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Coercive Control Literature Review

Final report

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We acknowledge all traditional custodians, their Elders past, present and emerging, and we pay our respects to their continuing connection to their culture, community, land, sea and rivers.

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Glossary

| Term | Definition |
|---|---|
| Cisgender | Cisgender “describes a person whose gender identity aligns with the sex that was assigned to them at birth” (Our Watch, ANROWS & VicHealth, 2015, p. 133). |
| Cisnormativity | Cisnormativity is defined as a “general perspective that sees cisgender experiences as the only, or central, view of the world. This includes the assumption that all people fall into one of two distinct and complementary genders (man or woman) which corresponds to their sex assigned at birth (male or female) or what is called the gender binary. It also relates to the systemic and structural privileging of the social models of binary sex and gender” (Our Watch, ANROWS & VicHealth, 2015, p. 133). |
| Coercive control | “While there is no single agreed definition of coercive control, research indicates that it generally involves conduct that is intended to dominate and control another person, usually an intimate partner, but may also occur in the context of familial or carer relationships (Carson et al., [AIFS], 2022, p. 9, citing ANROWS, 2021). Coercive control is regarded as being perpetrated predominantly by men against women and may include threats to harm; physical, sexual, verbal and/or emotional abuse; psychologically controlling acts; financial abuse; social isolation; systems abuse (defined below); stalking; deprivation of liberty; intimidation; technology-facilitated abuse; and harassment” (Carson et al., [AIFS], 2022, p. 9, citing ANROWS, 2021). |
| Domestic and family violence | <p>Domestic violence is defined as “acts of violence that occur in domestic settings between two people who are, or were, in an intimate relationship. It includes physical, sexual, emotional, psychological and financial abuse” (Our Watch, ANROWS & VicHealth, 2015, p. 133, citing Morgan & Chadwick, 2009).</p> <p>Family violence refers to violence occurring in a broader familial context (for example, elder abuse), as well as violence within intimate partner contexts (Our Watch, ANROWS & VicHealth, 2015).</p> <p>In a family law context “under the <i>Family Law Act</i> (FLA) 1975, family violence refers to violent, threatening or other behaviour that coerces or controls a family member (including relatives, de facto partners and spouses) or causes them to be fearful: FLA s 4AB(1). Behaviours that may constitute family violence include assault, sexual abuse, stalking, repeated derogatory taunts, intentionally damaging property and financial abuse: FLA [<i>Family Law Act 1975</i> (Cth)] s 4AB(2)” (Carson et al., [AIFS], 2022, p. 10, citing the <i>Family Law Act</i>, 1975).</p> |
| Economic abuse | Economic abuse is defined as behaviours perpetrators use that inhibit a victim-survivor’s ability to make decisions, control and maintain economic resources (Singh, 2020). |
| Financial abuse | Financial abuse refers to a perpetrator’s control of money and finances in the household (Singh, 2020). |
| Intersectional(ity) | In the context of coercive control, scholars who take an intersectional approach underscore that the risk factors for experiencing coercive control are shaped by numerous intersecting inequalities, including but not limited to gender, age, race, ability, and geographical location (Our Watch, ANROWS & VicHealth, 2015). |
| Intersex | <p>Intersex people have innate sex characteristics that do not fit medical and social norms for female or male bodies, and that create risks or experiences of stigma, discrimination and harm (Intersex Human Rights Australia, 2013).</p> <p>These characteristics can be physical, hormonal, or genetic, and some intersex traits become apparent at puberty, or when trying to conceive, or through random chance (Victorian State Government, 2019).</p> <p>Intersex people do not share any identity, they are a very diverse population; those old enough to freely express an identity can be heterosexual or not, and cisgender (identify with sex assigned at birth) or not (Intersex Human Rights Australia, 2013).</p> |
| Non-fatal strangulation | Non-fatal strangulation is often perpetrated in the context of coercive control and occurs when a perpetrator strangles a victim-survivor who is not able to breathe due to the force used to compress the neck. This form of abuse does not always result in visible injury but has been identified as a risk factor for intimate partner homicide (Bendlin & Sheridan, 2019). |
| Perpetrator | A person who uses any form of violence against a victim-survivor (Department of Social Services, 2022). |
| Psychological or emotional abuse | Psychological or emotional abuse refers to non-physical abusive behaviours including but not limited to: demeaning, threatening, degrading and intimidating behaviours (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2022; McMahon & McGorrrery, 2020). |

| Term | Definition |
|--|--|
| Queer | Queer is an umbrella term for diverse genders or sexualities. Some people use queer to describe their own gender and/or sexuality if other terms do not fit (Victorian State Government, 2021). |
| Reproductive coercion | Reproductive coercion can be defined as behaviour that interferes with or prevents a person (usually women) from exercising their autonomy and control in reproductive decision-making (Tarzia et al., 2019). It is usually perpetrated by intimate partners but can also be characterised by perpetration within familial relationships (Tarzia et al., 2019). |
| Sexual violence | The Department of Social Services (2019, p. 60) defines sexual violence as “sexual actions without consent, which may include coercion, physical force, rape, sexual assault with implements, being forced to watch or engage in pornography, enforced prostitution or being made to have sex with other people.” |
| Systems abuse | Systems abuse refers to the exploitation of government and/or legal systems by perpetrators of domestic and family violence and coercive control to exert power and control over victim-survivors (Department of Social Services, 2022). Litigation tactics may be used to “gain an advantage over or to harass, intimidate, discredit or otherwise control the other party” (National Domestic and Family Violence Bench Book, 2021). |
| Technology-facilitated coercive control | Technology-facilitated coercive control is a form of abuse that involves the utilisation of technologies to abuse, control and intimidate victim-survivors (Dragiewicz et al., 2021). Perpetrators of technology-facilitated coercive control can use technologies such as text messaging, social media messages and posts, GPS, and online monitoring to control victim-survivors (Dragiewicz et al., 2021). |
| Victim-survivor | A victim-survivor is a person who has, or is experiencing, domestic and family violence, sexual violence and/or coercive control (Department of Social Services, 2022). |

Executive Summary

This report presents a literature review on coercive control in the context of domestic and family violence, with a particular focus on the understanding of, and responses to coercive control in the Australian context. Commissioned by the Australian Attorney-General's Department, this review focuses on identifying, summarising, analysing and synthesising the existing Australian academic research and evaluations on coercive control. The review highlights the complexities of defining, recognising, and responding to coercive control and identifies relevant gaps in the evidence base.

Drawing from a range of quantitative and qualitative studies across scholarly and grey literature, including non-government reports, government and parliamentary reports, peak body reports, and position papers, this review captures the growing recognition of coercively controlling behaviour in the context of family and domestic violence.

Definitions of coercive control

Coercive control is a gendered phenomenon that occurs in a broader context of gender inequalities and norms, amongst other intersectional inequalities (ANROWS, 2021; Douglas et al., 2019; Harris & Woodlock, 2019). While there is no single agreed upon definition of coercive control, the literature drawn upon from this review commonly refer to a range of tactics used by (usually male) perpetrators to control or dominate the victim-survivor, including: physical and/or sexual violence, emotional or psychological abuse, stalking and surveillance, social isolation, financial abuse, technology-facilitated abuse, reproductive coercion, and systems abuse (Stark, 2007).

Prevalence of coercive control

This review illustrates that there is currently limited available data on the prevalence of coercive control (rather than domestic and family violence (DFV) more broadly) in Australia. In the absence of a single agreed definition of coercive control, data on prevalence is difficult to capture in a consistent and meaningful way (Bendlin & Sheridan 2019; Boxall et al., 2020; Mayshak et al., 2020). The lack of prevalence data on coercive control is a significant gap identified in this literature review. However, data from a range of surveys based on different samples applying diverse approaches to measuring the constructs provide insight into the nature and experience of coercive control. Findings from the only population level source available do not specifically refer to coercive control. However, 6% of women experienced emotional abuse by a current partner since age the of 15, with just over three-quarters of these participants reporting threatening or degrading behaviours and more than one-third reporting controlling financial behaviours (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2022).

Impacts and experiences of coercive control

Coercive control can have a range of diverse impacts on victim-survivors that can be short and/or long term in nature. These include health impacts (physical and mental) including post-traumatic stress disorder (Hegarty et al., 2013), social isolation, and reduced help-seeking (Boxall et al., 2020). The sense of loss of self (Moulding, 2021) and feelings of entrapment (Pitman, 2017) are commonly reported in qualitative studies and the impact on a victim-survivor's sense of self-trust and self-belief as a result of coercive and controlling behaviour including gaslighting, are noted as contributing to further abuse (Easteal, 2021). Coercive control is also identified as having a range of significant impacts on children such as negative behavioural outcomes and psychological, and emotional consequences into adulthood (Women's Safety and Justice Taskforce, 2021). Notably some research literature identifies that the impacts of coercive control may be worse than other forms of family violence (Moulding et al., 2021).

Discussions of coercive control within the literature focus on the multiple and diverse experiences of different groups of people. The groups identified throughout this literature review are by no means an exhaustive list of groups who may be at heightened risk of experiencing coercive control, nor are they mutually exclusive. The discussion reflects the main groups featured throughout the studies, including Culturally and Linguistically Diverse communities, First Nations people, people with disability, people living rurally, children and youth, and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex or Queer (LGBTIQ+) people. The studies included capture a range of experiences which are unique to the identities of some subgroups. They also highlight a shared experience of both non-physical and physical violence and abuse used by perpetrators to diminish the autonomy of the

victim-survivor. These findings exemplify the nature of coercive control within these contexts and highlight some unique risk factors for particular groups. For example, evidence suggests that Culturally and Linguistically Diverse groups can be at higher risk of experiencing coercive control, with some victim-survivors being financially dependent on perpetrators and being subject to temporary visa status (Tarzia et al., 2022). There is a consensus that intersectional identities shape risks of coercive control victimisation.

Community awareness of coercive control

Another key finding relates to the lack of community knowledge and awareness of coercive control. For instance, a study by Webster and colleagues (2021) highlights the myths surrounding coercive control shifts blame and responsibility onto the victim-survivor and serves as additional barriers to seeking help. There is acknowledgement across the wide range of literature that in order to better identify and respond to coercive control, awareness and knowledge must be increased throughout communities (Harris & Woodlock, 2019, 2021; Webster et al., 2021; Women's Safety and Justice Taskforce, 2021), healthcare and response systems (such as the police) (Buchanan & Humphreys, 2020; Harris & Woodlock, 2019; 2021), and legal systems (Wangmann, 2020). Research also shows that community awareness can influence help-seeking behaviour. This influence can be negative resulting from engrained attitudes or fear of backlash (Bendlin & Sheridan, 2019; Harris and Woodlock 2019; Women's Safety and Justice Taskforce, 2021). It can also be positive, as friends, family, and colleagues can function as an informal support network and can further empower the victim-survivor to seek formal support (Women's Safety and Justice Taskforce, 2021).

Further, a gap was identified in the literature regarding victim-survivor lived experience advocacy in coercive control response models which, if addressed, will provide important evidence on the strengths and deficiencies of current approaches and frameworks and contribute to improving these moving forward.

Effectiveness of approaches and interventions

The literature review considers the effectiveness of approaches and interventions to address coercive control, finding that the research identifies a need for improved risk assessment frameworks and consistency in defining coercive control and Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) (Douglas 2021a; Johnson et al., 2019). Similarly, discussions on integrated response systems are identified throughout the literature on perpetrator support to mitigate contributing risk factors such as mental health or alcohol or drug services, notably through men's behaviour change programs (Commonwealth of Australia, 2015). Discussions on the effectiveness of judicial and police response systems highlight the strengths and deficiencies of current approaches in addressing and responding to coercive control. Key findings from this research include the need for greater acknowledgement from justice responses of the severity of harm caused by patterns of coercively controlling behaviours (Parliament of New South Wales, Joint Select Committee on Coercive Control, 2021; Tolmie, 2021). Australian and international resources highlight the need for training specific to coercive control throughout the responding judicial, criminal and health sector systems. In addition to training, integration of these systems would improve responses by ensuring consistent definitions and the ability to recognise non-physical violence as a serious form of IPV and DFV (Douglas, 2021a).

Criminalising coercive control

The debate on criminalising coercive control highlights the complexities and the diverse perspectives both for and against criminalising in Australia. Key arguments in favour of criminalising, highlighted in the review, were the ability to expand evidence beyond physical violence to demonstrate that IPV or DFV has occurred (Our Watch, 2021) as well as to publicly denounce coercive behaviours. Others have called for improvements to existing mechanisms and response systems and including civil laws (Women's Safety and Justice Taskforce, 2021a; Women's Legal Service Victoria, 2015). The literature review considers international and domestic jurisdictions where legislation has been implemented to further explore this debate. However, as observed throughout the literature, the criminalisation of coercive control may result in unintended negative consequences, most significantly among First Nations women who face structural inequalities and barriers particularly in the justice system and are likely to be placed at increased risk of being misidentified as perpetrators by police (Parliament of New South Wales, Joint Select Committee on Coercive Control, 2021; Women's Safety Justice Taskforce, 2021, p. xviii). This can result in reduced trust that victim-survivors will receive the help they need (Parliament of New South Wales, Joint Select Committee on Coercive Control, 2021), and reduce the effectiveness of the legal and health systems to support those most at risk from coercive controlling behaviours.

1. Introduction

The Australian Attorney-General's Department (AGD) has commissioned the Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS), to undertake this review of literature on coercive control in relation to domestic and family violence, with a particular focus on the understanding of, and responses to, coercive control in the Australian context. This literature review identifies, summarises, analyses and synthesises the existing Australian research and evaluations on coercive control issues and interventions, identifying relevant gaps in the evidence base.

As agreed with AGD, this literature review covers the following topics:

1. the defining features and important elements of coercive control in the domestic and family violence context
2. the experiences of coercive control by perpetrators and victim-survivors (according to demographics, relationship type), including children and young people
3. the gendered and other intersectional drivers and reinforcing factors that influence coercive control
4. short- and long-term impacts of coercive control on victim-survivors, families and communities (including economic analysis where available)
5. community awareness of coercive control, including understanding of the relationship between coercive control and family and domestic violence, and including myths and misconceptions of coercive control
6. the experiences of coercive control by particular cohorts (including those affected by discrimination and inequality)
7. the role of victim-survivor lived experience and advocacy in addressing coercive control, and
8. unintended consequences of criminalising coercive control including misidentifying victim-survivors as perpetrators and the risk of increasing the over-representation of First Nations people in the criminal justice system.

Consideration is also given to:

1. the experience of, and access to, legal support and justice for victim-survivors
2. the experience of, and access to, support for perpetrators
3. the effectiveness of approaches and interventions to address coercive control across prevention, early intervention, response and recovery (including education and awareness initiatives), and
4. the effectiveness of the criminal and civil justice efforts to address coercive control.

Further, the literature review:

- applies a national lens that involves consideration of matters relating to states and territories and Australia as a whole, with consideration given to urban, regional, rural and remote locations
- identifies, analyses, and summarises the issues by theme
- identifies areas of disagreement and gaps in the available Australian evidence base, and
- considers position papers and international research as required.

Review methodology

This literature review follows the method outlined by Fink (2010) and is consistent with the World Health Organization rapid review guidelines by King and colleagues (2017). The method has three main elements: (1) sampling the literature; (2) screening the literature and (3) extracting data. Figure 1 shows the steps taken throughout the procedure, beginning with the databases that were searched and concluding with the synthesis of results. This procedure is consistent with the PRISMA checklist for reporting systematic reviews and meta-analyses (Moher et al., 2009).

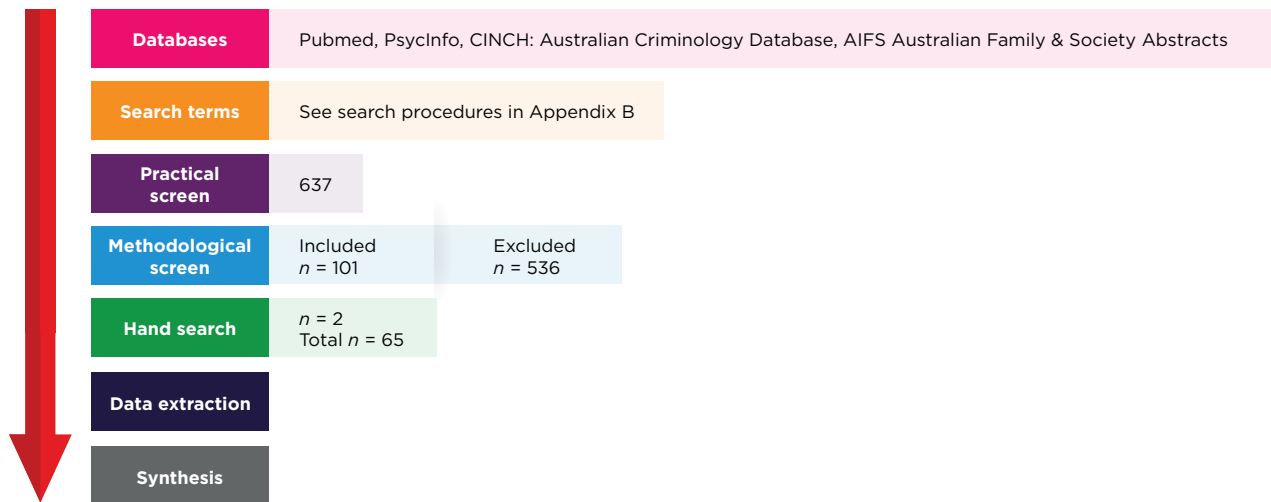
In total, the database searches yielded 689 results, and 52 duplicates were removed.

Two reviewers completed the practical screen for the same 100 articles. The purpose of this being to calibrate, ensuring the inclusion and exclusion criteria were being applied consistently and providing an opportunity to update the criteria based on the kinds of studies identified. After this initial calibration, the remaining articles were split between the two researchers. At this stage, 536 studies were excluded for not meeting the eligibility criteria. A total of 101 studies were then assessed for eligibility by full text by two researchers. A total of 63 studies from these

searches were included in the final sample. Hand searches produced further material, with two further sources being included at this stage. All remaining resources included were identified through the researcher's expertise.

Following consultation with AGD, the research team undertook a series of supplementary searches, representing an addendum to the initial searches described above. The materials that were included on this basis are denoted with an asterisk in the reference list.

Figure 1: Flow chart of the review process



The sample

The literature was sampled in two steps. First, key terms were used to source relevant studies from four electronic databases. The databases that were searched are listed in Figure 1. These databases were chosen because they contain content from disciplines likely to store research and practice literature related to coercive control (psychology, social work, sociology, criminology, and health and nursing). The additional appeal of CINCH: Australian Criminology Database was that it provided relevant Australian government and peak body reports.

The search terms were developed based on:

- the desired topics outlined in the Request for Quotation document provided by the AGD
- previous research activities associated with the coercive control review that is currently being conducted within the AIFS, including stakeholder engagement and a review (see Appendix A for further detail on these activities).

The search terms include a combination of two categories:

1. terms relating to the variations of coercive behaviour and controlling behaviour, and
2. terms covering broader behaviour conceptualisations associated with coercive control and intimate partner violence/abuse: intimate terrorism, psychological, financial, and reproductive.

Key word searches were conducted in the title, abstract and key word search fields. Appendix B contains the search strategy developed to search the key terms within each of the five databases.

The search was narrowed to articles published since 1 January 2012 to ensure that the literature sampled was recent, while still being able to capture changes in the literature over the past decade. The search was also restricted to Australian research published in English language. Where there is no or limited Australian literature, we supplemented this using international literature identified in the preliminary search (outlined below).

In the second sampling step, all studies obtained through the first step were used as potential sources for further sampling. A hand search of each reference list was conducted to identify other relevant studies. Where relevant to the scope topics, additional material such as legislation and submissions to enquiries and other grey literature were included in the analyses.

The screening process

The literature was screened in two phases: a practical screen and a methodological screen (Fink, 2010).

Practical screen for the usefulness of the literature

The practical screen was the initial assessment of how useful a piece of literature might be to the overall review (Fink, 2010). This assessment was based on a set of predetermined inclusion and exclusion criteria (Table 1). The inclusion criteria were divided into three relevant research participant categories: (1) victim-survivors, (2) perpetrators and (3) community. The content focus for each participant category is provided in dot-point format.

For each document identified through the sampling procedure described above, the abstract was examined to determine whether one or more of the necessary inclusion criteria were met. Where articles did not include an abstract, an electronic key term search was conducted, and relevant parts of the document were reviewed to establish the context and purpose of the article. Where an electronic key term search was not possible, the entire document was reviewed to assess suitability.

Table 1: Inclusion and exclusion criteria for the practical screen

| Inclusion criteria | Exclusion criteria |
|--|---|
| Victim-survivors of coercive control <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Risk and protective factors for experiencing coercive control ▪ Outcomes associated with coercive control ▪ Screening tools, support programs, or intervention Advocacy efforts to address coercive control | Coercive control outside of the context of domestic and family violence (for example, authoritarian parenting styles, workplace behaviours) |
| Perpetrators of coercive control <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Risk and protective factors for perpetrating coercive control ▪ Screening tools, support programs, or intervention | |
| Community samples <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Impacts of coercive control ▪ Awareness of, and attitudes towards, coercive control | |

The research team drew on literature from the broader DFV literature in instances where there was little to no research specific to coercive control available for particular subtopics. Selected seminal materials published before 2012 were also included.

Methodological screen for methods used within the literature

The methodological screen was then applied to each of the articles that passed the practical screen, using a second set of inclusion and exclusion criteria (see Table 2). The aim was to prioritise research studies where original quantitative data is reported and the methods are clearly explained. In topic areas where quantitative data was not available or where gaps were identified within the quantitative literature, we turned to the empirical qualitative literature and position papers for insights. Where gaps remained, reports from government agencies and parliamentary inquiries (including for example, Women's Safety and Justice Taskforce, 2021, 2022, and New South Wales Parliament Joint Select Committee on Coercive Control, 2021) and reports from peak bodies were used. This kind of stepwise hierarchy of article inclusion based on methodology and peer-review is supported in the rapid review guidelines provided by Cochrane (Garritty et al., 2020). The identification of related qualitative studies and reports by peak bodies and government agencies, even if excluded from thematic synthesis of findings in the present review, were still identified in the search process and used to contextualise findings. Finally, review papers were excluded as the articles reviewed may not meet the inclusion and exclusion criteria of the proposed review.

Table 2: Inclusion and exclusion criteria for the methodological screen

| | Inclusion criteria | Exclusion criteria |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Empirical academic literature reporting original quantitative data (excluding case studies) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Literature reviews ▪ Original data reported without description of method or procedure |
| 2 | Empirical academic literature reporting original qualitative data | |
| 3 | Position papers and reports by government agencies and peak bodies | |

Data extraction

A data extraction form was used, which included a series of categories that corresponded to the desired participant types (victim-survivors, perpetrators, and community) and thematic topic outlined in the introduction. This extraction form was completed for each article sampled in the review. The categories in the form were tested against each article and evolved through the extraction process to reflect the content and specifics of coercive control research literature. The completed data extraction forms were used to inform the thematic analysis of the review.

Report structure

This report will present the literature review in 14 further sections. Section 2 presents the defining features and elements of coercive control in the DFV context. Section 3 presents research relating to prevalence and this is followed in section 4 by a discussion of the gendered and intersectional drivers. Section 5 outlines the experiences of coercive control by victim-survivors and perpetrators, before the short- and long-term impacts of coercive control on victim-survivors, families and communities are presented in section 6. Research literature relating to community awareness of coercive control will be presented in section 7, and an analysis of research relating to the experiences of coercive control by particular groups (including those affected by discrimination and inequality) follows in section 8. Sections 9 and 10 consider the limited available research on help-seeking behaviour and the effectiveness of current approaches in addressing coercive control, including the experience of, and access to, support for perpetrators. Section 11 then focuses on the effectiveness of police responses and subsequently discusses police workforce development and training, which is followed by a similar discussion on development and training in the health sector in section 12. Section 13 explores considerations relating to the criminalisation of coercive control and the potential unintended consequences that may result, including misidentifying victim-survivors as perpetrators and the risk of increasing the over-representation of First Nations people in the criminal justice system. A summary and conclusion of the material examined overall in this literature review is presented in section 14.

2. Definitions of coercive control

Research on DFV is increasingly focusing attention to the role of coercively controlling behaviour, recognising such patterns of behaviour as a means to control, intimidate, and limit the autonomy of the victim-survivor (Australian Women Against Violence Alliance, 2021). Notably, much of the literature focuses on coercive control within the context of IPV. Although this literature review is largely focused on the research evidence within an IPV context, it is important to acknowledge that children and young people are a focus, and that there are also some important distinctions within specific bodies of literature, including research on reproductive coercion, and experiences of coercive control within LGBTIQ+ communities (for example, Hill et al., 2020; Tarzia et al., 2019). Research on these experiences illustrates how victimisation and perpetration of coercive control can also be shaped by complex familial relationships and external influences such as heteronormativity and expectations about rigid gender roles. These nuances will be examined more closely in the corresponding sections on these topics.

The concept of coercive control has roots in feminist scholarship established in the 1970s and 1980s (Langdon et al., 2022) which started to point to non-physical forms of violence as a tactic used by perpetrators to control victim-survivors of DFV (for example, Dobash & Dobash, 1979; Schechter, 1982). Coercive control manifests in different ways according to the relationship context. However, Evan Stark's (2007) seminal scholarship represents a key turning point for research in this area, further developing our understanding of coercive and controlling

behaviours in intimate partner relationships as not necessarily co-occurring with physical violence. For Stark, coercive control is a framework of abuse that erodes a victim-survivor's autonomy and agency (Stark, 2007): it is not simply "a type of violence" (Stark & Hester, 2019, p. 81). According to Stark (2007), coercive control is a way for perpetrators to micromanage the daily life of their partners, and this can be achieved through a range of behaviours, such as: physical violence; emotional or psychological abuse; sexual violence; stalking and surveillance; social isolation; financial abuse; technology-facilitated abuse¹ and systems abuse.

Despite this development in thinking, there is still no single agreed definition of coercive control. Some research defines coercive control as the broader context in which abuse occurs, and other studies frame coercive control as a tactic in and of itself. Nevertheless, the empirical research identifies a range of common behaviours that emerge, providing a framework through which coercive control can be identified and measured. Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS, 2021) provides some key considerations in defining coercive control that align with Stark's conceptualisation. ANROWS describes coercive control as the overarching context in which DFV occurs as distinct from a tactic used to perpetrate DFV. More specifically, ANROWS defines coercive control as "a course of conduct aimed at dominating and controlling another (usually an intimate partner but can be other family members)" (ANROWS, 2021, p. 1). ANROWS also describes it as a kind of male power where physical and non-physical violence tactics are used to subordinate and control the female victim-survivor (ANROWS, 2021).

There is also broad agreement that coercive control is not simply a form of emotional abuse (although emotional abuse can be a part of coercive control) and that it is defined by ongoing patterns of behaviours utilised by the perpetrator to control the victim-survivor that are unique to the relationship (ANROWS, 2020). As coercive control is cumulative and individualised rather than being an isolated incident (ANROWS, 2021; Douglas & Fitzgerald, 2022), it can be difficult to identify outside of the relationship as domestic violence (Boxall & Morgan, 2021; Douglas, 2021). Threats may be implicit or explicit (Bendlin & Sheridan, 2019) and do not have to be followed through in the context of coercive control, as the fear and belief that the acts will be committed result in the cooperation of victim-survivors (Johnson et al., 2019). The belief that these threats will be perpetrated give rise to the term 'intimate terrorism' which emphasises the use of fear to control victim-survivors (Boxall & Morgan, 2021). On the other hand, Cleak and colleagues (2018) cite the use of physical forms of violence when non-physical tactics are not effective, creating an "abusive pattern" (p. 1,120) which is again often difficult to reveal and measure.

According to ANROWS, definitions of coercive control should centre on the ways that ongoing, repetitive, and cumulative DFV tactics impact a person's autonomy, liberty, and equality (ANROWS, 2021). The focus should not be exclusively on violent behaviours and individual incidents (ANROWS, 2021) given that the perpetrator's dominance and control over the victim-survivor has the potential to impact "every aspect of her [or their] life, effectively removing her personhood" (ANROWS, 2021, p. 1). The range of physical and non-physical behaviours noted above can be used separately or together across different contexts. ANROWS emphasises the use of coercive control as involving an intent to diminish the agency of the victim-survivor and create a sense of entrapment in the relationship (ANROWS, 2021). Similarly, Bendlin and Sheridan (2019) identify the use of coercive controlling behaviours as a means of either provoking or diminishing a specific response from the victim-survivor, controlling their emotions and entrapping them in the relationship. The enumerated behaviours are not exhaustive, as perpetrators can adopt a broad range of tactics and behaviours contextualised to the relationship to evoke fear in the victim-survivor (Boxall & Morgan, 2021).

The measures for coercive control applied in an online survey (involving 15,000 women aged 18 years or over) conducted by the Australian Institute of Criminology (AIC), includes in the definition of coercive control, three or more forms of the following emotionally abusive, harassing and controlling behaviours in the three-month period preceding the survey (Boxall and Morgan, 2021, p. 3):

- physical and/or sexual violence
- jealousy and suspicion about friends, family and social connections
- social isolation whereby perpetrators interfere in victim-survivor's social relationships and prevent victim-survivors from maintaining relationships
- monitoring and surveillance of where victim-survivors are and what the person is doing, including stalking

¹ Technology-facilitated abuse involves the 'use of mobile and digital technologies in interpersonal harms such as online sexual harassment, stalking and image-based abuse': Powell, A., Flynn, A., & Hindes, S. (2022). *Technology-facilitated abuse: National survey of Australian adults' experiences* (Research report, 12/2022). ANROWS. See also Department of Social Services (2022). *National action plan to end violence against women and children 2022-2032: Ending gender-based violence in one generation*. www.dss.gov.au/women-programs-services-reducing-violence/the-national-plan-to-end-violence-against-women-and-children-2022-2032

- financial abuse, including where perpetrators control all of the income, pressuring victim-survivors to spend money and/or limiting victim-survivors' ability to obtain employment
- damaging or stealing property in order to intimidate victim-survivors
- emotional and psychological abuse, including threatening behaviours, verbal abuse, threats of self-harm and/or harm to others, humiliation, eroding victim-survivor's self-esteem and sense of identity, and
- utilising technology to enact coercive control through monitoring and surveillance, restricting the use of technology to increase isolation and disconnection from friends and family.

3. Prevalence of coercive control

This literature review indicates that there is limited evidence on the experiences and perpetration of coercive control in Australia (rather than DFV more broadly). Consequently, there is no reliable prevalence data on coercive control. Although many behaviours associated with coercive control are measured or discussed in the studies referred to in this literature review, most studies do not refer to coercive control specifically.

Limited research has focussed specifically on samples of people who have experienced DFV to identify the nature of experiences of coercive control. One study undertaken by Reeves and colleagues (2021) presents data collected through an online survey directed at Australians who had experienced coercive control in a DFV context. The final sample of research participants comprised 1,261 responses. Most participants identified as female (82%), with 16% identifying as male and 2% selecting "other". The findings indicate that 80% of participants reported experiencing intimidation, 79% had experienced humiliation and degradation, 79% had been isolated from their family and friends and 64% had rules applied to their day-to-day living by their abuser (Reeves et al., 2021). Almost two-thirds reported limitations on their access to money and finances and other forms of economic abuse (64%) and the infliction of rules on their day-to-day living (64%) (Reeves et al., 2021). More than half reported threats of harm if they did not comply with their abuser's rules (52%) (Reeves, et al., 2021). In relation to perpetrators, 87% of participants reported experiencing coercive control from a former partner and 10% from a current partner.

Another study conducted by Boxall and colleagues in 2020 involved the analysis of data from the AIC online survey sent to women members of the i-Link Research Solutions online panel of adults between May and June 2020. The survey methodology involved proportional quota sampling with the data being weighted according to age and jurisdiction to reflect the Australian population (Boxall et al., 2020). Nevertheless, because a non-probability sampling method was used, the authors cautioned that the survey findings could not be generalised to the population of Australian women (Boxall et al., 2020). The survey aimed to explore the nature and prevalence of domestic violence experienced by women in Australia during the initial stages of the COVID-19 pandemic and any causal mechanisms between the pandemic and domestic violence. Participants were asked to reflect on their experiences of domestic violence in the three months preceding the survey, together with prior experiences of DFV (Boxall et al., 2020, p. 2). The data showed that 12% of all participating women and 22% of which were in cohabiting relationships reported experiencing "emotionally abusive, harassing and controlling behaviours". Boxall and colleagues also indicate that 6% of all participating women and 11% who were in a cohabiting relationship experienced coercive control, which was defined for this survey as involving experiences of three or more forms of the emotionally abusive, harassing and controlling behaviours listed in section 2 above in the three-month period preceding the survey (Boxall et al., 2020, p. 3). Almost half of the women reported emotionally abusive, harassing or controlling behaviour, including "constant verbal abuse and insults" (47%) and "jealousy or suspicion about...friends" (46%) as most common. Two-thirds (67%) of women who reported emotionally abusive, harassing or controlling behaviour in this period reported more than one form of emotionally abusive, harassing, or controlling behaviour. On average, nearly four types of emotional abuse, harassing or controlling behaviours were reported by victim-survivors (Boxall, et al., 2020, p. 8).

Another recent study by Mayshak and colleagues (2020), involved a cross-sectional survey of 1,009 Australian adults (aged 18-79 years). Of the 989 participants who responded to questions about coercive control in the survey, 28% ($n = 276$) experienced coercive control over the past 12 months from a current or most recent partner.² (Mayshak et al., 2020).

² The scale assessing psychologically controlling behaviour in Mayshak et al., 2020 is based on Johnson & Leone, 2005 and includes seven questions regarding experiences of controlling behaviour in the past 12 months including: whether the partner limits contact with family or friends; whether the partner makes the participant feel inadequate; and whether their partner is jealous or possessive (Mayshak et al., 2020, p. 3).

Insights are also available from the New South Wales Domestic Violence Death Review which presents data from 112 intimate partner homicides that occurred in New South Wales between March 2009 and June 2016, involving the death of 93 women and 19 men (Domestic and Family Violence Death Review Team, 2020). The review indicates that in all but one of the 112 cases in this dataset (99%), “the relationship between the domestic violence victim and the domestic violence abuser was characterised by the abuser’s use of coercive and controlling behaviours” (p. 154). In each of these cases the domestic violence abuser perpetrated various forms of abuse against the victim-survivor, including psychological abuse and emotional abuse. The findings indicate that 99% of homicides caused by IPV between 2008-2016 show evidence of coercive control (Domestic Violence Death Review Team, 2020).

In a study based on police administrative data, Bendlin and Sheridan (2019) reviewed a sample of 9,884 Family Violence Incident Reports involving stalking behaviour from the Western Australia Police Force made between 2013-2017. The study examines the link between non-fatal strangulation and other coercive and controlling behaviours and focuses on reports where stalking was indicated, as the presence of other coercively controlling behaviours is often seen among this population (Bendlin and Sheridan, 2019). The study applies the Dutton and Goodman (2005) model of coercive control, which is described as a multifaceted concept that “involves behaviours such as isolation, intimidation, excessive monitoring, and threats... (with) a negative consequence... instigated towards the victim...as a result of a previous threat to give credibility to future coercive control and to ensure that such acts are effective in asserting compliance” (Bendlin and Sheridan, 2019, p. 5). The study focused on Family Violence Incident Reports (FVIR) completed by police officers in Western Australia when called to “a domestic disturbance”, involving stalking or where stalking was indicated (Bendlin and Sheridan, 2019, p. 10). These FVIRs are completed based on information drawn from police questioning, i.e. victim-survivor accounts. The descriptive summary data indicate that 44% of the reports in the sample involved the presence of coercive control in the relationship pertaining to the FVIR (Bendlin & Sheridan, 2019, p. 27, Table 1). However, it is important to note that due to the authors narrow sample (reports where stalking was reported), increased rates of coercive control may be identified should the scope be expanded to include instances of coercive control where stalking was not involved.

Data collected by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) via the Personal Safety Survey (PSS) also provides key insights into experiences of coercive control, through the lens of emotional abuse. The ABS define emotional abuse as “behaviours or actions that are aimed at preventing or controlling [someone’s] behaviour, causing them emotional harm or fear” (ABS, 2022). The PSS is a national survey based on responses from 21,242 participants, with 15,589 of these respondents being women. Analyses indicated that nearly one quarter (23%) of Australian women had experienced emotional partner abuse since 15 years of age, with 6.1% of women experiencing partner emotional abuse at the hands of a current partner, and 18% experiencing this abuse by a previous partner. The most common forms of emotional abuse for the 6.1% of women who experienced this from a current partner, were threatening or degrading behaviours (76%) and controlling financial behaviours (41%). For the 18% of women who had experienced emotional partner abuse by a previous partner, 88% had been subject to threatening or degrading behaviours and 63% had experienced controlling social behaviours. In relation to the number of behaviours experienced by these women who had been abused by a current partner, nearly half (45%) had experienced only one behaviour, and a quarter (25%) had experienced two behaviours. For the women who had experienced emotional partner abuse by a former partner, 18% experienced one behaviour. Strikingly, 20% of women who had experienced emotional partner abuse from a former partner had experienced 10 or more behaviours (ABS, 2022).

4. Gendered and other intersectional drivers of coercive control

Coercive control is a gendered phenomenon as it (re)produces power imbalances and inequalities stemming from gender structures and norms (ANROWS, 2021; Harris & Woodlock, 2019). Coercive control also occurs in the context of other intersectional inequalities, such as race, age, sexuality and sexual identity, location, and disability (Douglas et al., 2019).

In their framework for the primary prevention of violence against women in Australia, Our Watch (2021b) highlight the importance of understanding the gendered dynamics of family violence in Australia, with the definition of family violence adopted in the framework including coercive and controlling behaviour (Our Watch, 2021b, p. 61). The gendered dynamics include the gendered nature of both victimisation and perpetration, and

identify a socio-ecological model of violence against women as supporting prevention work with the focus on the “structures, norms and practices” that drive perpetration of violence and enable it to occur “at different levels of the social ecology” (Our Watch 2021b, p. 34).

Gender inequality is still prevalent in Australian institutions, with men continuing to hold the majority of power and influence in workplaces, as well as legal and political systems (Our Watch 2021b). Moreover, in relation to Australian public attitudes to gender dynamics in the household, findings from the 2017 National Community Attitudes towards Violence Against Women survey (2018), show that “one in five Australians think men should take control in relationships and be the head of the household” (Our Watch 2021b, p. 29).

Attitudes that reinforce rigid gender roles and stereotypes are linked to attitudes that support violence against women (Our Watch, 2021b). Characteristics of masculinity that are constructed as dominant in Australia include entitlement, control, hypersexuality, aggression and toughness, competitiveness and risk-taking (Our Watch, 2021b, p. 31), and influence how men and boys feel they should behave. While not all the characteristics of masculinity have negative connotations, they can serve to maintain gender inequalities and reinforce men’s power and dominance over women (Our Watch, 2021b).

This conceptual framework also recognises that gendered drivers, together with other drivers, are relevant in some intersectional contexts also. Our Watch identifies the four key drivers as:

1. Condoning violence against women
2. Men’s control of decision-making and limits to women’s independence in public and private life
3. Rigid gender stereotyping and dominant forms of masculinity, and
4. Male peer relations and cultures of masculinity that emphasise aggression, dominance and control (Our Watch, ANROWS & VicHealth, 2015, p. 36).

Gendered and other intersectional inequalities shape experiences of coercive control. For example, a qualitative study by Louie (2021) based on interviews conducted in 2018 with Melbourne-based DFV practitioners ($n = 13$) found that women are more likely to experience economic abuse if they have a disability or long-term illness, or experience financial stress. Research by McKenzie and Kirkwood (2016) analysed 51 Victorian cases where men killed an intimate partner and observed how gender attitudes shaped risk factors in intimate partner homicide. The analysis also identified that in over one-third of cases ($n = 19$) in the sample, there were three or more co-existing factors, including perpetrator mental health issues or substance misuse (McKenzie & Kirkwood, 2016, pp 15-16). Maher and colleagues (2018) also examined the compounding risk factors of women with disability in facing economic stressors, such as housing security and access to support services. As highlighted by Moulding and colleagues (2021), based on mixed-method research involving a national online survey and life history interviews, gendered drivers were identified as manifesting in men through expectations placed upon them and roles (Maher et al., 2018). For men facing unemployment, this may result in higher risks of domestic violence due to beliefs about masculinity or stemming from jealousy if their partner is earning more (Maher et al., 2018). However, as noted by Moulding and colleagues (2021), further research is required to gain greater understanding of the gendered drivers of DFV in the Australian context.

Limited research has explored coercive control experienced by LGBTIQ+ people. LGBTIQ+ people represent a varied and diverse population. Relationships may have only one person who is either L,G,B,T,I, or Q, they may involve people of same or mixed sex, they may be defined as heterosexual (regardless of people’s individual sexuality), and people may hold one or more identities. However, some research which explored violence in intimate partner relationships amongst LGB and/or T + people, found that patriarchal heteronormativity and cisnormativity is relevant to their experiences of coercively controlling partners (Donovan & Barnes, 2020). Donovan and Barnes (2020) found that beliefs and/or expectations that a heteronormative, cisnormative binary of relationship roles/norms that map onto male/female, victim/perpetrator binaries provided a template for understanding the abuse of power that had taken place in LGB and/or T people’s relationships. They argued that male participants’ narratives demonstrated that their socialisation into heteronormative and cisnormative masculinity had normalised physical violence between men as a way of responding to conflict. Further, Donovan & Barnes (2020) found that patriarchal gender norms shape how gay men might treat each other, both inside and outside of intimate relationships, and that patriarchal norms can make it difficult for gay men to problematise their own behaviour as well as to recognise their experiences as being contextualised in a coercively controlling relationship (Donovan & Barnes, 2020).

5. Experiences of coercive control by victim-survivors and perpetrators

The following section highlights literature pertaining to the experiences of coercive control by victim-survivors and perpetrators. Understanding the lived experience of both victim-survivors and perpetrators is important to inform strategies to better identify and address coercive control in future.

Victim-survivor experiences

Coercive control includes a broad range of tactics and behaviours that perpetrators utilise to control and micro-manage the life of their partners. A limited amount of Australian research explores the ways that victim-survivors experience coercive control (Bendlin & Sheridan, 2021; Boxall, et al., 2020; Boxall & Morgan, 2021; Buchanan & Humphreys, 2020; Carrington et al., 2021; Mayshak et al., 2020; Moulding et al., 2021; Pitman, 2017).

For example, Boxall and colleagues' (2020) analysis of data from the AIC online survey noted above, identifies that the most common forms of abuse that women report are verbal abuse and insults, jealousy, and monitoring or surveillance (Boxall et al., 2020, p. 8). Two-thirds of victim-survivors report experiencing more than one form of emotionally abusive, harassing, or controlling behaviour (Boxall et al., 2020, p. 8). Financial abuse is experienced by one in two participants, while two in three participants indicate that they had been verbally abused or experienced constant insults in order to make them feel intimidated by the perpetrator (Boxall et al., 2020, p. 7). Threatening behaviours are also directed towards others in the victim-survivors life, such as their children, friends, family, and pets (Boxall et al., 2020).

A subsequent study drawing from the same dataset (Boxall and colleagues, 2020) reveals the high prevalence of jealous behaviour and suspicion of friends and family members by perpetrators, with 55.9% of women reporting experiencing coercively controlling behaviour ($n = 388$), including their partner monitoring how they spent their time (Boxall et al., 2021). Further, 43% of women reported damage, destruction or theft of their property, perpetrated by their partner. In the context of coercive control, damaging property and the abuser's use of physical strength against an object (for example, by punching a wall) may be used to intimidate by demonstrating their ability to harm their partner (Boxall and colleagues, 2021). However, these behaviours may also be used as a form of financial abuse against women, particularly when they are forced to repair or replace damaged goods at their own expense (Boxall & Morgan 2021). Women also reported that their partner isolated them from their family members, friends and other sources of help, restricting their use of their phone, internet or car (Boxall and colleagues 2021). Constant insults, belittling, yelling or verbal abuse was reported by 67% of women, which they describe as a means to humiliate or intimidate them (Boxall and colleagues, 2021).

As indicated in section 4 above, the national PSS also highlights the experiences of many Australian women of coercive control through the lens of emotional abuse. The most common forms of emotional abuse being threatening or degrading behaviours, controlling financial behaviours and controlling social behaviours (ABS, 2022).

Earlier research by AIFS - the Experiences of Separated Parents Study (ESPS) - a component of the Evaluation of the 2012 family violence amendment reforms, which was based on data from telephone interviews with separated parents (2012: $n = 6,119$; 2014: $n = 6,079$), provides insight into the experiences of coercion and control. The 2014 survey includes additional questions based on the amended definition of family violence in s 4AB of the *Family Law Act 1975* (Cth) (FLA), which includes behaviour that "coerces or controls" a family member or "causes the family member to be fearful". It should be noted that these findings are based on participants' understandings of these terms and their application to their own subjective feelings. The data from the ESPS indicate that feeling fearful, coerced, or controlled is more commonly reported by parents who had experienced physical violence. Further, there are statistically significant differences between mothers and fathers who report feeling fearful, coerced, or controlled and physical violence or emotional abuse, with the former consistently more likely to report experiencing safety concerns than participants who were fathers (Kaspiew et al., [AIFS], 2015, Tables 3.9 and 3.10, p. 45-46). The data also show that mothers are more likely than fathers to report feelings of coercion and control before or during separation (Kaspiew et al., [AIFS], 2015, Figure 3.14, p. 47) and mothers' reports regarding the severity of feeling fearful, coerced, or controlled are also substantially higher than those made by fathers (Kaspiew et al., [AIFS], 2015, Figure 3.16, p. 51). Also of note, significantly higher proportions of mothers using formal pathways to resolve their parenting arrangements report experiencing family violence before or during separation that cause them to feel fearful, coerced, and controlled - 71% for family dispute resolution (FDR) and 86% for courts - compared to fathers - 48% FDR and 55% courts (Kaspiew et al., [AIFS], 2015, Figure

4.4, p. 80). These gender differences are also present among parents reporting experiences of fear, coercion, and control since separation although not as pronounced as those experienced before or during separation (Kaspiew et al., [AIFS], 2015, Figure 4.5, p. 81).

A study by Pitman (2017), which analysed the experiences of 30 Tasmanian women experiencing domestic violence, found that women perceived their partners (who were also the perpetrators of the violence they experienced) to share an attitudinal style of superiority and entitlement. Participating women describe being made to feel inferior and expected to adjust and adapt to their partner's needs. Consequently, they recall feeling reduced to being an extension of, and a possession of their partner (Pitman, 2017). Participating women also explained how the attitudinal style of their partner created "adversarial communication" and "behaviour patterns", inconsistent with an egalitarian relationship and clear boundaries (Pitman, 2017). For example, women recounted how their partners withdraw, refuse to communicate, withhold necessary information, empathy or reassurance, and generally avoid their responsibilities (Pitman, 2017). Pitman's study also presented women's experience of coercive control in the context of 'double standards', where their partner denied that they have the same rights as they do and refused to meet their needs or to be accountable for their actions.

Qualitative studies by Moulding and colleagues (2021) and Pitman (2017) examine Australian women's experiences of coercive control. Through in-depth interviews with 17 Australian women, Moulding and colleagues (2021) found that women report experiencing a loss of freedom and identity, work, social connections and housing. Women describe perpetrators preventing them from contacting family or friends, having their appearances controlled, as well as experiences of surveillance and stalking (Moulding et al., 2021). Participants in the study describe a loss of self-esteem and self-confidence, with many identifying tactics of coercive control leading to a loss of self (Moulding et al., 2021). Similarly, Pitman's study (2017), discussed in section 3, provides insight into victim-survivors' experiences of a loss of autonomy and agency, with many feeling 'trapped' within their relationship (Pitman, 2017). Participants also report being treated as inferior and as if they were a possession of the perpetrator (Pitman, 2017).

Technology-facilitated abuse

There is a growing body of Australian literature examining the use of technology to facilitate coercive control. Technology-facilitated abuse co-occurs with other forms of coercive control, often utilised as a means of controlling and monitoring aspects of a person's life such as their finances and communication. It is also used to impersonate, create barriers to access help or services, interfere in communication between victim-survivors and children, or to facilitate threatening behaviours (E-Safety Commissioner, 2020).

A recent qualitative study by Douglas and colleagues (2019), based on interviews with 65 women at multiple points over a three-year period, identifies technology-facilitated abuse as a common aspect of victim-survivors experience of coercive control. A total of 85% of participants report this abuse as part of a pattern of violence they experience. These findings are supported by Harris and Woodlock (2019), whose mixed-method study involving focus groups with DFV sector professionals, an online survey of DV support practitioners ($n = 152$), and an online survey of victim-survivors ($n = 46$), shows a high prevalence of the use of technology in the pattern of coercive control as a means of monitoring, controlling, and intimidating victim-survivors. Additionally, a smaller qualitative study by Harris and Woodlock (2021) highlights how technology can exacerbate the fear created through coercive control, by creating a "sense of omnipresence" which entraps the victim-survivor further (p. 387).

Another qualitative study, involving interviews with 20 victim-survivors and focus groups with DFV professionals located in rural, regional, and remote New South Wales and Queensland, finds that technology-facilitated abuse does not end at separation (Dragiewicz et al., 2019). Indeed, 12 of the professionals in this study report that they are aware of this abuse occurring during the relationship and confirm that it increases following separation. More specifically, technology-facilitated abuse continues to occur in the context of post-separation parenting with 13 victim-survivors reflecting on this experience. Participants reported experiences of repetitive and persistent text messages and calls, restricting and controlling access to technology, accessing accounts without permission, and impersonation through technology, among many other forms of technology-facilitated coercive control (Dragiewicz et al., 2019). Non-consensual smartphone recordings are also identified in a qualitative study ($n = 65$), with victim-survivors describing this experience as intimidating (Douglas & Burdon, 2018). However, this research also indicates that non-consensual smartphone recordings can be used by victim-survivors to assist them in protecting themselves and using recordings as evidence of such abuse occurring, highlighting the complexities around this practice from a legal perspective (Douglas & Burdon, 2018).

Children can also be impacted by technology-facilitated coercive control. Dragiewicz and colleagues (2022) utilise data from a qualitative study on victim-survivor's experiences to analyse children's involvement in

technology-facilitated coercive control. The study found that children can be used by perpetrators to extend coercive control of the family (Dragiewicz et al., 2022). Examples are provided of perpetrators using children to transport devices which can then be used to monitor and track mothers and children, using video calls to obtain information about their location, and using technology to harass and intimidate children (Dragiewicz et al., 2022).

Non-fatal strangulation

There is a growing body of literature on the use of non-fatal strangulation perpetrated in the context of coercive control. For example, Bendlin and Sheridan's (2019) study, noted in section 3, on the link between stalking behaviours and non-fatal strangulation, based on the 2013-17 dataset of Western Australian Police FVIRs ($n = 9,884$), found victim-survivors were 2.3 times more likely to report non-fatal strangulation with partners who are coercive, compared with those who do not report coercively controlling partners. The research highlighted the relationship between non-fatal strangulation and coercive control, notably jealous and stalking behaviour, and physical violence to control and threaten the life of the victim-survivor.

Boxall and Morgan's (2021) analysis of the AIC survey data also highlighted the risk of more severe forms of physical violence (such as non-fatal strangulation) as a method of coercive control. Overall, one in two women participating in the survey who were experiencing coercive control,³ reported that their partner had been physically violent towards them in the three months preceding the survey (Boxall & Morgan, 2021, p. 9). More specifically, 27% of participating women who experienced coercive control reported non-fatal strangulation by their partner, and 23% reported being assaulted by being hit with something that could hurt them, being beaten, stabbed or shot with a gun (Boxall & Morgan, 2021, p. 9).

Douglas and Fitzgerald (2022) further contend that non-fatal strangulation be considered an extreme form of coercive control as it enables the perpetrator to threaten the victim-survivor, often without leaving a mark. Drawing from an original study conducted with 65 women victim-survivors of IPV in Brisbane, the researchers analysed a subset of responses from 24 women who had experienced strangulation, choking, or being grabbed by the neck in the previous 12 months. Findings from the subset revealed the co-occurrence between non-fatal strangulation and coercively controlling behaviours, as physical violence is described by participants as being part of a broader pattern of control (Douglas & Fitzgerald, 2022). The study also illustrated the effect of non-fatal strangulation on victim-survivors' memory, which impacts the ability to provide statements and evidence during prosecution. Some research, primarily from outside of Australia, has indicated that the consumption of violent pornography may influence similar perpetration of violence against women, though its relationship to coercive control is unclear (for example, Huibregtse et al., 2022).

Coercive control in the context of reproduction, birth and mothering

The literature considered in this review highlights connections between coercive control and decisions and behaviour in relation to reproduction in various ways. Reproductive coercion has been associated with a pattern of coercive control as one aspect of a complex set of dynamics. Other research highlights how coercion and control can manifest in the specific contexts of pregnancy, birth and early parenthood.

A small number of studies on reproductive coercion emerged in the research literature during the initial search conducted for this review. Reproductive coercion is largely considered a form of IPV (Price et al., 2022; Suha et al., 2022; Tarzia et al., 2019). However, Tarzia and colleagues (2019) acknowledge it can be perpetrated by family members. The relevant body of research generally accepts reproductive coercion to include controlling behaviours such as threatening behaviours if the victim-survivor does or does not become pregnant or terminates a pregnancy, tampering with or preventing access to birth control, and sexual assault leading to pregnancy (Price et al., 2022; Sheeran et al., 2022; Tarzia et al., 2019). Further, Tarzia and colleagues (2019) acknowledge the impacts of reproductive coercion on health, including negative impacts to mental health, sexually transmitted infections, and unintended pregnancies. A small number of studies on reproductive coercion emerged in the research literature during the initial search conducted for this review.

The complexities of reproductive coercion are worthy of their own systematic review. Tarzia and colleagues (2019) highlight the difficulties in adequately situating reproductive coercion within IPV. This is because the term reproductive coercion does not accurately account for the sexualised characteristics of this form of abuse, nor does viewing it as sexual violence acknowledge forced reproduction as distinct from forced sex (whereby pregnancy may be an unintended consequence of the latter but is the intent of the former). It is further acknowledged that the role other family members may play in reproductive coercion also places reproductive

³ As noted in section 3, for the purposes of this AIC study, coercive control was defined to include 'three or more forms of emotionally abusive, harassing and controlling behaviours in the three months prior to the survey' (Boxall et al., 2020, p. 3).

coercion within the domain of family violence (Tarzia et al., 2019). However, tactics evident in reproductive control often co-occur with those discussed throughout this review and it has been indicated as a form of coercive control (Our Watch, 2021; Parliament of New South Wales, 2020). Similarly, reproductive coercion is defined as a means of maintaining power in the relationship and limiting the autonomy of the victim-survivor through the control of their reproductive health (Price et al., 2022).

A study conducted by Price and colleagues (2022) examined the prevalence of reproductive coercion among a sample of women in Queensland experiencing an unintended pregnancy between January 2015 and June 2017 ($n = 3,117$). The study findings revealed 5.9% of women reported reproductive coercion and among these women 55.2% reported also experiencing domestic violence. However, the authors note the limitations of the study, which does not capture the experiences of women who carry their pregnancy to term, suggesting the prevalence of co-occurring domestic violence and reproductive coercion could be higher. This is supported by Sheeran and colleagues' (2022) study on reproductive coercion and abuse prevalence among women who seek pregnancy counselling. Collecting data from two prominent pregnancy counselling providers in Australia, the study revealed that of those who had contacted pregnancy counselling ($n = 5,107$) 15.4% experienced at least one form of reproductive coercion and abuse (Sheeran et al., 2022). The study also shows that 2% of participants experienced both coercion towards terminating the pregnancy and also coercion towards pregnancy, suggesting reproductive coercion may change over time and contexts (Sheeran et al., 2022).

A qualitative study by Buchanan and Humphreys (2020) provides some further evidence on coercion in the context of pregnancy and mothering. It involved interviews and follow up focus groups with 16 women in Australia who had left an abusive partner between one to eight years prior to interview and had a child under ten years of age. The study aimed to understand the experiences of women who have gone through pregnancy and mothering while experiencing domestic abuse. Research questions were directed at identifying "the cues, from women's lived experiences, [that] indicate that coercive control is being exerted by their partners" (Buchanan & Humphreys, 2020, p. 325). Women in the study reported experiences of perpetrators refusing to attend ante-natal appointments, showing a lack of interest in the pregnancy and negative attitudes towards a woman's changing body shape (Buchanan & Humphreys, 2020). Conversely, other women reported perpetrators controlling and micro-managing appointments and decision-making. Three women reported perpetrators preventing them from accessing healthcare during the pregnancy. Women provided accounts of feeling unsupported while giving birth, being manipulated and demeaned during the birth, and feeling pressure to prioritise the needs of the perpetrator even while giving birth (Buchanan & Humphreys, 2020). Victim-survivors describe these coercive and controlling behaviours as being overlooked by hospital staff when perpetrators made displays of "proud fatherhood" (Buchanan & Humphreys, 2020, p. 330).

Impact of COVID-19 on coercive control

Recent research literature focusses on the experiences of victim-survivors during the COVID-19 pandemic in Australia (Boxall, et al., 2020; Boxall & Morgan, 2021; Boxall & Morgan, 2021a; Carrington et al., 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic created an environment whereby victim-survivors spent more time in the home with perpetrators, and households were experiencing greater levels of stress and financial strain (Boxall et al., 2020; Carrington et al., 2021).

A cross-sectional survey of female survey adult participants drawn from the research company i-Link's online panel ($n = 15,000$) by Boxall, Morgan and Brown (2020), found more than a third of women (36.9%) had at least one experience of wanting to seek advice or support in relation to abuse but could not do so due to safety concerns (Boxall et al., 2020). Boxall, Morgan and Brown (2020) are unable to establish a cause-effect relationship between COVID-19 and an increase in coercive and controlling behaviours, however their findings indicate that social isolation and increased time spent at home and financial hardships from lockdowns, have likely contributed to experiences of physical and sexual violence and coercive control (Boxall et al., 2020). In their study on COVID-19 and DFV services, Carrington and colleagues (2021) highlight shifts in behaviours related to coercive control. Notably, they identified that technology-facilitated abuse was used to monitor and control the victim-survivor during the pandemic. Drawing on data from an online survey conducted in 2020 with 362 participants, the study highlights the growing use of technology in domestic violence and coercive control, and the rising number of new tactics used by perpetrators to control victim-survivors, such as strangulation and COVID-19 lockdowns to control movement (Carrington et al., 2021). Carrington and colleagues (2021) suggest that restrictions on movement during COVID-19 were 'weaponised' by perpetrators, with practitioners reporting that the use of coercive and controlling behaviours by perpetrators increased during the COVID-19 pandemic (Carrington et al., 2021). Participants indicated that victim-survivors were experiencing increased isolation, surveillance and fear, alongside feeling unable to seek outside help (Carrington et al., 2021).

Perpetrator experiences

There is limited Australian research investigating the experiences of perpetrators who choose to use coercive and controlling behaviours. The review identified a limited number of small-scale studies that shed light on perpetrator behaviour, with only one study based on data collected from perpetrators themselves. This body of evidence underlines the association between coercive control and femicide, and coercive control and tactics that undermine mothering capacity.

A study by Johnson and colleagues (2019) examined the histories of 68 men who had been convicted of intimate partner femicide. The study reported increased levels of coercive and controlling behaviours by perpetrators in the lead up to femicide. These behaviours included controlling actions, psychological abuse, sexual jealousy and stalking. The authors found that although men with a prior history of IPV are more likely to use coercive and controlling behaviours, these behaviours are still common in men with no history of IPV (at 62% of men) (Johnson et al., 2019). These findings point to the importance of understanding the role of coercive control in femicide.

Through in-depth interviews with 17 Australian men, Heward-Belle (2017) collected and analysed data from perpetrators themselves about their use of coercive control. Participants in the study were all involved in a Men's Behaviour Change Program. They were either on a waitlist to engage in the program or had completed a number of sessions already. To be involved in the study, participants had to be over 18 years old and have resided with their children and the children's mother for at least one year (Heward-Belle, 2017). This study found that a common tactic used by perpetrators is targeting women's mothering in order to impact the woman's self-esteem and sense of identity, as well as fracturing the mother-child relationship (Heward-Belle, 2017). Men in the study acknowledged using such tactics, understanding the effectiveness of undermining a woman's parenting (Heward-Belle, 2017).

These findings are consistent with a study by Kaspiew and colleagues [AIFS], (2017) that sought to understand the characteristics of perpetrators as fathers and how mother-child relationships are impacted by domestic abuse. As part of this research, 50 qualitative interviews were conducted with women who had experienced domestic and family violence. Of the sample, 37 women reported experiencing coercive and controlling behaviours prior to separation, while 16 reported that these behaviours started after separation (Kaspiew et al., [AIFS], 2017). The participants reported common characteristics of perpetrators such as manipulative behaviours, needing to be in control, prioritising themselves over children or partner's needs, as well as intimidating and threatening children (Kaspiew et al., [AIFS], 2017). It was found that perpetrators used abusive tactics to undermine the mother-child relationship and two-thirds of women reported that these tactics had continued or escalated after separation (Kaspiew et al., [AIFS], 2017).

As noted earlier, Pitman's (2017) study identified some common elements in the behavioural styles of perpetrators who use coercive control, including an entitled and adversarial attitude, a lack of empathy and consistently violating boundaries in the relationship (Pitman, 2017).

6. Short- and long-term impacts of coercive control

Coercive control can have diverse short- and long-term impacts on victim-survivors. The research captured in this literature review identifies a range of impacts and outcomes of coercive control, including (but not limited to) impacts to mental and/or physical health, social isolation, decreased self-confidence, and impacts to help-seeking behaviours. Several sources note the long-term impact of coercively controlling behaviour on victim-survivors as being a greater cause of distress than other forms of violence experienced (Moulding et al., 2021; Parliament of New South Wales, 2020; Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, 2021; Patafio et al., 2022).

Mental health and post-traumatic stress disorder

The literature highlights the impacts of coercive control on physical and mental health and the risk of post-traumatic stress disorder among victim-survivors (Hegarty et al., 2013; Katz, 2019; Moulding et al., 2021).

Research by Moulding and colleagues (2021) points to the long-term mental health impacts of experiencing coercive control. Results from their survey of 658 women find that 70% had reported positive psychological

wellbeing prior to abuse, 90% reported poor psychological wellbeing during abuse and 65% reported poor psychological wellbeing after abuse (Moulding et al., 2021, p. 1069). Coercive control can lead to coping strategies that cause further harm to victim-survivors such as substance abuse, self-harm or gambling (Hing et al., 2022).

Research conducted by Hegarty and colleagues (2013) draws from responses received from a survey of clients ($n = 272$) from 52 general health practices in Australia between June 2008 and May 2010 for the Women's Evaluation of Abuse and Violence Care (WEAVE) project. WEAVE was the first family practice-based trial testing the effect of screening plus intervention for IPV on women's health and wellbeing. The study demonstrates that women who experience a combination of emotional, physical, and sexual abuse (likely reflecting a pattern of coercive control), experience long-term mental health impacts and poorer quality of life (Hegarty et al., 2013).

Ongoing entrapment and other consequences

The experience of entrapment can continue after separation, as perpetrators may adopt tactics such as stalking, continued surveillance in person or online, or systems abuse to create fear and a sense of constant vigilance (Douglas, 2018; Easteal, 2021; Harris & Woodlock, 2021; Louie, 2021). Further, drawing on qualitative interviews with 36 women with disability, Maher and colleagues (2018) consider the levels of dependency on perpetrators or systems among victim-survivors which may develop as a result of social isolation or limited access to support services. Another study by Ragusa (2017), based on interviews with 36 women who had recently experienced IPV in the 3-12 months prior to the study, illustrated the impact of physical and emotional violence on employment. In this study, almost two-thirds of participants (64%) identify IPV as limiting their capacity to work, with the same proportion indicating that they experience a long-term illness or a disability as a result. Similar responses are observed in relation to their capacity to complete their education (61%), which in turn impacts the future employment of these women (Ragusa, 2017).

In their qualitative interviews with 24 Australian women, Hing et al. (2022) found that women utilised gambling as a way to escape experiences of coercive control. Gambling venues provided a safe physical space for women, a way to dissociate from abuse, as well as being a place for women to be around other people when they had become socially isolated. The research identifies that utilising gambling to cope with the impacts of abuse can lead to further harm as abuse sometimes escalates after gambling losses and it can lead to gambling dependence (Hing et al., 2022).

Consequences for mother-child relationships

Kaspiew and colleagues' [AIFS], (2017) earlier study also details the impact of the perpetrator's emotional and psychological abuse on children, including the abuse of animals in front of children, instilling fear in children that they will be removed from their mother's care, and verbal abuse and humiliation directed towards both the mother and children. Significantly, the study also identifies that perpetrator's undermining of the mother-child relationship had a number of negative impacts on children, including increased stress and anxiety, behavioural issues, social and educational challenges (Kaspiew et al., [AIFS], 2017)

Some Australian men engaged in a men's behaviour change program report sabotaging the mother/child relationship in order to reduce the power and authority of women's parenting (Heward-Belle, 2017). Participants in the qualitative study describe teaching children to disrespect their mothers, as well as pressuring mothers to take a 'tough love' approach to their parenting when being disrespected (Heward-Belle, 2017). These experiences are echoed in research by Moulding and colleagues (2021), with victim-survivors reporting that perpetrators had 'brainwashed' children into believing that mothers were to blame for the family's problems (Moulding et al., 2021).

International research has also reported on the mental health impacts that mothers can experience when the mother-child relationship is fractured as a result of DFV, including coercive control. Katz's (2019) study involving qualitative interviews with 15 mothers and 15 children aged between 10 and 14 years in the United Kingdom illustrates mothers' difficulties in emotionally connecting with their children when experiencing this pattern of behaviour. Some participating mothers describe experiences of dissociation, numbness, and feeling that they had "shut down" emotionally (Katz, 2019, p. 1,843). Examples are also provided of women feeling a need to disconnect from children when they felt powerless to protect them from the perpetrator's abuse (Katz, 2019). Most mothers did not label the issues they experienced as mental health conditions; however, Katz suggests that it is likely many of the women experience symptoms of anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder, impacting their ability to connect with their children (Katz, 2019). The Katz (2019) study contributes to the emerging body of international research that identifies coercive control as central to children's experiences

of DFV. This qualitative research illustrates how the behaviours of perpetrators can have significant impacts on the mother-child relationship, noting that a positive mother-child relationship is identified as critical to the reduction in the severity of negative impacts of DFV on children (p.1,830, citing Mullender et al., 2002; Fong, Hawes & Allen, 2019; Graham-Bermann et al., 2009). This research identifies that when fathers engaged in more subtle, manipulative behaviours, “mixing hostility and indifference with periods of praise and attention as part of their overall pattern of abuse”, children were more confused about their feelings toward each parent and the mother-child relationship was more likely to be disrupted (Katz, 2019, pp. 1,839-40).

7. Community awareness of coercive control

Community awareness and attitudes around violence against women (including coercive control) play an important role in shaping responses to violence against women, including from professionals, service providers, friends, family, and community members. General population attitudes also impact victim-survivors and the extent to which they seek out and receive support (Webster et al., 2018; Women’s Safety and Justice Taskforce, 2021). Research indicates that community knowledge of violence against women plays an important role in reducing violence against women (Webster et al., 2018).

Engrained myths about coercive control function to place blame and responsibility on the victim-survivor, which can in turn influence cultures of acceptance of violence against women and serve as barriers to recognising and/or reporting such violence for both victim-survivors and others (Webster et al., 2018). Some of the key myths that operate in the Australian context around coercive control include the assumption that it is simple for a woman to leave a violent relationship, the idea that a woman is partly responsible for any abuse endured during a violent relationship if she does not leave that relationship, and that coercive and controlling behaviour will cease after an abusive relationship has ended (Harris & Woodlock, 2019, 2021; Webster et al., 2021; Women’s Safety and Justice Taskforce, 2021).

To elaborate on how these myths around coercive control play out in community attitudes in Australia, an analysis of data from the National Community Attitudes towards Violence against Women Survey conducted in 2017 indicates that approximately one in three Australians believe that a woman who does not leave an abusive relationship is in part responsible for the continued violence, and one in six Australians do not believe it is difficult for a woman to leave an abusive relationship (Webster et al., 2018). The survey data indicate that Australians have a relatively good understanding of violence against women. Indeed, findings illustrate that knowledge of non-physical forms of violence against women increased between the years of 2013 and 2017, with knowledge around financial control, repeated criticism, and controlling a partner’s social life increasing by eleven, seven and six percentage points, respectively (Webster et al., 2018, p. 42). At the same time, the research suggests that Australians are still more likely to recognise physical forms of abuse than non-physical forms of abuse as violence against women (Webster et al., 2018). Based on a representative survey of the general adult Queensland population, the Queensland Social Survey (2020) indicates that there have been some shifts in how coercive control is viewed and understood in the general community. Comparing the 2019 and 2020 results illustrates that respondents were more likely to consider ‘trying to control a partner by denying them access to money’ as always being a form of DFV (57.4% held this view in 2019, and 65.7% held this view in 2020). Furthermore, while only 62.1% of respondents view “harassing a partner via phone or electronic means” as always being a form of DFV in 2019, 70.7% held this view in 2020 (Queensland Government Statistician’s Office, 2020, p. 1). However, gendered dynamics came to the fore, with women being more likely than men to view sharing “intimate, nude or sexual images of a partner without their permission” (99.0% cf. 97.1%), attempting “to control a partner by denying them access to money” (97.4% cf.90.6%), and “[harassing] a partner by repeated phone or electronic means” (97.9% cf.93.0%), as very, or quite serious (Queensland Government’s Statistician’s Office, 2020, p. 1).

The broader Australian community’s understanding of economic abuse (which can be experienced in the context of coercive and controlling behaviour) is also investigated in a recent survey undertaken by Glenn & Kutin (2021) for the Centre for Women’s Economic Safety (*n* = 970). The findings indicate that there are large variations in participants’ understandings of economic abuse, with 14% of the sample failing to identify any of the 20 indicators of economic abuse, and nearly one quarter of participants being confident that they could explain economic abuse “very well”. In comparison, 51% responded that they were able to explain physical abuse “very well” (Glenn & Kutin, 2021, p. 3).

Community understanding of coercive control may be reflected in the attitudes of professionals who interact with victim-survivors of coercive control. Focusing on the gendered phenomenon of digital coercive control

(DCC), described as the online manifestation of 'offline' forms of abuse, Harris and Woodlock (2019) report on two key studies. The first draws on mixed methods and the second on in-depth interviews and focus groups with both professionals and victim-survivors. Both studies indicate that victim-survivors encounter victim-blaming from some professionals including police, underpinned by the assumption that DCC is 'easy' to escape if women simply stopped using their phones, or other technologies (Harris & Woodlock, 2019, 2021). The data show pressure being placed on women from police to change their phone numbers and cancel their social media platforms, with those not able or willing to do so being advised that they cannot be supported any further, thereby placing sole responsibility onto victim-survivors (Harris & Woodlock, 2019, 2021; Woodlock et al., 2020). The researchers underscore how these community understandings and attitudes around coercive control impact on the ability of victim-survivors to access support, and the lack of awareness, understanding and recognition of DCC, particularly by the police, leading participants to express the tendency of police to overlook the seriousness of DCC (Harris & Woodlock, 2019; Woodlock et al., 2020).

In their submissions to the Women's Safety and Justice Taskforce, key professional stakeholders call for greater community awareness and education, which could include media campaigns and more comprehensive and consistent respectful relationships education in Australian schools (Women's Safety and Justice Taskforce, 2021). These submissions, along with some from victim-survivors draw attention to, for example, inappropriate portrayals of what romance might look like in intimate relationships and how these ideas are (re)produced and framed problematically in the (news) media. These stakeholders also call for awareness campaigns that target particular groups, including First Nations people, CALD communities, people living with disability, the LGBTIQ+ community, and other groups who may have specific or complex needs. They argue that the media plays a key role in shaping knowledge and understanding of important social issues and that there is an opportunity to shift media framings which continue to draw on and reproduce myths around coercive control and victim-survivors (Women's Safety and Justice Taskforce, 2021).

More broadly, the importance of education about respectful relationships in schools is highlighted by Our Watch (2021) in their brief for policy makers. Our Watch point to the impact that such programs can have on addressing the gendered drivers of violence against women (Our Watch, 2021). An example of a recent respectful relationships program in Australian schools is 'R4Respect'. In their evaluation of the program, Struthers and colleagues (2019) highlight how the program aims to support young people to recognise and understand the dynamics of DFV, including coercive and controlling behaviours. The peer-to-peer model utilised in this program is found to be beneficial, with respondents noting that peer educators are able to maintain a high level of engagement with young people (Struthers et al., 2019). School educators note that the learning from such programs needs to be reinforced over time, with messaging continued through other educational activities and in broader community strategies (Struthers et al., 2019). Echoing these findings, Youth Action argue that school-based education programs should be a part of any strategy to address coercive control (Youth Action, 2021).

8. Experiences of coercive control among particular groups

Coercive control may be experienced differently by different groups of people, particularly those of concern in intersectional analyses. There is considerable diversity between and within these groups. Some people may also belong to more than one group (Hocking, 2022), and therefore, their experiences may reflect different intersecting aspects of their identity. Groups of people known to be impacted by discrimination and inequality may also be at risk of experiencing coercive control.

A small amount of literature in Australia has focussed on the experiences of various groups, including women of migrant or CALD backgrounds (ANROWS, 2020; Boxall & Morgan, 2021, 2021a; Segrave & Pfitzner, 2020), First Nations people (Blagg et al., 2018; Boxall & Morgan, 2021; Douglas et al., 2020), women with disability (Maher et al., 2018, Woodlock et al., 2020), women living rurally (Harris & Woodlock, 2019; Ragusa, 2017), people who identify as LGBTIQ+ (Hill and colleagues, 2020) and children and young people (Easteal, 2021; Jeffries, 2016). There are a number of unique experiences within these groups, however, one similarity between them identified in the research, is an increased vulnerability to experiencing technology-facilitated coercive control (Harris & Woodlock, 2019; Woodlock et al., 2020).

Culturally and Linguistically Diverse People

There is limited Australian research on the experiences of coercive control for women of migrant and/or CALD backgrounds, however recent studies show that there is an increased risk of experiencing coercive control for this group (ANROWS 2020; Boxall & Morgan, 2021, 2021a). Segrave, Wickes, and Keel (2021) analysed findings from a survey of 1,392 participants from a migrant or refugee background. Overall, a third of participants reported experiencing a form of DFV, and among this number, controlling behaviours were reported the most frequently (91%). Similarly, utilising data from an AIC online survey of 15,000 women, Boxall and Morgan (2021a) found that 35% of CALD women who responded to the survey (19% of participants) have experienced coercive control. This is compared with 17% of women in the full sample and points to the over-representation of women of migrant and CALD background experiencing coercive control (Boxall & Morgan, 2021a).

People with migrant and refugee backgrounds

Factors that can contribute to an increased risk of coercive control for migrant women include financial dependence on their partner, lack of understanding of rights in Australia in relation to abuse within a relationship, the impact of language barriers on help-seeking behaviours, as well as community and cultural expectations (Boxall & Morgan, 2021a) Women's Safety and Justice Taskforce, 2021).

Findings from a national study conducted by Segrave (2017) on intimate partner and family violence as experienced by refugee and migrant women, highlight the correlation between temporary migration status and forms of violence and abuse. This is supported by a later study conducted by Segrave, Wickes, and Keel (2021) which identifies higher reports of DFV (in particular coercive control) by temporary visa holders among participants. For women who hold a temporary visa in Australia, their lack of citizenship can be used as a tool of coercive control by perpetrators (Boxall & Morgan, 2021; Segrave & Pfitzner, 2020; Ibrahim, 2021). Segrave and Pfitzner's analysis of 100 case files from a domestic violence service for women on temporary visas, finds 55% of these women have experienced threats of deportation, and 60% have experienced threats to withdraw visa sponsorship (Segrave & Pfitzner, 2020). Such threats are seen to have a significant impact upon women, with over a quarter of victim-survivors in the study reporting fears of returning to their country of origin (Segrave & Pfitzner, 2020).

Supporting these findings, a recent study based on six focus groups with specialist legal and DFV service providers for women in Queensland and Victoria reported that practitioners indicate that women from a minority ethnic background are potentially more at risk of being subject to reproductive coercion (Tarzia et al., 2022). Participants reflect on the unique circumstances of many of these victim-survivors who are typically financially dependent on perpetrators, and on partner visas that perpetrators can threaten to cancel if the victim-survivor does not comply with their demands (for example, demands to keep or terminate a pregnancy). Practitioners also report that gendered cultural norms around the expected roles of women in particular groups could harm victim-survivors, who might be expected to have children and to accept men's dominant position as decision makers in some families and communities (Tarzia et al., 2022).

While there have been minimal studies to date on the experiences of women from a CALD background and reproductive coercion, there is evidence to suggest CALD women experience higher rates of reproductive coercion than women who are not from a CALD background (Price et al., 2022). A study by Suha and colleagues (2022) draws on the Analysing Safety and Place in Immigrant and Refugee Experience (ASPIRE) project, alongside data collected from 46 interviews to analyse reproductive coercion prevalence among refugee and immigrant women. The interview findings reveal 13 of the 46 women interviewed detail experiences that match the description of reproductive coercion. Additionally, the study discusses the involvement of family members (such as spouses, parents, in-laws, and extended family members) in controlling the victim-survivor's reproductive health, with multiple perpetrators enacting abuse and control which are worsened by structural inequalities (such as economic status or visa-related restrictions in accessing services) and barriers in accessing Australia's healthcare, such as language barriers (Suha et al., 2022).

In regard to technology-facilitated coercive control, women of migrant background are found to have increased vulnerability to such abuse due to language barriers and the need to rely on technology to communicate with service providers and connecting with family and friends in their country of origin (Douglas et al., 2019; 2020; E Safety Commissioner, 2020; Woodlock et al., 2020). Research by Woodlock and colleagues (2020) finds that perpetrators can exacerbate the isolation already being experienced by women by controlling and restricting the use of technology. Similarly, Louie (2021) provides qualitative evidence from Australian practitioners that clients of migrant background often do not have ownership of their technology devices, with perpetrators setting up victim-survivor's devices and accounts. Australian victim-survivors also indicate that technology is used to hack into immigration accounts to cancel visa applications (Woodlock et al., 2022).

Coercive control has also been identified as a feature of financial abuse for women of migrant backgrounds, including Indian migrant women, who are denied agency over how family money is used, including as a means of extorting money from a female partner's family such in the form of dowry or gifts (Singh & Sidhu, 2020)

CALD faith communities

There is a dearth of literature that has examined coercive control experiences of victim-survivors within CALD faith communities in the Australian context. The limited research in this field on experiences of DFV more broadly in CALD faith communities shows that while some victim-survivors have reported their religious beliefs presenting barriers to help-seeking and support, others have indicated that their religious beliefs have provided them with a sense of community to support them in the context of DFV (Ghafournia & Easteal, 2019; Koleth, Serova & Trojanowska, 2020). For example, a qualitative study that explored the experiences of Muslim women in Sydney and Newcastle ($n = 14$) showed differing relations and experiences with religion while experiencing forms of DFV, with some women describing religion as a source of strength, while others report negative experiences with religious leaders when seeking help or guidance (Ghafournia, 2017).

The study by Segrave (2017) mentioned earlier draws from 300 cases of family violence from 2015-2016, seeking to highlight the impact of religion or faith identities on victim-survivor experiences of DFV. While most cases (74%) state no religious or faith identity, the authors find that religion or faith identities do not have a significant impact on victim-survivor experiences, but rather culture influences gender roles in the relationship more. However, it is important to note that religion and culture should not be viewed as a cause of DFV nor an excuse to enact violence (Multicultural Centre for Health, 2020). Additionally, in their submission to the New South Wales Joint Taskforce on Coercive Control, Muslim Women Australia highlighted how diverse CALD faith communities are, suggesting that there cannot be a "one-size-fits-all approach" to addressing DFV and coercive control in these communities, and that an intersectional approach to any response to coercive control is crucial (Muslim Women Australia, 2021, p. 5). Muslim Women Australia (2021) highlights that within CALD faith communities, faith leaders often contribute to family life in unique ways, and that these complex dynamics can present additional barriers to escaping DFV or coercive control. For example, victim-survivors can be required to adhere with religious practices and norms in the process of escaping DFV or coercive control. Therefore, the submission underscored the importance of non-legal supports for victim-survivors, and the need for specialised support services for Muslim women (Muslim Women Australia, 2021).

First Nations People

Research on First Nations women's experiences specifically of coercive control is limited. However, Boxall and Morgan's analysis (2021) indicates that First Nations women are overrepresented in their sample of 15,000 women who have experienced coercive control in the last three months. In this study, nearly 4% of participants identified as being Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander (Boxall, Morgan & Brown, 2020) with 6% of all participating women and 11% who were in a cohabiting relationship experiencing coercive control as defined in that study (see further section 3 above). Canadian research similarly indicates Aboriginal women experience significantly higher rates of coercive control and stalking experiences than non-Aboriginal women (Pedersen et al., 2013). The research indicates the overrepresentation of First Nations Women in the experience of family violence more broadly and that family violence occurs at higher rates for First Nations communities than in the general population (AIHW, 2019). In 2016-17 First Nations people were 32 times more likely to be hospitalised for family violence than non-indigenous people (AIHW, 2019) with First Nations women accounting for more than one in three (35%) of all hospitalisations for family violence (AIHW, 2019). Langton and colleagues present a range of data highlighting the significance of the issue for First Nations communities and identifies First Nations women as five times more likely to experience physical violence and three times more likely to experience sexual violence than other Australian women (Langton et al., 2020, citing Our Watch).

The Aboriginal Legal Service New South Wales/Australian Capital Territory has observed that the complexity and high prevalence of family violence in First Nations communities has roots in colonisation and dispossession, with trauma arising from multiple sources including systemic racism, entrenched poverty, lack of education and employment opportunities, and intergenerational family breakdown (ALS NSW/ACT, 2021). This is further supported by Douglas and colleagues (2020) who write that any analysis of coercive control within First Nations communities needs to be understood within the context of intergenerational trauma and structural violence. Blagg and colleagues (2018) indicate that reform should focus not only on gender equality but must also be complemented by additional place-based strategies to empower First Nations people more broadly.

Blagg and colleagues (2018) conducted qualitative research with Aboriginal communities in three sites: Fitzroy Crossing, Western Australia; Darwin, Northern Territory; and Cherbourg, Queensland. The findings from this research indicate a different paradigm is required to understand coercive control in Aboriginal communities. The report suggests that while there are cases of coercive control in First Nations communities, they do not represent the majority (Blagg et al., 2018). The research points to the importance of understanding First Nations women's experiences of interpersonal violence, one aspect of which is described by service providers in the research as a different form of violence and as First Nations women and men often resolving issues through fighting (Blagg et al., 2018).

In a later study conducted by Blagg and colleagues (2020), the authors refer to the limitations of mainstream response and intervention approaches as "advancing mono-causal explanations for family violence – patriarchal male power, coercive control, gender inequality..." which fails to recognise the impact of colonial structures and violence (p. 62). In the 2018 research conducted by Blagg and colleagues, women do not talk about family violence in the context of coercive control and male power, attributing more weight to alcohol and social conditions. The report also describes community complaints of a lack of safe places to commence behaviour change and a lack of essential services for recovery, such as alcohol treatment.

Our Watch's *Changing the Picture* report observes that violence against First Nations women is committed by both non-Indigenous and First Nations men. The report presents anecdotal evidence suggesting that non-Indigenous men make up a significant proportion of perpetrators and that many partnered Indigenous women have non-Indigenous partners, particularly where they reside in urban areas. This report suggests that partners and patterns of perpetration vary geographically, and that violence against women in remote areas is more likely to be perpetrated by First Nations men, and violence in urban areas more likely to be perpetrated by non-Indigenous men (Our Watch, 2018).

In a submission to the New South Wales Joint Taskforce on Coercive Control, the Wirringa Baiya Aboriginal Women's Legal Centre outline some of the specific ways that coercive control manifests in First Nations communities. This includes highlighting the threat of child removal, with perpetrators threatening to report mothers as abusive or negligent. Another element is abusive partners denying their partner's right to practice cultural and spiritual beliefs, such as not enabling victim-survivors to attend important cultural and community events or mocking cultural practices. Partners can also use children to perpetuate this abuse, by denying children's Aboriginality (Wirringa Baiya Aboriginal Women's Legal Centre Inc., 2021).

Research by Woodlock and colleagues (2020) on technology-facilitated coercive control indicates that the necessity to use technology to connect with others and the emphasis on community and connection in First Nations cultures may lead to increased emphasis on technology-facilitated abuse by perpetrators. Participants in this research described how "Indigenous women may need to use technology to keep connected to their mob" (p. 374) but that this could in turn alert perpetrators to their whereabouts, with community connection having the potential to facilitate perpetrators' ability to use public shaming or humiliation as a form of abuse, such as by spreading information or rumours or encouraging abuse by others toward the victim (Woodlock et al., 2020). The E-Safety Commissioner further indicates that the practice of mobile phone sharing in First Nations communities can mean that a victim-survivor may be sharing a device with a perpetrator and have calls and texts monitored (E-Safety Commissioner, 2020). The Wirringa Baiya Aboriginal Women's Legal Centre submission (2021) also outlines their support for clients who have been tracked and stalked online by former partners and indicates that technology-facilitated abuse is a significant issue for many of their clients. The experience described by these professionals is that police do not have the time or skill set to practically assist these victim-survivors (Wirringa Baiya Aboriginal Women's Legal Centre Inc., 2021).

The Wirringa Baiya Aboriginal Women's Legal Centre submission (2021) also indicates that training for law enforcement should include deprogramming of racist views and the detection of veiled emotional, psychological and economic abuse when investigating domestic violence in First Nations communities. The submission notes that barriers to reporting partners include a history of deaths in custody, child removal and racist treatment in the justice system (Wirringa Baiya Aboriginal Women's Legal Centre Inc., 2021).

People with disability

Research suggests that people with disability are subject to the same kinds of violence and abuse in the home as people without disability, but they often have less access to support to address it or seek help (Royal Commission into the Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability [DRC], 2020; Our Watch, 2021). This violence and abuse can manifest in the form of coercive control, including perpetrators limiting victim-survivors or controlling their communication, activities and relationships with others. Perpetrators may

also be the facilitator of the different types of support required (for example, mobility support, personal care). This often means that people with a disability become isolated from family, friends, and community members, or have reduced opportunities and support to develop connections elsewhere (DRC, 2020). In a study focused on women with disability, findings indicated they may be more vulnerable to technology-facilitated coercive control, as they may experience social isolation and have a greater reliance on technology to access informal and formal support (Woodlock et al., 2020).

Recent analyses of the PSS indicate that women with a disability or long-term health condition experience higher rates of emotional partner abuse than those without disability or a long-term health condition (6.3% of women with disability or long-term health condition compared to 4.1% of women without disability or long-term health condition). Notably, according to the ABS (2021), women with intellectual or psychological disability were the most likely to experience emotional partner abuse (12%). Furthermore, Tarzia and Hegarty (2021) argue that forced sterilisation is an overlooked and under-researched form of reproductive coercion among women with disabilities.

Research by Maher and colleagues (2018) identifies women with disability as more susceptible to coercive control, due to factors such as a lack of economic security, including housing and barriers to accessing care and support services (Maher et al., 2018). In their qualitative study of Australian women with disability, victim-survivors reported having limited access to disability support payments and consequently, economic security was a significant concern for them (Maher et al., 2018). Victim-survivors with disability also indicated that their dependence on perpetrators to provide care and support limited their options, including leaving abusive relationships (Maher et al., 2018).

Submissions to the Women's Safety and Justice Taskforce indicated that negative stereotypes of people with disability (for example, those which infantilise them) can lead to the coercive and controlling behaviours of perpetrators being misconstrued as 'care' (Women's Safety and Justice Taskforce, 2021a). The experience of abuse in childhood can further compound the normalisation of coercive and controlling behaviours, which may make it difficult for victim-survivors of this abuse to recognise it (Maher et al., 2018). This proposition is supported by the initial findings of a survey undertaken by the Monash Gender and Family Violence Prevention Centre, which found that 59% of women with a disability did not recognise coercive and controlling behaviours as forms of DFV (Reeves et al., 2021). The study also suggests that women with disability are almost 15% more likely to experience coercive and controlling behaviour from a parent or intimate partner, than women without disability (Reeves et al., 2021).

Rurality

Living in rural and remote locations can increase a woman's vulnerability to experiencing coercive control including a reduced access to and awareness of services (Harris & Woodlock, 2019; Ragusa, 2017), lack of employment opportunities to gain financial independence (Ragusa 2017), large distances to access supports (Harris & Woodlock, 2019), and limited transportation options (Harris & Woodlock, 2019). It can also exacerbate the effects of coercive control and increase barriers to help-seeking and reporting for example, due to concerns that others in the community will find out (Harris & Woodlock, 2019; Women's Safety and Justice Taskforce, 2021a).

Harris and Woodlock (2021) find that the impacts of living rurally can be compounded for First Nations women and migrant women, due to victim-survivors feeling that they were too visible in small towns to seek help. An earlier study by Harris and Woodlock (2019) find that such barriers to reporting can also be felt more broadly within small towns, with victim-survivors hesitant to report to police or hospitals due to concerns that people in the community will find out (Harris & Woodlock, 2019). In Ragusa's (2017) qualitative research with women living in rural Australia, victim-survivors also cite financial concerns as being a significant factor when living rurally, as limited options for paid employment can lead to financial dependence on partners (Ragusa, 2017). A further compounding factor for victim-survivors seeking to leave a relationship was the difficulties of complying with child visitation orders if they relocated to another town (Ragusa, 2017).

The impacts of technology-facilitated coercive control can be heightened for victim-survivors who are living rurally. With victim-survivors already experiencing remoteness and isolation, Woodlock and colleagues (2020) reveal that perpetrators are able to utilise technology to extend this isolation, creating heightened risk (Woodlock et al., 2020). Practitioners working with women living rurally in Australia indicate that victim-survivors in such geographic locations need to have their phones on them for safety, however perpetrators can exploit this and use technology to extend the boundary of their control through continued and heightened surveillance and harassment tactics facilitated through phones and social media (Woodlock et al., 2020). Victim-survivors living

rurally report experiencing anxiety and public humiliation as a result of digital coercive control (Woodlock et al., 2020). However, it is also identified that technology can be an important tool for help-seeking and connecting with supports (Harris & Woodlock, 2019).

Limitations in accessing services and support are identified by victim-survivors of violence who live in rural and remote locations. The previously mentioned research by Ragusa (2017) examines the impacts of rurality on accessing support services in Australia through qualitative interviews with women who lived rurally, finding that there were insufficient services to assist with IPV in the study region (Ragusa, 2017). However, the survey data indicate that participants may not be aware of all the formal services existing in their area, including counselling services, crisis housing and women's centres. These findings point to a lack of community awareness of available services in rural Australia and suggests changes in service provision are needed in rural areas to ensure that women have knowledge of, and access to, appropriate supports and services when needed. (Ragusa, 2017).

Children and young people

Children and young people experience coercive control and they should also be identified as victim-survivors (Department of Social Services, 2022; s 4 FLA). Children can also be used as a means for perpetrators to access the other parent to continue enacting coercive control after separation (Easteal, 2021; Jeffries, 2016). Perpetrators may use child visitation as an opportunity to continue abuse of an ex-partner (Jeffries, 2016) and may manipulate children to try to damage the mother/child relationship (Easteal, 2021; Jeffries, 2016).

Literature on children as victim-survivors highlights the long-term impacts of coercive control, as direct or indirect experiences of coercively controlling behaviours harm children and may result in negative behavioural outcomes into their adulthood (E-Safety Commissioner, 2020; Women's Safety and Justice Taskforce, 2021). This can be seen through problems with education, such as attention or confidence, potential health impacts, or throughout their future relationships which may be influenced by witnessing the violence or abuse towards or by their parents (*Fourth Action Plan – National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children*, 2022).

Children can also be impacted by systems abuse, which involves the use of systems and processes, including the legal system, by perpetrators of domestic and family violence to assert power and control over the other party (Carson et al., [AIFS], 2022; National Domestic and Family Violence Bench Book, 2021), particularly when children are placed in the care of the abusive father (Heward-Belle, 2017; Women's Safety and Justice Taskforce, 2021). AIFS research relating to non-compliance with family law parenting orders indicates that data on the duration and intensity of litigation in a sample of 300 family law court files involving contravention litigation in the context of family violence suggest that the legal framework lends itself to misuse, and systems abuse and vexatious litigation were issues emerging more broadly in the data (Carson et al., [AIFS], 2022). Almost two-thirds of participants in the survey of parents and carers component of this study who provided responses about improvements to non-compliance indicated that their engagement in the family law system was harmful or had failed to protect their children from harm. More specifically, some parents reflected on the impact of the misuse of court processes or systems abuse as being harmful to their children (Carson et al., [AIFS], 2022). The Women's Safety and Justice Taskforce reports that some women describe ongoing impacts on children including psychological, physical, and emotional harm, as well as reports of self-harm and suicidal ideation (Women's Safety and Justice Taskforce, 2021a). In Heward-Belle's (2017) study, most perpetrators interviewed were found to minimise the impact that violence and abuse could have on children.

These findings are supported by international literature that has found that higher levels of coercive control in a relationship can have negative impacts on children and the mother-child relationship (Jouriles & McDonald, 2015; Katz, 2019). Jouriles and McDonald (2015) surveyed 107 mothers who had experienced IPV in the last six months and had children aged 7-10 years old. The findings of this study suggest that children display increased levels of externalising and internalising behaviours when exposed to higher levels of coercive control from their parents' relationship (Jouriles & McDonald, 2015). The Katz (2019) study (described earlier) contributes to the emerging body of international research that identifies coercive control as central to children's experiences of DFV. This qualitative research illustrates how the behaviours of perpetrators can have significant impacts on the mother-child relationship, noting that a positive mother-child relationship is identified as critical to the reduction in the severity of negative impacts of DFV on children (p. 1, 830, citing Fong, Hawes & Allen, 2019; Graham-Bermann et al., 2009 and Mullender et al., 2002). This research identifies that when fathers engaged in more subtle, manipulative behaviours, "mixing hostility and indifference with periods of praise and attention as part of their overall pattern of abuse", children were more confused about their feelings toward each parent and the mother-child relationship was more likely to be disrupted (Katz, 2019, p. 1, 839-40).

Consistent with findings from Kaspiw and colleagues [AIFS] (2017), coercive and controlling behaviours were identified as undermining the relationship and interactions between mothers and their children, which could in turn require professional support for recovery (Kaspiw et al., [AIFS] 2015; Katz, 2019 citing Humphreys et al., 2006, McManus et al., 2013). The qualitative data identified that where perpetrators, as part of their coercive control, required mothers to comply with “gruelling schedules”, both mothers and children participating in the study reported these restrictive regimes led them to have “distant and strained mother-child relationships” and that they were “isolated and disconnected from each other” (Katz, 2019; p. 1, 841). This contrasts with children’s experiences of fathers who were physically violent in front of children or who were ‘almost always hostile or indifferent towards them’, with these children more likely to respond to the father’s behaviour in a negative light and maintain a relationship with the mother (Katz 2019, p. 1, 840). Similarly, the Kaspiw and colleagues [AIFS] (2017) study indicates that perpetrators undermining the mother-child relationship had a range of negative impacts on children, ranging from increased stress and anxiety, through to behavioural issues and social and educational challenges (Kaspiw et al., [AIFS] 2017). Also consistent with Kaspiw and colleagues [AIFS] (2017), mothers participating in the Katz (2019) study reflect on how their children in these circumstances came to view the abusive and humiliating behaviour as appropriate responses.

Most recently, AIFS research examining compliance with, and enforcement of, family law parenting orders (Carson et al., [AIFS], 2022) provides insight into the impact of coercive control upon children. Participants in the Survey of Parents and Carers part of the study evidence the detrimental and pervasive effect of violent, coercive and controlling behaviour on the lives of parents and their children, including manifesting in extended litigation. These concerns are underlined by the findings in the court file data illustrating the intensity and duration of proceedings, with litigation in a substantial proportion of cases extending beyond three years, with nearly one third of cases between five and nine years, and a small but not insignificant proportion taking place over twelve or more years (Carson et al., [AIFS], 2022, p. 143). Data from both the survey of parents and carers and from the court files demonstrate that children are exposed to and directly affected by family violence in a very high proportion of matters, with significant concerns raised in relation to the wellbeing of children in this cohort. Close to half (45%) of participating parents/carers reported that their children were faring somewhat worse or much worse than most children their age, with these reports substantially higher than reports from a representative sample of court-using separated parents (cf. 12%) in the Experiences of Separated Parents Study in the Evaluation of the 2012 family violence amendments (Carson et al., [AIFS], 2022, p. 74).

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex and Queer+ (LGBTIQ+) People

The evidence base pertaining to LGBTIQ+ people’s experience of coercive control and family and domestic violence remains limited (Our Watch, 2017). Studies on the rates and nature of violence within same-sex intimate partner relationships have generally had small sample sizes. It is rare for studies to include reasonable sized samples (if any) on trans and gender diverse people and people with intersex variations (Our Watch 2017). Studies conducted on rates of violence within opposite sex intimate partner relationships have also largely overlooked these groups (Our Watch, 2017).

LGBTIQ+ people experience the same forms of family violence as non-LGBTIQ+ people (Our Watch, 2017). However, research suggests that the violence LGBTIQ+ people experience often involves high rates of coercive control, including some experiences unique to them. For example, a national survey published by Hill and colleagues in 2020, involving over 6,000 LGBTIQ+ Australians, shows that a high number of participants report being shamed by their abuser for being an LGBTIQ+ person, including being threatened about revealing their sexuality or HIV status to others, or having their hormones or medication withheld (Hill et al., 2020). The study makes the distinction between IPV and family violence to capture the unique experiences of LGBTIQ+ people, by defining IPV as the forms of violence perpetrated by an intimate partner (including both romantic and non-romantic) and family violence as occurring within the context of immediate and extended family. This is important in the context of the LGBTIQ+ community as victim-survivors may be at elevated risk of violence within their family and kinship networks after ‘coming out’ (Hill et al., 2020). The findings in the study by Hill and colleagues (2020) show 10% of reported experiences of violence and/or abuse occur in the context of IPV, in comparison to 41% of cases occurring in the context of family violence. Among these responses, behaviours associated with coercive control were evident, including verbal abuse (43%), financial control and abuse (16%), and the use of violence to enforce social isolation (27%).

While only focusing on experiences of coercive control from the perspective of people in same-sex relationships identifying as gay men and women, a survey undertaken by Frankland and Brown (2014) provides some qualitative data on the prevalence of coercive control in this context. The findings, based on a small sample of 184

same-sex attracted men and women, indicate that 23.9% of respondents and 24.5% of their partners engaged in some form of controlling behaviour (Frankland & Brown, 2014, p. 20).

As with all people, LGBTIQ+ people are not a homogenous group, their experiences, needs, preferences and perceptions vary, and are influenced by many intersecting factors including age, race, ability and socioeconomic status. Studies on LGBTIQ+ issues and experiences are rarely disaggregated and as a result, the experiences and needs of LGBTIQ+ people are often conflated, limiting the scope to adequately identify and address the interactions between various factors that may impact some LGBTIQ+ people differently to others (Our Watch, 2017). Consequently, more research about LGBTIQ+ people's experience of coercive control is needed, especially within an Australian context.

9. Help-seeking and reporting

There is limited research focusing on reporting and help-seeking behaviour specifically in relation to coercive control. However, findings from some research suggest that victim-survivors of coercive control were more likely to seek help when it occurred alongside physical or sexual violence (Boxall, Morgan & Brown, 2021). One reason may be reflected in the findings from the study by Reeves and colleagues (2021), which show that only 38% of respondents viewed coercive control as DFV, at the time they were experiencing it.

In a submission to the New South Wales Joint Select Committee on Coercive Control, Easteal (2021) explores the "lack of self-trust" (p. 6) that can result because of ongoing abuse, such as gaslighting. The ability of the victim-survivor to trust themselves contributes to the cycle of coercive control, as the perpetrator can manipulate these experiences to reinforce control (Easteal, 2021).

Community awareness and attitudes more broadly are identified in the research as influencing factors in seeking help and reporting coercive control. Social and geographical isolation, and fear of community backlash are noted as help-seeking barriers (Bendlin & Sheridan, 2019; Harris and Woodlock, 2019; Women's Safety and Justice Taskforce, 2021). Friends, family, or work colleagues can function as an informal help-seeking network; thus community awareness of coercive control is important to empower victim-survivors to seek support (Women's Safety and Justice Taskforce, 2021).

Victim-survivor submissions to the Queensland Women's Safety and Justice Taskforce highlight the 'invisibility' of their coercive control experiences, where they describe not being adequately seen or understood, not just by police, but by other professionals and service providers, as well as family, friends, colleagues, and the wider community. These experiences can perpetuate feelings of self-blame and also highlight how this lack of recognition amplified their experiences of isolation, representing another key barrier to seeking and receiving supports (Women's Safety and Justice Taskforce, 2021).

The impacts of coercive control on help-seeking due to language barriers, fear and intimidation, monitoring of and access to technology, and self-confidence or social isolation have also been identified (ANROWS, 2020; Bendlin & Sheridan, 2019; Douglas et al., 2019; Harris & Woodlock, 2019). Boxall, Morgan and Brown's (2020) study indicates that over half of participants who reported experiencing physical and/or sexual violence in their survey did not seek help for fear of safety.

A research synthesis paper published by ANROWS (2020) on the link between mental health and violence against women, also highlights the compounding risk-factors that function alongside structural inequalities to influence reporting behaviours, such as mental health, physical or intellectual disabilities, immigration status, LGBTIQ+ identity, rurality, or economic status. First Nations women have specific challenges in reporting and seeking help as described earlier in this report (for example, Wirringa Baiya Aboriginal Women's Legal Centre Inc., 2021).

Women from CALD communities also face structural, social and policy barriers that intensify risks associated with family violence for them (Mahar & Segrave, 2018; Women's Safety Justice Taskforce, 2021). These barriers include immigration policy and legislative regimes that currently inhibit women's help-seeking, for example by creating a financial dependency on perpetrators who may also be visa sponsors (Mahar & Segrave, 2018). Factors such as migration status or the threat of involvement of child protection, can also be used to instil fear around government responses (Maher & Segrave 2018), with language barriers and pressures from cultural and faith leaders in community also having the potential to further inhibit help-seeking, particularly where the coercive control may not be demonstrable (Maher & Segrave, 2018). Similarly, findings from Ragusa's (2012) study on rural women seeking legal help for IPV identify four key themes limiting help-seeking among victim-survivors: "(a) financial dependence, (b) prior knowledge and experience of court processes, (c) police access and response, and (d) apprehended violence order access and utility" (p. 698).

10. Effectiveness of approaches and interventions for coercive control

This section presents research findings from studies meeting the inclusion criteria for this review relevant to the issue of effectiveness of current approaches and interventions to coercive control in Australia (for example, Cleak et al., 2018; Johnson et al., 2019; Withiel et al., 2020). However, a comprehensive consideration of this issue is beyond the scope of this review.

Interviews with victim-survivors indicate the importance of an integrated systems approach in responding to IPV (Douglas, 2021a). Douglas observes the need to ensure all aspects of the response are using the same definitions of IPV across multiple entry points and, where possible, the same screening and risk assessment tools are being used to ensure consistency and integration of services and systems (Douglas, 2021b).

The importance of including coercive and controlling behaviours within screening tools for DFV is also highlighted. Research by Johnson and colleagues (2019) analysing the history of 68 men convicted of femicide, indicates that further research is required to understand the role of coercively controlling behaviours in femicide, which could then inform improved risk assessment frameworks for practitioners.

Lack of access to specialist services is also identified with a survey of women attending 52 general practices in Australia by Hegarty and colleagues (2013), finding that women who have experienced multiple, severe forms of abuse were attending healthcare settings frequently, but specialist DFV services infrequently, raising concerns that these women may not be receiving appropriate supports for their particular experiences.

Research by Cleak and colleagues (2018) presented data from a mixed-methods longitudinal study of people attending mediation services in Victoria, aiming to understand the reliability of scales that measure for coercive and controlling behaviours, and their suitability for use by Family Dispute Resolution practitioners. This research identifies a high prevalence for coercive and controlling behaviours among the sample, highlighting the need for mediators to be monitoring for such behaviours, and the impact that they may have on the mediation process (Cleak et al., 2018). The study indicates that the commonly utilised scale (CTS2) is a reliable measure for coercive control in mediation services, and a number of new scales are also found to have “very good reliability” (Cleak et al., 2018, p. 1136). This research shows the importance of more comprehensive screening in mediation services and the training of mediators to understand and manage coercive and controlling behaviours (Cleak et al., 2018).

The experience of and access to support for perpetrators

It is acknowledged that there is limited material that addresses perpetrators of coercive control as a particular subgroup of DFV perpetrators generally. As such, the discussion in this section is not confined to the experience of, and access to, support for perpetrators of coercive control. Following on from the *National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children 2010–2022*, in 2015 the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) agreed to consider a set of National Outcome Standards for Perpetrator Interventions (The Standards) (Commonwealth of Australia, 2015). The headline standards in the framework include:

1. *Women and their children’s safety is the core priority of all perpetrator interventions*
2. *Perpetrators get the right interventions at the right time*
3. *Perpetrators face justice and legal consequences when they commit violence*
4. *Perpetrators participate in programs and services that enable them to change their violent behaviours and attitudes*
5. *Perpetrator interventions are driven by credible evidence to continuously improve*
6. *People working in perpetrator intervention systems are skilled in responding to the dynamics and impacts of domestic, family and sexual violence* (Commonwealth of Australia 2015, p. 6).

A core focus of the Standards is for perpetrators to receive the right supports and interventions to provide opportunities for them to change their behaviours and attitudes, highlighting that interventions need to be able to effectively engage with perpetrators from diverse backgrounds, communities and social circumstances. The Standards indicate the importance of men’s behaviour change programs in supporting perpetrators to change their violent behaviours, as well as keeping perpetrators visible to accountability systems (Commonwealth of Australia, 2015). Men’s behaviour change programs should be integrated with other sectors

such as mental health and alcohol and other drugs services to provide wrap-around support that addresses factors that may be contributing to a perpetrator's behaviours (Commonwealth of Australia, 2015).

The Standards also point to the importance of establishing an evidence base for perpetrator interventions as this is currently lacking. Funding was provided to ANROWS to develop a research stream focused on perpetrator interventions in order to strengthen the evidence base of perpetrator interventions (Commonwealth of Australia, 2015). ANROWS have since developed an evaluation guide for behaviour change programs that aims to support organisations to effectively evaluate their programs and contribute to improved understandings of the effectiveness of behaviour change programs (Nicholas et al., 2020). ANROWS argues that evaluations of men's behaviour change programs need to not only assess the outcomes of programs, but also provide a more detailed understanding of which components of a program assist in achieving outcomes and for which groups (Nicholas et al., 2020).

While there has been a clear acknowledgement of the importance of developing evidence-based perpetrator interventions, the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) reports that significant data gaps remain in this area (AIHW, 2021). It is indicated that currently data is collected primarily from police and the courts. This information is important to understand perpetrator engagement with the justice system, however, it does not provide a broader picture of experiences of, and access to, specialist perpetrator programs (AIHW, 2021). AIHW also note that there is currently limited scope to compare data nationally and argue that improvements could be made in using linked data (AIHW, 2021). Indeed, the baseline report 2015-2016 of the National Outcome Standards for Perpetrator Interventions stated that it was unable to report on all standards due to consistency issues that meant the data could potentially be misleading or misinterpreted (Department of Social Services, 2016, p. 6).

Some studies seek to understand perpetrator experiences of engaging in support programs (Reimer, 2020; Wendt et al., 2019). In their review of the effectiveness of invitational narrative approaches in men's perpetrator intervention programs, Wendt and colleagues (2019) undertook qualitative interviews with key informants including practitioners, men who have used violence, and their ex/partners. Invitational narrative practice is based on the premise that change is most likely to occur when clients take ownership over the solutions and when they can see real meaning to their lives (Wendt et al., 2019). This research highlights that it is important for men to not feel they are being judged when participating in programs and that practitioners use a respectful tone and stance with participants (Wendt et al., 2019). This is found to support men to explore their behaviours and personal responsibility. Participants report that the relationship with practitioners is central to being able to engage in a program. Being able to identify with other men in the groups is also highlighted as a positive factor that supports engagement.

Reimer (2020) additionally highlights the importance of the client-worker relationship in the effectiveness of men's behaviour change programs. Using qualitative research methodologies, Reimer explored perceptions of client-worker relationships with 22 male participants and 13 workers from two men's behaviour change programs in Australia (Reimer, 2020). The research indicates that many participants experienced feelings of vulnerability when initially engaging in the program, however a positive client-worker relationship supported men's engagement in behaviour change programs (Reimer, 2020). Respondents indicated that a client-worker relationship which involves care and support whereby workers also challenge clients to change their behaviours and attitudes, helps participants to feel more comfortable in the program. Using both male and female facilitators was found to have benefits in providing an example to men of what a respectful relationship between a man and a woman can look like (Reimer, 2020). Employing female facilitators is also found to be beneficial in preventing collusion with clients, as female facilitators can bring different perspectives on male privilege (Reimer, 2020). It is acknowledged that this review identified limited available research in relation to the impact of men's behaviour change programs on the perpetration coercive control.

The authors caution that while giving men a voice can support their engagement in conversations about violence, there can be some men in the group who may use this to gain mutual support by colluding with perpetrators and supporting their behaviours (Wendt et al., 2019).

There is evidence to suggest that perpetrators can learn new coercive and controlling behaviours from other perpetrators, with scholars highlighting the role that media reporting can play in this regard (Lelliott, Noble-Dickinson & Wallis, 2022). Threats of dousing or the use of fire against victim-survivors, and media reporting of this abuse was the focus of a qualitative pilot study conducted by Lelliott and colleagues (2022), who interviewed 17 participants from DFV service providers in Queensland. Many participants note that following reports of the murder of Hannah Clarke and her children (all were killed by Hannah's ex-partner, who doused their car in petrol and set them alight), they experienced a spike in similar patterns of offending or threats of a similar nature in the community. Participants also recall perpetrators referring to media reports of the Hannah Clarke murder to threaten victim-survivors: 'Telling women, "you're going to end up just like her"' (p. 7).

11. Effectiveness of police responses to coercive control

Improving police responses to coercive control is a common theme in multiple reports, analyses and submissions to inquiries (see for example, Douglas, McGlade, Tarrant, & Tolmie, 2020; Parliament of New South Wales, Joint Select Committee on Coercive Control, 2021; Wangmann, 2021; Women's Safety and Justice Taskforce, 2021a). Experts have expressed doubt about whether a legislative provision criminalising coercive control would increase the effectiveness of a justice response without a comprehensive program of police training to support the implementation and ensure that police respond in a way that gives effect to the legal elements.

Several submissions to the New South Wales Joint Select Committee provide examples of the challenges for victim-survivors in using the law to ensure safety. For instance, in her submission, Wangmann highlights circumstances where professionals in the criminal justice system have failed to act in accordance with the legislative framework within which they operate. Examples include recent homicides where police have failed to make records of reports, undertake risk assessments and escalate them as required, and to fully investigate a perpetrator's offending history, highlighting issues with the operation of legislative frameworks in practice (Wangmann, 2021).

Inadequate police responses to coercive control and victim-survivor reports are recognised in the reports of the Women's Safety and Justice Taskforce as a weakness in the justice system (Women's Safety and Justice Taskforce, 2021a). The Taskforce describes many of the challenges for victim-survivors in how the Queensland Police Service responds to coercive control, with poor response being seemingly impacted by negative cultural elements including racism, lack of cultural capability and responses shaped on negative beliefs about family violence and attitudes to women. The report findings indicate that women do not always experience police responses to family violence as supportive. For example, some First Nations women describe experiences of over-policing and not being recognised as a victim-survivor once they had offended, with police seemingly more concerned about their offence histories (Women's Safety and Justice Taskforce, 2022a). Other research with IPV victim-survivors highlights multiple incidents whereby women reporting to police felt obligated to collect their own evidence to support their reports. Participants recall feeling that police were more likely to believe them if they could show specific evidence (Douglas, 2021a). Douglas's research with victim-survivors points to three key issues identified by women who had experienced IPV and contacted police:

1. police failing to recognise non-physical forms of IPV
2. a sense that the police were aligning with the abuser, and
3. police failing to intervene where there were children in the relationship (Douglas, 2021a, p. 147).

Concerns about police responses to family violence are acknowledged by the Queensland Government response to the reports of the Women's Safety and Justice Taskforce. Following a key recommendation, an independent Commission of Inquiry has been established (the Inquiry) to examine policing responses to DFV, to ensure full public confidence in the ability of police to protect victim-survivors and hold perpetrators to account.

The New South Wales Joint Select Committee Inquiry heard evidence that police did not take breaches of orders against perpetrators sufficiently seriously and that this undermines victim-survivors' trust in police, making them less likely to report breaches or abuse in the future (Parliament of New South Wales, Joint Select Committee on Coercive Control, 2021). In their submission to the New South Wales Joint Select Committee, the Monash Gender and Family Violence Prevention Centre (2021) identifies similar issues across other police force responses, noting that lack of diversity within police forces, and organisational cultures that do not value domestic violence specialisation within policing, are among some of the immediate challenges. Alleged instances of police protection of known IPV offenders within the force is also identified as a critical reason to move a family violence response away from general policing towards a specialised response (Monash Gender and Family Violence Prevention Centre, 2021). Wangmann's submission to the Committee also questions whether specialised training and support for police to understand the gendered nature of coercive control and to develop improved skills for identifying victim-survivors who are frequently misidentified as perpetrators, is possible in a system that is incident focused and lacks the ability for police to make nuanced interpretations in their decision making around family and domestic violence (Wangmann, 2021).

Douglas observes that for most of the 65 women interviewed for her research into IPV and the law, their problems with legal responses stem from a failure to properly exercise available powers and follow through on charges, rather than a lack of police powers or offences to invoke (Douglas, 2021a). Douglas recommends

increasing the accessibility of the justice system to women and to have key contact points with police who are aware of their history and safety risks. Other suggestions include having highly specialised family violence teams, a feature of the Scottish model of criminalising coercive control (Stark & Weiner, 2021).

Responding to family violence has become a major part of police work (Douglas, 2021a). The way that police respond when doing this work has been found to have important implications for women's help-seeking behaviour with IPV (Douglas, 2021a). Contacting police has been noted as the number one action women take when seeking help to deal with IPV (Douglas 2021, citing Meyer, 2011). In her study with 65 women who had experienced IPV, Douglas finds that 91% ($n = 54$) had at some point contacted the police. However, responses from police to their reports were varied, with a common issue described by the participants being that police do not take non-physical acts seriously enough when responding to IPV (Douglas, 2021). This is especially problematic for the ability to deal with coercive control where there may be no instances of physical violence but instead patterns of behaviour that instigate control and intimidation (Parliament of New South Wales, Joint Select Committee on Coercive Control, 2021, p. 19 citing Submission 89 Office of Public Prosecutions, 2021). Perceptions that non-physical forms of abuse are not considered as harmful or serious as physical abuse by police was also identified in research into technology-facilitated abuse (Harris, & Woodlock, 2019). For example, in a submission to the New South Wales Joint Select Committee, the Centre of Women's Economic Safety indicate that police and the legal sector urgently require training to recognise financial abuse and suggest that police should include forensic accountants on staff to help address coercive economic behaviour (Centre for Women's Economic Safety, 2021).

Police workforce development and training

Research findings relating to women's experiences with police indicate a need for organisational culture change to develop an improved understanding of IPV and coercive control, to support police to understand a more holistic picture of the nature of abuse (Douglas 2021a). The potential for training and education to support a change in the response of general duties police appears to be an area where further research would be beneficial. Segrave and colleagues (2018) conducted interviews with 163 Victorian Police members and found an intrinsic problem with applying incident-based responses to IPV and concluded that attitudes towards victim-survivors were cynical and there was a widespread dissatisfaction with attending IPV incidents as a policing task. Multiple factors appear to contribute to this including gendered understanding of 'true' victim-survivors and frustration at victim-survivors returning to partners noting the relentless volume of family violence police were facing. The authors also indicate there is limited research on the efficacy of police training to change attitudes (Segrave et al., 2018). The findings underpin a comprehensive argument for shifting the focus on family violence to specialist police units and away from generalised police duties.

In reviewing workforce development literature on policing family violence, Dowling and colleagues (2018) note that training can be effective to enhance police understanding of the need to intervene in family and domestic violence incidents and improved police responses to family violence, though this was not considered in the context of coercive control alone.

Submissions to the New South Wales Joint Parliamentary Committee highlight the difference that training can make for police, with data revealing there were 41% more arrests for coercive control in police forces within England and Wales, that had been trained in the new offence compared to those that had not (McMahon & McGorrery, 2021 citing Brennan et al., 2021). The source of that research, Professor Iain Brennan, also made a submission to the Committee that indicated more specifically, that training over 75% of police officers and staff, in gender dynamics and coercive control is associated with a 40% increase in coercive control arrests, with an effect lasting more than 8 months (Brennan, 2021).

The type of training that appears most effective for police would include practical examples rather than solely theoretical or conceptual training and would be repeated or updated over time rather than being just a one-off event (Dowling et al., 2018). This analysis also suggests that police may be more receptive to the training when delivered by experienced police, though this must be managed to ensure outdated information or attitudes are not passed on (Dowling et al., 2018).

The significance of police training is illustrated in the comprehensive program of training for police and the judiciary about the dynamics of family violence and the nature of coercive control that supported the Scottish model of criminalising coercive control. In a submission to the New South Wales Joint Select Parliamentary Committee, Police Scotland outlined the training program that accompanied the introduction of the *Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act 2018* (DASA). To support implementation of the Act, Police Scotland received funding for

a significant training program to support an effective police response to coercive and controlling behaviours, including face-to-face training for more than 14,000 police staff up to and including the rank of Chief Inspector (Police Scotland, 2021). In addition, online training to improve understanding of family violence and cover key areas of the new legislation was delivered via an e-learning format made available to all staff, completed by 90% (or 21,000) of officers and staff of the workforce at that time. The training was developed by a family violence specialist support agency SafeLives (Police Scotland, 2021) and is described as building “knowledge of the dynamics of power and control in abusive relationships” (p. 2) and sought to dispel myths and misconceptions common in the community. The training also provided practical guidance on gathering evidence to support the establishment of coercive and controlling behaviours (Police Scotland, 2021a).

Additionally, Police Scotland maintain an intranet site on the introduction of DASA. This is accessible across the organisation and is key to ensuring consistent and meaningful communication and information sharing (Police Scotland, 2021). The pages are regularly updated to reflect feedback from issues raised, and practical application of DASA. Further, there is additional information sharing with criminal justice partners, including the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service (COPFS), to ensure this information remains current and responsive (Police Scotland, 2021). The introduction of the Act also included support from specialist police. Upon its commencement, officers with comprehensive knowledge of the legislation were available on-call, to assist across Scotland and at all hours. Members of the implementation team, Domestic Abuse Matters (Scotland), were available as a single point of contact for guidance during the delivery phase of the training. Members of this team travelled to all Local Policing Divisions and carried out further face-to-face briefings with specialist domestic abuse and public protection officers, so they could cascade their enhanced knowledge to peers (Police Scotland, 2021).

12. Health sector workforce development and training

Healthcare practitioners are well placed to screen for, and support, victim-survivors of coercive control. However, research evidence suggests that the health sector workforce requires further training and development support to do this (Tarzia, 2018; Withiel et al., 2019).

Key submissions to the New South Wales Joint Select Committee on Coercive Control from health sector stakeholders suggest a need for comprehensive training for the broader healthcare sector. Submissions included recommendations that the education and training be “mandatory and ongoing” (Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists, 2021, p. 7) for professionals in the health and justice sector, and that services within these sectors must be adequately integrated in their approach to ensure the continuity of service provision for victim-survivors of coercive control (Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists, 2021).

Hegarty and colleagues (2013) and Withiel and colleagues (2019) also indicate the importance of screening for coercive control within healthcare settings. This is because risk assessments that focus on physical violence and abuse may lead practitioners to overlook the risks associated with coercive and controlling behaviours (Johnson et al., 2019; Pitman, 2017; Withiel et al., 2019). Based on data from an online survey of 35 staff and 15 mothers from a maternal and child health service in Melbourne, Australia, the recent Withiel and colleagues study indicates that while the majority of participants recalled being screened for physical violence, most stated that they were not asked about emotional, financial, psychological violence, or coercive control (Withiel et al., 2019). Barriers to screening in healthcare settings include the perpetrator being present and language barriers. The authors observed that while some health practitioners have basic identification skills, more consistent and extensive support and training is required to ensure that forms of abuse other than physical (including coercive control) can be successfully screened for. Notably, clients who disclosed abuse to health practitioners reported being adequately supported (Withiel et al., 2019).

Another study based on interviews with 17 health practitioners around their understandings of reproductive coercion, and experiences of responding to this abuse, highlighted the challenges healthcare professionals face when both identifying and defining reproductive coercion. Many participants reported on the complexities of defining reproductive coercion, which often co-occurred with other forms of violence or control, having intersections with both IPV and sexual violence (Tarzia et al., 2019). Some participants also highlighted that the key to understanding reproductive coercion is the intent of the perpetrator, meaning that if health practitioners do not have access to information on the perpetrator’s intentions, they would categorise some cases as sexual assault (Tarzia et al., 2019). The authors of the study suggested that a lack of definitional clarity impacts on the

ability of health practitioners to identify and adequately support victim-survivors of reproductive coercion. This same study identified that a lack of community awareness could lead to women normalising experiences of reproductive coercion as something that occurs in relationships.

Recent qualitative research also identifies concerns in relation to the level of knowledge of coercive control among health professionals based on interviews with sixteen Australian women who reflected on their experiences of coercive control during pregnancy and the postpartum period (Buchanan & Humphreys, 2020). Health professionals are expected to build trusting relationships with their patients, particularly during pregnancy and in the postpartum period. However, this qualitative study identified a lack of acknowledgement and identification by healthcare professionals of the effects of women's experiences of coercive control. Consequently, this resulted in a failure to appropriately assess and respond in these circumstances. Some participants explained that if they were to report their experiences of coercive control to healthcare professionals in this context, they would not be taken seriously, which often prevented them from doing so (Buchanan & Humphreys, 2020). This study illustrates the importance of understanding and empathy from healthcare professionals, with a few participants recalling times when the behaviour displayed by the perpetrator was recognised as coercive and controlling, and how this led to them receiving the required support from social workers and other professionals (Buchanan & Humphreys, 2020).

13. Criminalising coercive control

This section examines legislative responses to coercive control, including moves to criminalise coercive control that have recently gathered pace in Australia, notably in NSW and Queensland. Legislation introduced (NSW) or planned (Qld) in these jurisdictions goes much further than the approach taken in one Australian state – Tasmania – which criminalised economic and emotional abuse in 2004. These moves follow international developments that have seen England and Wales, Scotland, Ireland and Northern Ireland legislate to criminalise coercive control. Creating criminal offences to enable the prosecution of coercive control augments civil justice responses, primarily legislative mechanisms for obtaining personal protection orders, as well as addressing gaps in criminal law responses that are seen as inadequate to support prosecution of coercive control.

There are a range of arguments for and against criminalising coercive control (Government of Western Australia, 2022; Parliament of New South Wales, Joint Select Committee on Coercive Control, 2021; Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, 2021; South Australian Attorney-General's Department, 2021; Women's Safety Justice Taskforce, 2021, 2021b, 2022, 2022b). Arguments in favour include:

- Legislative recognition supports the distinct features involving a pattern of control that includes non-physical tactics such as emotional and psychological abuse and control (Our Watch, 2021; Wangmann, 2020)
- The need for legislation to counter the focus on incidents in the criminal justice system that decontextualises the lived experience of ongoing and relentless patterns of power and control that the victim-survivor experiences (Parliament of New South Wales, Joint Select Committee on Coercive Control, 2021; Wangmann, 2020; Women's Safety Justice Taskforce, 2021)
- The need to punish perpetrators and reflect social condemnation for this type of behaviour and the suffering that it causes in victim-survivors (Douglas, 2021; McMahon & McGorrrery, 2020)
- A focus on the mechanisms and techniques used by perpetrators may expand the ability for evidence gathering to extend beyond that related to individual incidents and the expectation of physical or visible elements such as injuries and to encourage a focus on perpetration and improve community understanding about how it is enabled (Our Watch, 2021)
- A criminal offence provides "a range of educative and practical benefits", including increasing the ability of the criminal justice system to respond to non-physical forms of family violence and to reduce the misidentification of victim-survivors as the predominant aggressor, with police responses less incident-focused (Parliament of New South Wales, Joint Select Committee on Coercive Control, 2021, p. 79)
- Criminalisation provides a means of reinforcing the value of women's safety and freedom (Douglas, 2021) and requires the state to assume responsibility for responding to coercive control
- The creation of a criminal offence may prevent deaths from occurring (Walklate & Fitz-Gibbon, 2021).

In commentary and analysis that questions the value of introducing a criminal offence for coercive control, there are three particular and interlinked prominent themes. The first is that the shortcomings of existing legal approaches for addressing DFV will not be ameliorated by such a strategy and could even be augmented. The

second questions reliance on legal responses in general, indicating that responses that support recovery and healing should be the focus of policy and program development. The third is that unintended consequences may arise that mean some groups are adversely affected by the creation of a criminal offence. Arguments against criminalising coercive control include:

- Concern about unintended consequences particularly for groups at risk of 'misidentification' which means that people who are victim-survivors are misidentified as perpetrators (see further below)
- A linked concern that perpetrators of coercive control will misuse the legal system to maintain control by, among other things, taking advantage of the possibility of misidentification to continue to control victim-survivors (see further below)
- That a criminal law response will be difficult to activate in a context where some elements of coercive control will be difficult to evidence to the criminal standard (beyond reasonable doubt)
- That engagement with the criminal justice system has the potential to re-traumatise victim-survivors to an extent that may outweigh any benefit to them (Tolmie, 2021; Walklate and Fitz-Gibbon 2019). See further below
- Potential procedural barriers to the successful prosecution of an offence, as well as the difficulties of proscribing specific descriptors to behaviours that by their nature are tailored by the perpetrator for the individual victim-survivor (Walklate & Fitz-Gibbon, 2019)
- Translating the concept of coercive control, which originated in a clinical setting, to legal settings will be challenging particularly in a criminal law context (Douglas, 2021; Walklate et al., 2017)
- That resources that may otherwise be used to support victim-survivors, including through providing protection and support for therapeutic recovery, will be diverted into an expensive criminal justice response that will provide limited benefits for victims (Women's Safety and Justice Taskforce, 2021a).

Misidentification of victim-survivors as perpetrators

Research has demonstrated that engagement with legal system responses (including personal protection order systems, criminal law responses and family law responses) to DFV can be ineffective and potentially traumatising for some women. For some women in the Douglas study for example, engagement with the law often challenged, delayed, or reduced their safety (Douglas 2021a, p. 257). One of the factors that led to these outcomes were justice system workforce, such as police misidentifying the victim-survivor as the perpetrator when called to incidents. There are a range of factors that may contribute to this occurring and some groups may be at higher risk.

Groups at particular risk of misidentification include women from CALD backgrounds and women with disability (Douglas 2021, Parliament of NSW, Joint Select Committee on Coercive Control, 2021). First Nations women are also a group of particular concern (see further below). The potential for sanctions against victim-survivors (usually women) who use violence in response to violence perpetrated against them, and more opportunities for systems abuse by predominant aggressors, has been considered in research and analysis (Nancarrow et al., 2020; Parliament of New South Wales, Joint Select Committee on Coercive Control, 2021; Women's Safety Justice Taskforce, 2021).

Complexity in the operation of legislative responses may arise from concepts of "ideal victims" or stereotypes of what "real victim behaviour looks like". Such assumptions can be compounded when the behaviour of both parties "is viewed purely through an incident-based lens" (Parliament of New South Wales, Joint Select Committee on Coercive Control, 2021; Women's Safety Justice Taskforce, 2021, p. xviii). These assumptions and stereotypes about victim-survivors of abuse, and women more generally, can mean that those who do defend themselves, or who are not perceived to be cooperating with police, are then seen as perpetrators of violence rather than victim-survivors (Nancarrow et al., 2020; Parliament of New South Wales, Joint Select Committee on Coercive Control, 2021; Women's Safety Justice Taskforce, 2021). This is particularly an issue for First Nations women who, compared to non-Indigenous women, are less likely to be identified as victim-survivors, more likely to use violence in response to violence, and are overrepresented in breaches of Family Violence Orders and sentences involving imprisonment (ANROWS 2020; Nancarrow et al., 2020).

A misunderstanding and a lack of clarity around the nature and identification of coercive control among police may be a contributing factor to this criminalisation of victim-survivors of abuse (Nancarrow et al., 2020; Parliament of New South Wales, Joint Select Committee on Coercive Control, 2021). When investigating DFV situations some police officers may default to a reactive criminal justice approach where the violence is often viewed on an incident-by-incident basis, which can limit their perspective of who is in the most need of protection (Nancarrow et al., 2020; Parliament of New South Wales, Joint Select Committee on Coercive Control, 2021). The risk is that the police may miss the wider context of coercive control, which is ongoing and

complicated in nature (Nancarrow et al., 2020; Women's Safety Justice Taskforce, 2021; Parliament of New South Wales, Joint Select Committee on Coercive Control, 2021). When women use violence to defend themselves, police may view them as a sole or co-perpetrator of assault and not recognise this as retaliatory violence (Boxall, Dowling, & Morgan, 2020; Nancarrow et al., 2020; Parliament of New South Wales, Joint Select Committee on Coercive Control, 2021; Women's Safety Justice Taskforce, 2021).

Nancarrow and colleagues (2020) describe perpetrators as deliberately using 'image management' strategies to portray themselves as the victim at the time of specific incidents or during various points of the legal process. Such strategies included being the first to call police and report the incident or ensuring they act calmly in contrast to their partner's more emotional state. This research also reflects concerns indicated by service providers that such strategies were being used against people with limited English and, in the absence of interpreters, resulting in the perpetrator's version of events being accepted by the responding police (Nancarrow et al., 2020). Similarly, the Women's Safety and Justice Taskforce (2021) describes the use of image management by perpetrators to manipulate the police, the victim-survivor, and the people around them. Common tactics adopted by the perpetrator include the frequent taking and sharing of 'happy family images' on social media, public displays of affection, and even the use of the victim-survivor's finances to purchase gifts which are subsequently given to the victim-survivor in public to fabricate an image of generosity (Women's Safety and Justice Taskforce, 2021). These tactics result in the misidentification of the victim-survivor as the perpetrator (Women's Safety and Justice Taskforce, 2021).

The AIFS study of compliance with, and enforcement of family law parenting orders identifies a trauma-informed approach to decision-making and extensive family violence training as critical "to ensure that people experiencing family violence were not misidentified as perpetrators or that protective behaviour was not penalised in contravention proceedings" (Carson et al., [AIFS], 2022, p. 135). Given the very high proportion (55%) of court files in the AIFS study sample that include allegations of family violence made by both mothers and fathers, the adoption of this approach in the family law system is identified as having the potential to improve the capacity of the family law system to better identify, assess, and respond in family law matters characterised by family violence (Carson et al., [AIFS], 2022).

Strategies have been identified that have the potential to counteract possible misidentification of the victim-survivors as aggressors. The Women's Safety Justice Taskforce acknowledges that "system responses must be improved to avoid misidentifying the person who is most in need of protection and failing to hold the predominant aggressor in the relationship accountable" (2021, p. xii). The taskforce recommends the establishment of a trial of a co-responder model involving both Queensland police and specialist DFV services with a view to reducing misidentification, and a particular focus on meeting the needs of First Nations people (Recommendation 37, Women's Safety Justice Taskforce, 2021, p. xii). The New South Wales Parliament, Joint Select Committee on Coercive Control recommends a national electronic data base of family violence orders as a potential means of reducing misidentification of victim-survivors where the perpetrator has previously been subject to a family violence order (New South Wales Parliament, Joint Select Committee on Coercive Control, 2021, p. 41). Improvements in the training of professionals to identify primary victim-survivors and prevent the making of orders against victim-survivors was also identified (New South Wales Parliament, Joint Select Committee on Coercive Control, 2021, p. 75) as was criminalising coercive control as a means of facilitating police responses to be less incident-focused (p. 79).

First Nations women

For First Nations people there is a history of highly problematic treatment by legal systems in Australia, including in relation to family violence (Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service, 2022). This is an important consideration when examining legislation introduced in other jurisdictions, such as Scotland, where there is no history of First Nations people being colonised, over-policed, and traumatised by child removal practices (Wirringa Baiya Aboriginal Women's Legal Centre Inc., 2021). The challenging relationship between First Nations people in Australia and the justice system (particularly police) is a significant factor to consider in developing legislative responses. Relevant commentary emphasises the history of disbelief and mistreatment of Aboriginal victim-survivors by police, prosecutors and judicial officers (Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service, 2022). Organisations such as the Wirringa Baiya Aboriginal Legal Centre observe that criminalising coercive control poses particular risks to First Nations people, with new offences identified as unlikely to protect women at risk of violence for reasons similar to those identified in relation to the shortcomings of legal systems experienced by First Nations people generally (Wirringa Baiya Aboriginal Women's Legal Centre Inc., 2021).

A fundamental issue for First Nations people relates to their experiences reporting family violence to police. In the 2017 National Community Attitudes Towards Violence Against Women Survey (NCAS) the findings of attitudes among First Nations people found that the large proportion of First Nations women participants agreed that reporting violence remains difficult, indicating that this is priority issue to address. Barriers to reporting identified in the report included: a fear of institutional racism, lack of cultural safety, reluctance to access the criminal justice system in response to family violence because of the ways in which Indigenous people have been negatively treated in the past, fear that their children will be removed, and fear of homelessness (NCAS, 201).

For coercive control legislation to be effective, support is required for victim-survivors to safely report to police, and for police to respond in a way that women feel supported. Currently there are multiple barriers to involving police, including a fear of discrimination for women from marginalised backgrounds (Walklate et al., 2017). If a legislative system encourages women to report “a broader range of less-severe acts of violence, but (they) are not believed when they do so, or the services they report to are not properly equipped to respond, then such laws will have the opposite effect of their intended outcome” (Our Watch, 2021).

The Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service suggests that early intervention by police is not necessarily the most appropriate intervention, especially for First Nations women, and that increased interaction with police in the context of the criminalisation of coercive control risks poor outcomes, including experiences of further violence, threats of arrest or threats relating to child protection interventions (Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service, 2022). First Nations women already experience significant structural inequalities, noted to influence their use of violence (Douglas, et al., 2020), and these women also disproportionately experience coercive control (Our Watch, 2021). As noted earlier in this review, First Nations communities are dealing with intergenerational effects of trauma. In circumstances where system responses are not sufficient to support the safety of First Nations women, these victim-survivors may consider that they have few options other than to respond to the violence they experience with violent behaviour of their own (Douglas, 2021).

Enabling systems abuse by perpetrators

Those who advocate caution in relation to criminalising coercive control highlight the potential for the legal system to be misused as a means of perpetuating or continuing to perpetrate abusive behaviour (for example, Carson et al., [AIFS], 2022; Nancarrow et al., 2020; Walklate & Fitz-Gibbon, 2019). Perpetrators’ misuse of processes in this way has been identified as eroding victim-survivor’s trust in government institutions (Carson et al., [AIFS], 2018, 2022; Kaspiew et al., [AIFS], 2017; Parliament of New South Wales, Joint Select Committee on Coercive Control, 2021). In relation to the family law system in particular, the potential for systems abuse is widely acknowledged (Carson et al., [AIFS], 2018, 2022; Coy et al., 2012; Douglas, 2017, 2018b; Family Law Council, 2016; Fitch & Easteal, 2017; Kaspiew et al., [AIFS], 2017; Kaye, Wangmann & Booth, 2017; Women’s Legal Service Australia, 2015; Women’s Legal Service Victoria, 2015).

The court process and legal requirements for evidentiary thresholds raise specific challenges for prosecuting coercive and controlling behaviours as they may not be immediately or clearly visible, may be broad in range or may be less tangible and difficult to evidence in court proceedings. The adversarial nature of the legal process and the entitlement of the accused to challenge the evidence of victim-survivors, presents as another opportunity for perpetrators to undermine victim-survivors’ experiences in a manner that compounds the harmful impacts within the formality of the court environment (Walklate et al., 2018). Kaspiew and colleagues [AIFS] (2017) also identify the adversarial nature of the Australian family law system and principles of procedural fairness as having the capacity to “support abusive dynamics in an environment where many professionals have insufficient expertise in family violence to recognise the misuse of their services, systems and processes” (Kaspiew et al., [AIFS] p. 181). More than half of the participants in the qualitative component of that research reported that they had experienced post-separation systems abuse by their former partner, including via repeated litigation and mediation and cross-examination, including direct cross-examination by self-represented perpetrators (Kaspiew et al., [AIFS] 2017). In her recent analyses of IPV and women’s interactions with the legal system, Douglas identifies the potential for online courts and hearings to reduce the opportunity for abuse by perpetrators, particularly where women can participate from safe places such as in lawyer’s offices (Douglas, 2018a).

A more recent qualitative study based on 65 interviews with victim-survivors undertaken by Douglas and Fell (2020) also highlighted the issue of “malicious false complaints” (p. 827) as a kind of systems abuse, specifically, reports of child maltreatment made to child protection services by perpetrators. A total of 11 participants reported this form of abuse, with some reflecting on this being an attempt by the perpetrator to remove children from the victim-survivor’s care as a form of ‘punishment’ (Douglas & Fell, 2020). Processes of involving cross-

applications and cross-orders under state and territory family violence laws may be misused and inadvertently permit coercive and controlling behaviour, and further traumatise victim-survivors who lose trust in the legal process as a means of support and protection (ANROWS, 2020; Nancarrow et al., 2020).

Vexatious litigation in family law matters is also explored as a form of systems abuse where the family law system is used as a tool to coerce and control victim-survivors (Fitch & Easteal, 2017). For example, one study draws on the narrative experience of one victim-survivor who had been subject to vexatious litigation, and a small qualitative survey of 10 family law professionals who had witnessed vexatious proceedings (Fitch & Easteal, 2017). The victim-survivor and professionals reflect on vexatious litigation as representing a way to control the victim-survivor and increase legal costs and burden on them. Professionals participating in the study also report a number of negative impacts vexatious litigation can have on victim-survivors who are subject to it, including “psychological stress, increased legal costs, children being exposed to harmful environments, feelings of depression and oppression, hopelessness and despair, triggering of mental health episodes, and a loss of faith in the system” (Fitch & Easteal, 2017, pp. 107-108). The recent AIFS research on compliance with and enforcement of family law parenting orders also provides insight into systems abuse and vexatious litigation (Carson et al., [AIFS], 2022). Repeated non-compliance and vexatious litigants using the system to continue to perpetrate abuse, as well as inappropriate responses by the court to DFV and coercive control and prevailing power imbalances, were raised by both parents/carers and professionals participating in the surveys.

In particular, the research indicates the potential for the contravention regime and repeated litigation or non-compliance to become part of an ongoing family violence dynamic and pattern of coercive control (Carson et al., [AIFS], 2022; Fitch & Easteal, 2017; Kaye et al., 2021). Parties experiencing issues with non-compliance with parenting orders have reflected on a range of factors discouraging them from taking action for non-compliance. These include the costs, complexity and trauma and uncertainty associated with legal proceedings; together with perceptions of contravention proceedings as ineffective and fear that the perpetrator will respond with violence if action is taken (Carson et al., [AIFS], 2022). Improved information sharing between Family Dispute Resolution services and courts has also been recommended in the context of broader systemic change to address vexatious litigation (Barwick et al., 2020). Evidentiary requirements and procedural approaches are also identified as having the potential to contribute to the experience of coercive control. Women are often reluctant to participate in the justice process due to fear of the perpetrator or the financial, emotional and social costs involved (Douglas, 2021, citing Mazzerole, 2018). Consequently, evidence of having mixed results in relation to improvements to safety for victim-survivors following engagement with the justice system suggests benefits may be limited and there are risks. Some studies show increased victimisation following prosecution (Douglas 2021, citing Mazerole, 2018).

Risks in criminal justice responses

Trauma

Some research and analysis points to the risks in criminal justice system involvement by victim-survivors, given the trauma histories of victim-survivors (for example, Tolmie, 2018). A recent study on women with complex trauma indicated that successful criminal outcomes for this group are “rare”, police and prosecutorial decisions in this context are not transparent or accountable and initial assessments and informal judgments by police have a significant impact on access to justice (Salter et al., 2020).

Reliance on victim-survivor testimony in criminal law is a challenge, particularly where direct cross-examination is permitted and where victim-survivors are fearful and feel unsafe more generally (Tolmie, 2018). However, the use of expert witnesses to contextualise evidence in cases of DFV (and potentially coercive control) is acknowledged to be an effective mechanism in criminal law and suggest that expert testimony is likely to be a more appropriate way to capture the complexities of DFV (including coercive control), as it provides the opportunity to provide explanation and context around coercive control and how common myths operate (Walklate et al., 2017).

Judicial understanding

Concerns have been raised about whether judicial officers consistently and adequately identify and assess the ongoing coercive and controlling dynamics in relationships in various contexts (Douglas et al., 2021a; Kaspiew et al., [AIFS], 2015).

In a consultation report aimed at improving judicial officers’ education materials about coercive control, Douglas and Ehler (2022) interviewed 28 judicial officers and five research experts about how best to present information and what type of information was needed about coercive control in the National Domestic and Family Violence Bench Book to aid judicial officers to better understand coercive control. This report indicates there is a need for

improved information about judicial understanding of coercive control and what educative elements would help to support this and the relevance for legal proceedings (Douglas & Ehler, 2022). The interviews with judicial and research stakeholders identify four themes that are important to explain in more detail to judicial officers. These include: contexts where judicial officers need to be mindful of the possibility of coercive control, the subtlety of the behaviour of coercive control, patterns of behaviour that might indicate coercive control, and controlling behaviours.

In a State of Knowledge paper that used data from interviews with 66 judicial officers, Wakefield and Taylor (2015) indicate the importance of judicial training to ensure good decision making in protecting victim-survivors, as choices to take action against perpetrators of family and domestic violence can be influenced by a variety of factors and complex evidence. The paper also identifies that judicial education is necessary to support victim-survivors and ensure the legal process is not a retraumatising experience. Respondents to the survey indicate that a variety of formats would be most useful and most likely to support uptake. Participants in the study identify a lack of training specific to DFV, and amongst topics identified as valuable are those relating to risk factors and risk assessments. The report also acknowledges the importance of building on the knowledge and experience of officers and ensuring that new learning formats are evaluated.

Fitz-Gibbon and colleagues' research based on interviews conducted with 36 judicial officers in all Australian states and territories, indicates limited uniformity in how judicial officers think about the effectiveness of perpetrator interventions and accountability as linked to perpetrator interventions (Fitz-Gibbon et al., 2020). The research considers judicial officers' understanding about the dynamics of family and domestic violence and found that despite understanding their role in holding perpetrators to account, "there was considerable variation in how they understood the scope and extent of this role" (Fitz-Gibbon et al., 2020, p. 11).

Sentencing

The question of sentencing has also raised concern in relation to the creation of a criminal offence. According to Tolmie (2021), sentencing responses have traditionally not been well suited to effectively deal with coercive control as they may not adequately acknowledge the impact of non-physical violence, or the context of a patterns of behaviours which may have been repeated across successive relationships (Tolmie, 2021). This submission also noted that sentencing provisions do not currently centralise consideration of the risks to victim-survivors and their children and the need to plan for periods of intensified risk, such as when a woman leaves a relationship (Tolmie, 2021).

Submissions to the New South Wales Joint Select Committee on Coercive Control identify deficiencies, where minor penalties are ordered for breaches of family violence orders that do not reflect the seriousness of harm for victim-survivors, with the Joint Select Committee recommending an increase in the maximum penalty for contravening an apprehended violence order under the *Crimes (Domestic and Personal Violence) Act 2007* (Parliament of New South Wales, Joint Select Committee on Coercive Control, 2021).

In Victoria, there is evidence of a firmer approach to sentencing for breaches of personal protection orders, possibly influenced by a policy environment strongly focussed on improving response to family violence and the creation, in 2013, of new offences for aggravated and persistent breach offences (Sentencing Advisory Council, 2022). The most recent Sentencing Advisory Council Monitoring Report from 2022, on sentencing of Family Violence Intervention Orders (FVIO) and Family Violence Safety Notices (FVSN), found a significant increase in sentences of imprisonment in the Magistrates Court of Victoria, where 97% of cases in the reference period were listed. In 2011, just 14% of breaches of FVIOs and FVSNs received a sentence of imprisonment. In 2020 that had increased to 40%. This could be partly explained by the introduction in 2013 of the offences, with a higher maximum penalty of five years' imprisonment than the maximum penalty of two years' imprisonment for non-aggravated breach offences. However, the imprisonment rate for non-aggravated breach offences also increased, to 34%, independently of those new offences (Sentencing Advisory Council, 2022, p. xiii).

A need for multiple strategies

A significant theme in the literature is that legislative measures to criminalise coercive control represent only one strategy among many required to improve responses for victim-survivors of coercive control. It is further acknowledged that criminalisation requires comprehensive implementation support involving training and professional development to be effective (Wangmann, 2020).

A potential unintended consequence of legislating for coercive control identified in the commentary relates to the possible diversion of resources from other areas of service delivery or family violence prevention activities (Douglas, 2021, p. 9).

The New South Wales Joint Select Committee Inquiry identified a range of non-legislative options that could contribute to improvements in dealing with coercive control as a justice system response. For example, recommendation 19 indicated that tailored and ongoing training should be implemented to support the identification, assessment and response to coercive control by police officers, judicial officers and prosecutors (Parliament of New South Wales, Joint Select Committee on Coercive Control, 2021).

Australian jurisdictions

New South Wales

As noted, two Australian jurisdictions have recently legislated in relation to coercive control. In New South Wales, following consideration of the recommendations of the Joint Select Committee on Coercive Control Inquiry, a criminal offence has been introduced. The *Crimes Legislation Amendment (Coercive Control) Act* (NSW) received assent on 23 November 2022. It amended the *Crimes Act 1900* (NSW) to introduce a coercive control offence where an adult engages in ‘repeated or continuous abusive behaviour against a current or former partner’ and provides for a penalty of up to seven years’ imprisonment (s 54D). Consistent with most criminal offences, the offence involves a requirement for intent on the part of the perpetrator (who must be an adult) such that the course of conduct is an intentional attempt to coerce or control the former or current intimate partner.

Queensland

In Queensland a two-stage process of legislative reform will culminate in the introduction of a criminal offence by the end of 2023 (Legal Affairs and Safety Committee 2022). This two-stage approach has been adopted to reduce the likelihood of unintended consequences occurring, specifically in relation to misidentifying the primary aggressor and mitigating risks for First Nations women and girls (Legal Affairs and Safety Committee, 2022). Under the first stage, the *Domestic and Family Violence Protection (Combating Coercive Control) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2022* (the Bill) was introduced to multiple Acts to better address the patterns of behaviour that are indicative of coercive control. It is also intended to update other relevant legislation, including the definition of stalking in the Criminal Code and to strengthen court responses to cross-applications for family violence orders, to ensure they operate to protect the person most at risk and strengthen the court’s ability to consider a previous history of domestic violence.

In the context of coercive control, the Bill has two significant aspects. The first aspect relates to the definitions of DFV, emotional or psychological abuse and economic abuse in the *Domestic and Family Violence Protection Act 2012* (Qld; DFVP Act), present in Clause 31 of the Bill. These amendments involve explicit reference to a “behaviour or pattern of behaviour” that “when considered cumulatively is abusive, threatening, coercive or causes fear” and ‘is to (be) considered in the context of the relationship between the first person and the second person as whole”.

The second aspect relates to the question of misidentification of the victim-survivor as the perpetrator. The Bill will amend the DFVP Act to focus on “the person most in need of protection in a relevant relationship” (Clause 34). It directs attention to each person’s behaviour in the “context of the relationship as a whole” in a consideration of whether it is more likely than not that the second person’s behaviour to the first person is more likely than not abusive, threatening, controlling, coercive, dominating and fear-invoking. Correspondingly, it requires consideration of whether or not the first person’s behaviour toward the second person is more likely than not for self-protection or the protection of another person (including a child or pet) or retaliation in relation to the treatment of the first person by the second person or another person, including a child or pet. It also directs attention to whether the first person’s behaviour is attributable to the cumulative effect of experiencing domestic violence from the second person.

The amendments would provide a set of mandatory considerations that courts must apply in identifying the person most in need of protection. These include:

- The history of the relationship and domestic violence
- The nature and severity of the harm caused by each person to the other person
- Which person has the capacity to seriously harm, control or dominate the other person
- Whether either person has characteristics that may make them particularly vulnerable to domestic violence, including whether they are: women, children, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, people from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse backgrounds, people with disability, people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or intersex, and elderly people.

The Legal Affairs and Safety Committee report on the Bill noted that the amendments were being implemented in the context of other policy developments that would support effective implementation (2022, p. 12). These included the development of a whole of government strategy and action plan to support culturally informed responses for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across the justice system, and an evidence-based and trauma-informed framework to support implementation of the reforms across the justice and family violence sectors.

Tasmania

To date, Tasmania is the only Australian jurisdiction which has, since 2004, applied criminal penalties for financial and emotional abuse and intimidation, behaviours that are common to coercive control, (ss 8–9 *Family Violence Act 2004* [Tas]). The offences of emotional abuse and economic abuse were part of this new approach and reflect the patterns of behaviour of perpetrators in controlling victim-survivors. Section 9 of the Act prohibits emotional abuse or intimidation and prohibits a course of conduct the perpetrator knows, or is likely to know, will cause fear, apprehension and harm. This course of conduct includes the limitation of movement by threats or intimidation (s.9 [2]). The offence of emotional abuse is limited to spouses or partners. The accompanying offence of economic abuse is outlined in section 8 of the Act and relates to behaviours that prohibit a person from intentionally and unreasonably controlling or intimidating their spouse or partner by pursuing a course of conduct involving a range of outlined financial matters.

Walklate and Fitz-Gibbon (2021) indicate that this legislation has not been extensively used in the prosecution of behaviours associated with coercive control, though without a comprehensive analysis as to the reasons for its limited use. The Tasmanian Police submission to the New South Wales Joint select Committee on Coercive Control indicates that the offences were part of an overall package of policy reforms to address how family violence is addressed in Tasmania (Tasmania Police, 2021). The implementation of this package required time, with no prosecutions in the first three years after the commencement of the reforms. A lack of community awareness and difficulties for first responding police to identify course of conduct were identified as relevant factors. Since 2015 there has been a significant increase in charges and convictions, following further training for police and community, but also, significantly, the removal of a 6-month statutory time limit for laying complaints. Data for the period 2008 to 2021 indicates significant increases in prosecutions each year from 2016 (Tasmania Police, 2021).

According to Barwick, McGorrery and McMahon (2020), "it is possible that the full potential" of the offences is just beginning to emerge (p. 155). They note that of 73 identified prosecutions (all against male offenders), convictions were obtained in more than half the cases, mostly through a guilty plea (34), with six being upheld by the court. They argue that the potential for "the charges to deal with the many and varied social evils that arise in domestic abuse scenarios is only just starting to be seen and is certainly yet to be exhausted" (Barwick et al., 2020, p. 156).

Other legislation

Coercive control is currently recognised in some Australian legislation in both implicit and explicit ways, for example, the FLA, some state and territory legislative provisions relating to family violence legislation, and stalking. The risks in legislating for coercive control reflect some of the current challenges with existing legislation (Women's Safety and Justice Taskforce, 2021a). In their submission to the New South Wales Joint Select Committee on Coercive Control in domestic relationships, members of the Monash Gender and Family Violence Prevention Centre highlighted the differences and variety of approaches taken to coercive control across Australian jurisdictions (Monash Gender and Family Violence Prevention Centre, 2021).

In Victoria, coercive control (including emotional, psychological and economic abuse) is more explicitly recognised as a form of family violence in the *Family Violence Protection Act 2008* (s 5). In their policy brief on this issue, Women's Legal Service Victoria suggests that coercive control legislation should not extend beyond civil to criminal law, as the civil law jurisdiction is identified as having the scope to capture the "socio-legal complexities of family violence" (Women's Legal Service Victoria, 2015, p. 17).

More recently, McMahon, McGorrery and Burton (2020) highlight the potential for stalking laws to capture coercive control within the criminal justice system, given that stalking is considered a form of family violence in Australia and is non-physical in nature. However, the authors point to community attitudes and myths around family violence and how these can function to lessen the effectiveness of legal responses. For example, there is evidence to suggest that police are less likely to view an incident as stalking if it was perpetrated by a partner or ex-partner, as opposed to a stranger or acquaintance (McMahon et al., 2020).

International approaches

Offences developed in England and Wales, Scotland, Ireland and Northern Ireland have been designed to address existing gaps between the lived experience of coercive control and the deficiencies of criminal justice responses (Wangmann, 2020). Analysis of the existing legislation highlights the reframing of coercive control as an infringement of human rights in alignment with the Stark model of IPV that conceptualises coercive control as a restriction on liberty and on a victim-survivor's human rights (Stark, 2020). Stark's model, detailed earlier in this report, describes the framework that enables a perpetrator to undermine the victim-survivor's capacity for independent decision-making and disables the victim-survivor's ability to leave the relationship.

England and Wales

In England and Wales, the *Serious Crime Act 2015* makes it an offence to engage in coercive and controlling behaviour where the victim-survivor and perpetrator are personally connected (Home Office UK, 2015). This offence of controlling or coercive behaviour refers to repeated or continuous behaviour between parties personally connected in intimate or familial relationships (s 76 (1)(b) and (2)) and is intended to cover the types of behaviours that involve a pattern of offending rather than singular assaults (s 76(1)). The Home Office's guiding statutory document indicates that "this new offence focuses responsibility and accountability on the perpetrator who has chosen to carry out these behaviours" (Home Office UK, 2015). The maximum penalty is a sentence of five years' imprisonment, a fine or both (Home Office UK, 2015). In 2021 an amendment to this legislation was passed to remove the cohabitation requirement so that post-separation abuse and intimate and familial abuse is captured where the victim-survivor and perpetrator do not live together (Home Office UK, 2022). The *Domestic Abuse Act 2021* extends the offence of controlling or coercive behaviour in an intimate or family relationship to cover post-separation abuse and includes a statutory definition of domestic abuse that underpins other provisions in the Act (*Domestic Abuse Act 2021 – Overview*).

The s 76 provision in the earlier legislation outlines the elements of the offence to involve a person committing an offence if they "repeatedly or continuously" engage in behaviour towards another person that is coercive or controlling and that those people are "personally connected". This is intended to reframe the behaviour as a pattern of events rather than one-off or individual incidents (Weiner, 2020). The behaviour must have a "serious effect" on the victim-survivor and the perpetrator must know, or ought to have known, that the behaviour will have a serious effect on the victim-survivor, such that it causes fear, alarm or distress to the victim-survivor, and have a substantial effect on their usual day-to-day activities (s 76[4]). Critique of s 76 supports the move towards a pattern of behaviour but notes that the focus is removed from physical violence to frame the behaviours as non-physical or psychological abuse which may exclude the types of low-level physical violence that contribute to coercive control (Weiner, 2020).

Of note, training was delivered to 14 police forces in England and Wales to coincide with the criminalisation of coercive control. The training evaluation in 2019 showed that targeted, in-person training supported by peer support networks and ongoing professional development, can assist in the effective identification, assessment, and response to coercive control, with an increase in arrests for coercive and controlling behaviour also identified (SafeLives, 2019).

According to Walklate and Fitz-Gibbon (2019), offences of coercive control doubled in England and Wales between 2017-2018 (9000 in the year ending March 2018), suggesting substantial uptake of the new provision in England and Wales (p. 98). Despite this, their analysis of the literature on the impact of the legislation suggests police officers may not "see" the offence, practitioners may not understand the offence and there are problems associated with evidencing the offence (p. 99).

Scotland

Following an approach endorsed by Stark (Scott, 2020), coercive controlling behaviour was criminalised in Scotland in 2018, with a legislative definition of coercive control as a pattern of abusive behaviours that restrict the liberty of the victim-survivor (*Domestic Abuse [Scotland] Act 2018*; Scott, 2020). The *Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act 2018* provides that an offence is committed if a person engages in a course of behaviour which is abusive to their partner or ex-partner (s 1). The behaviour is in scope where a reasonable person would consider this course of behaviour as likely to cause the victim-survivor physical or psychological harm and intends that harm or is reckless as to whether or not that harm occurs (s 2[a] & [b][i] and [ii]), noting that the element of a "course of behaviour" requires the behaviour occurring on at least two occasions (s 10[4]).

A key difference between the legislation in England and Wales and the Scottish legislation is the inclusion of ex-partners in the Scottish Act, acknowledging that ex-partners often continue to exercise coercive control over their former partners (Weiner 2020). Although, the definition of “personally connected” in the *Serious Crimes Act 2015* is currently under review. The Scottish legislation does not extend to the behaviour of other family members, thereby limiting its application to the intimate partner context rather than to other forms of family violence, for example elder abuse (Scott, 2020).

As outlined above, the implementation of the Scottish legislation has been identified as successful due to the extensive training provided to legal professionals and police that accompanied its introduction, and the extensive consultation process during the development phase (Scott, 2020; Stark & Weiner, 2021). Scottish police also dedicated specialist officers to focus on coercive control offending and build expertise within its force (Stark & Weiner, 2021), a component identified as important for improving justice system responses to coercive control.

14. Conclusion

This literature review on coercive control in the context of DFV identifies that there is currently no uniform and integrated definition of coercive control. Nevertheless, the literature identifies coercive control as a gendered phenomenon that occurs in a broader context of gender inequalities and norms, impacted by other intersectional factors (ANROWS, 2021; Douglas et al., 2019; Harris & Woodlock, 2019). It also characterises coercive control as involving a range of tactics, adapted to individual circumstances, and used by (usually male) perpetrators to control or dominate the victim-survivor. Physical and/or sexual violence, emotional or psychological abuse, stalking and surveillance, social isolation, financial abuse, technology-facilitated abuse, reproductive coercion, and systems abuse (Stark, 2007).

The absence of prevalence data specifically on coercive control (rather than DFV more broadly) is a significant gap identified in this literature review. The absence of an agreed definition also contributes to this dearth of prevalence data collected in a consistent way (Bendlin & Sheridan 2019; Boxall et al., 2020; Mayshak et al., 2020).

Findings from qualitative studies provide insights into victim-survivors’ reported experiences of coercive control, which include loss of identity, autonomy and agency, feeling ‘trapped’ within their relationships, and as if they were a possession of the perpetrator (Buchanan & Humphreys, 2020; Moulding et al., 2021; Pitman, 2017). The experience can have diverse impacts on victim-survivors that can be short and/or long term in nature, for example, health impacts (physical and mental) (Hegarty et. Al., 2013), social isolation, and reduced help-seeking (Boxall, Morgan & Brown 2020), and a sense of loss of self (Moulding, 2021). Coercive control is also identified as having a range of significant impacts on children such as negative behavioural outcomes and psychological, and emotional consequences into adulthood (Women’s Safety and Justice Taskforce, 2021). Some literature identifies that the impacts of coercive control may be worse than other forms of family violence (Moulding et al., 2021).

Coercive control may be experienced differently by various demographic groups including First Nations women, migrants from culturally diverse backgrounds, women living in rural and regional areas and children (Harris & Woodlock, 2019; Ragusa, 2017; Women’s Safety Justice Taskforce, 2021a). Australian research suggests that LGBTIQ+ people can experience unique forms of coercive control, and experience increased rates of coercive control overall (Hill et al., 2020).

In considering the effectiveness of responses to coercive control, the literature in this review indicates that improving community understanding, awareness and attitudes is important as this can impact victim-survivors and the extent to which they seek and receive support. In addition to consistency in defining coercive control, changing attitudes and building knowledge is also a priority for developing a workforce in relevant sectors that is highly attuned to how coercive control manifests in order to provide appropriate supports. This includes health professionals, service providers, as well as the justice sectors with a specific focus on police as front-line responders whose decisions in responding can impact the help women’s ongoing safety and can be based on their broader attitudes towards women and specific cultural groups (Women’s Safety and Justice Taskforce, 2022a). In addition, more evidence is needed on men’s behaviour change programs and what are effective treatments and support for perpetrators (Nicholas et. al., 2020).

The debate on criminalising coercive control highlights the complexities and the diverse perspectives both for and against criminalising in Australia and there is an opportunity to learn from other jurisdictions who have already taken this path. The literature indicates however that the Australian context is unique and requires an integrated approach to best support those experiencing or most at risk of experiencing coercive control.

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Appendix A: AIFS' research and evidence synthesis on coercive control

AGD's Request for Quotation aligned with work already underway by researchers at the Australian Institute of Family Studies. There is some overlap between the AGD Request for Quotation and the work currently underway (see further below), and the pre-existing project experience amongst the research team provided efficiency in the conduct of this AGD project.

Dr Jasmine B. MacDonald and Melissa Willoughby are currently developing an evidence package on coercive control for the Child Family Community Australia (CFCA) project within the Australian Institute of Family Studies. This package involves a rapid literature review and synthesis of international empirical coercive control literature focused on victim-survivors. This package translates current research knowledge into implications and practice insights. This knowledge translation will take the form of a series of practitioner resources (review synthesis paper, short articles, practice guides, resource sheets and webinars) guiding generalist practitioners in the child and family welfare sector to support families impacted by coercive control.

There is some overlap in the CFCA coercive control literature review project and the current report. A certain degree of the search strategy set up and data extraction conducted in the CFCA project has informed the current review for AGD. However, there are significant points of difference to note:

- **Search terms:** the CFCA project searches only 'coercive control' as an exact phrase. The methodology for the current review includes broader related terms, such as psychological abuse, emotional abuse, and intimate terrorism.
- **Population of focus:** the CFCA project focuses specifically on victim-survivor literature. The current review requires three populations of focus: victim-survivors (children and adults considered separately), perpetrators, and community members.
- **Origin of the research:** the CFCA project includes international empirical literature. The requirement for the current review is no more than 15% international literature.

Stakeholder engagement

In the process of conducting the CFCA evidence package, the research conducted a number of stakeholder engagement activities that have been useful in developing the methodology for this current review.

AIFS conducts two surveys a year to understand the evidence needs of professionals in the child, family, and community welfare sector. The November 2021 survey received 1,233 responses, with domestic and family violence (including the sub-topic coercive control) being the top requested area of evidence needs. Professionals responding to the survey provided qualitative data relating to practice questions and evidence needs.

Two previous AIFS webinars had a focus on coercive control. Prior to, during, and after the live webinars, registrants provided questions about the topic. A preliminary search of the grey and empirical literature on coercive control was conducted. The qualitative data from the survey and questions from the webinars were then mapped over the broad themes identified within the literature. This was used to develop an initial plan for potential evidence-based resources for practitioners.

Six practitioners, service leaders, and researchers who are experts in domestic and family violence were consulted between February to April 2022. The initial plan for potential evidence-based resources for practitioners was shared with a group of experts for feedback. The experts also suggested research, policy, and practice questions that might be useful to generalist practitioners working with individuals and families impacted by coercive control.

Appendix B: Search strategy for each database

PsycInfo

- (coercive-control or controlling-behavior? or interpersonal-control or intimate N2 terrorism or emotional* N1 abus* or psychological* N1 abus* or financial* N1 abus* or reproductive N1 abus*).tw
- coercion/ or interpersonal control/ or emotional abuse/
- 1 or 2
- (australia?).tw,in
- 3 and 4
- limit 5 to (english language and yr="2012 - 2022")

PubMed

- coercive-control[tw] or controlling-behavior?[tw] or interpersonal-control[tw] or intimate-terrorism[tw] or emotional-abus*[tw] or psychological-abus*[tw] or financial-abus*[tw] or reproductive-abus*[tw] or emotionally-abus*[tw] or psychologically-abus*[tw] or financially-abus*[tw]
- Australia*[tw] or Australia*[ad]
- 1 and 2
- limit 3 to (english language and yr="2012 - 2022")

CINCH and Australian Family & Society Abstracts

- Abstract: "coercive control" OR "controlling behavior*" OR "interpersonal control" OR "intimate terrorism"-2 OR "emotional abus*" OR "psychological abus*" OR "financial abus*" OR "reproductive abus*" OR "emotionally abus*" OR "psychologically abus*" OR "financially abus*"
- Title: "coercive control" OR "controlling behavior*" OR "interpersonal control" OR "intimate terrorism"-2 OR "emotional abus*" OR "psychological abus*" OR "financial abus*" OR "reproductive abus*" OR "emotionally abus*" OR "psychologically abus*" OR "financially abus*"
- Subject: Coercive control
- 1 or 2 or 3
- Limit to "2012 - 2022"