quite what was 'real' or not.”

IMPACT OF THEIR EXPERIENCES (BATES, IN PRESS)

- *“I tried to kill myself...I ate all the sleeping pills I could find, drank a bit, and was happy that it was over. I woke up next to her, It was the worst moment in my life, I was still in hell”*
- *“I am still afraid of her”*
- *“The relationship is over for two years now and I still don't feel like I could trust another person to form a new relationship. I'm also heartbroken knowing there is nothing I can do to help my son, I'm still in court fighting”*
- *““Left me with vision loss in one eye...Symptoms of Brain injuries and PTSD”*

POST-SEPARATION

- Escalation of abuse (e.g., Jaffe et al., 2003)
- Stalking (e.g., Douglas & Dutton, 2001)
- Custody dispute and divorce
- Parental Alienation (syndrome)
- Impact on children (e.g., Callaghan et al., 2015) and children's voice
- Bates (in press)

POST-SEPARATION ABUSE: HARASSMENT

- “Erm, last year we was on holiday and it was Father’s Day. I’d already been told that I wouldn’t see the kids on Father’s day so we decided to go away for the weekend, and that was really as a result of I didn’t really want to be at home when it was Father’s Day knowing I couldn’t see the children, so I thought I’d take myself away from the situation. So my partner and I went away and on Father’s Day itself I got a text message through with a picture: Happy Father’s Day, you f-ing sperm donor!” (P12)
- “I actually ended it, which made her very unhappy. She harassed me for a little over two years, sending me emails. Even once I was in a relationship with somebody else...she took every opportunity to tear me down” (P6)

POST-SEPARATION ABUSE: PARENTAL ALIENATION

- “And it’s so simple, it’s so easy really, it’s just she knows they’re the most important thing for me therefore here we are, you know, we’ve just got to use it” (P11)
- “you know the thing about the silent treatment that was her constant thing. Where she would just give me the silent treatment, or she would... my son is six years old he was five when all this happened and she would speak through him when she was angry with me” (P4)

POST-SEPARATION ABUSE: FALSE ALLEGATIONS

- “no it was a different one... erm, every sort of two or three weeks with increasing severity. She obviously she starts off saying “oh no he used to beat me up” and then it got onto I had sexually abused my older kids, so they had to go through a child protection investigation. Erm... then she said I was having a relationship with an unspecified child at the school”, I was working at, so I got suspended for three months and a whole big position of trust enquiry” (P3)
- “And ultimately in 2015, 21st December 2015 my then wife took the decision to raise a false and malicious allegation against me formally. She had run one informally in March of that year but formally involving the police which led to my arrest and erm, then, er, I was in custody overnight, released on police bail for 12 weeks.” (P13)

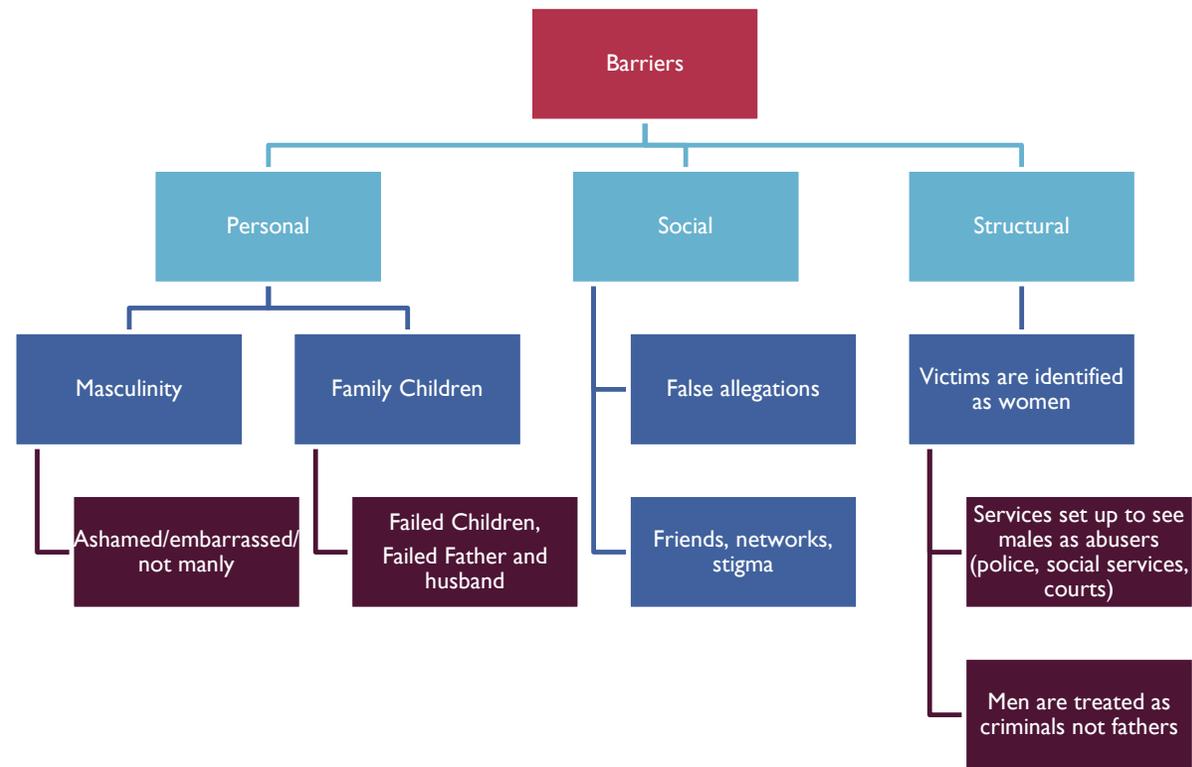
IMPACT OF EXPERIENCES

- “I don’t know how I survived that time because it was just unbelievable” (P3)
- “I will not have a partner because I can’t trust anyone” (P2)
- “Sometimes I feel as if it’s still continuing now” (P10)
- “I had trouble sleeping, I was quite anxious at times, sometimes I just was quite isolated, depression...” (P12)
- “yeah erm I was diagnosed with PTSD when I was 30. Erm and I have severe agoraphobia with panic disorder now” (P6)

BARRIERS TO LEAVING/HELP-SEEKING

- “...and I tried to talk to her mum...I went to have Sunday lunch with them and I had a great big black eye which she inflicted the night before and I just pointed at her, and they laughed and they thought it was really funny.” (P3)
- “I was ashamed I thought they would all think that I am a monster. I... she used to tell me that the only reason she used to hit me, was because I was scaring her. Cos I would be big and I would be opposing and I would be standing in her way... and so I thought I was the bad guy. I never once thought that I was the victim,” (P6)
- “just I think once you’re in to it it’s sort of difficult to get out of it” (P14)
- “do you know this is the absolute madness of being British, I think possibly I don’t know being a British bloke of a certain age, but no I think erm...number I I’d kind of erm” (P7)

TAYLOR & BATES (2019)



VICTIMS OF CONTROL

- Barriers to help-seeking and reporting:
 - Personal
 - Social
 - Structural
- Fear – of reprisal, of being arrested, or being falsely accused
- Being isolated, losing touch with friends and family
- Children

- Moving on? Recovery?



ONGOING IMPACT



“I HAD NO IDEA HOW PAINFUL IT WOULD BE”



THE EMPTINESS AND THE STRUGGLE

ISSUES WITH CURRENT LEGISLATION

- Section 76 of the Serious Crime Act 2015
 - Current partner
 - Ex-partner but living together
 - Relative
- Stalking and harassment
 - Following, contacting, monitoring, loitering, spying, fear of violence
 - ...that affects victim' physical and mental health
- “where there is an ongoing relationship then the offence of controlling or coercive behaviour should be considered”.



FUTURE DIRECTIONS?

- Elizabeth.Bates@cumbria.ac.uk
- Twitter: @DrLizBates

- Bates, E.A. (in press). “Walking on egg shells”: A qualitative examination of men’s experiences of intimate partner violence. *Psychology of Men and Masculinities*
- Bates, E.A. (in press). “No one would ever believe me”: An exploration of the impact of intimate partner violence victimization on men. *Psychology of Men and Masculinities*
- Bates, E.A. (in press) “I am still afraid of her”: Men’s experiences of post-separation abuse. *Partner Abuse*.