

The Chairperson and Members  
Women's Safety and Justice Taskforce  
GPO Box 149  
BRISBANE QLD 4001  
**via Taskforce Submission online platform**

**RE: Submission on Options for legislating against coercive control and the creation of a standalone domestic violence offence (Discussion Paper 1)**

Dear Colleagues

**Soroptimist International – Brisbane Inc** is grateful for the opportunity to provide this a submission to the Queensland Women's Safety and Justice Taskforce Discussion Paper, *Options for legislating against coercive control and the creation of a standalone domestic violence offence*.

Our membership base consists of business and professional women who advocate supporting other women impacted by Domestic and Family Violence (DFV). As part of the global advocacy organisation, **Soroptimist International**, we are committed to ending all forms of violence which affect women and girls disproportionately.

**Context**

We have outlined below relevant responses on key issues based on our current collective position about gender-based violence and informed by our members' personal and professional knowledge and experiences in the community about DFV.

Gender-based violence occurs in the family, in the general community, and through actions sometimes perpetrated or condoned by the State. Whatever form it takes, gender-based violence is deeply rooted in historical inequalities, power imbalances, and gender-based discrimination. Gender-based violence is a violation of human rights and affects the ability of women and girls to reach their full potential and participate in society.

**Identifying 'coercive control'**

'Coercive control' is often an unseen and mostly non-physical form of DFV. These include behaviours by perpetrators designed to control and make someone subordinate and subservient.



In addition to the elements highlighted in the discussion paper, we assert that the types of ongoing and sometimes subtle coercive controlling behaviours include one or a combination of the following:

- Being controlled as to where to work, and what type of work to do
- Being deprived of basic needs (i.e. food, medication, and comfort)
- Being financially deprived of own money and having to unreasonable account for the money spent
- Being isolated from family and friends
- Being repeatedly put down, telling to be worthless
- Being stopped from working or going to school/college/university, etc.
- Being subjected to constant criticism, humiliation, intimidation, and degrading name-calling
- Being threatened with violence if not *behaving* in a certain way (i.e. how you clean the house, cook the meals, perform in the bedroom, etc.).
- Controlling everything within the household (i.e. deeds of the house, telephone, utilities, passport, etc.)
- Controlling reproductive choices and sexual health (i.e. forbid the use of contraception to protect from sexually transmitted disease or unwanted pregnancy, etc.)
- Enduring mental, emotional, physical, and sexual violence
- Forcing to be part of criminal activities or child abuse
- Having no authority over personal financial accounts
- Having personal or household property damaged
- Losing control of everyday life (i.e. where to go, whom to see, what to wear, what to buy, etc.)
- Monitoring activities, movements, and communication (i.e. emails, social media, spyware on mobile phones, computers, and other digital devices)
- Threatening to harm or kill (the woman and/or their children, or their pets)
- Threatening to publicly publish or broadcast harmful or false information.

Coercive control is a form of abuse and may involve graduating to various criminal offences (i.e. assault, rape, damage to your property, even threats to kill, etc.). We acknowledge the association of intimate partner homicide in the application of coercive controlling behaviours. The repeated behaviours of coercive abuse are ultimately about owning and controlling the victim, with the expressed intent to remove the freedom and for the victim to eventually lose their liberty.

The above are just a few examples of coercive control tactics, and the list is not exhaustive. Perpetrators subjugate their victims, primarily women and children, and apply these against a background of entitlement and inequality. Each element serves to dramatically reduce the victim's space for action by disabling their freedom of movement, association, and financial independence in different ways.

### **Dealing with coercive control in Queensland**

We support raising awareness in the community on the harmful effects that DFV and gender-based violence have on all members of society and work to break the cycle of violence. Community attitudes about coercive control and DFV need a sustained and strategic approach that engages behaviour change by focusing on the message that eliminating DFV and gender-based violence benefits everyone. This must be implemented with educational programs that support girls and boys, at an appropriate age, about health and respectful relationships.

We also support the need to ensure that schools and other educational settings are not enabling sites of gender-based violence and that girls, young women, and women can access education without the threat of violence.

In dealing with coercive control in DFV, we recommend to the Taskforce, the Queensland Government, and relevant jurisdictions to:

- Ensure that front line responders have adequate resources and training to respond quickly to all incidents of family and domestic violence with gender-specific compassion, understanding and respect
- Recognise that DFV poses significant financial costs to society and that prevention of violence has real economic benefits
- Adequately fund effective resources and appropriate support services to victims/survivors of violence, including safe shelter, access to legal services, and medical and psychological treatment at no cost to the victim/survivor
- Recognise that some groups are at particular risk including migrants, refugees, indigenous women and girls, rural women and girls, women and girls living with disabilities, HIV positive women and girls, women and girls living with mental health challenges, and women and girls facing multiple discriminations (such as sexual orientation and gender identity, race, and ethnicity)
- Ensure robust systems are in place and utilised to collect reliable data and statistics disaggregated by sex relating to DFV and ensure that the collection of this data does not endanger women or girls in any way.

#### **Legislating against coercive control**

In a broader context, we would support an approach to enact or reform legislation to criminalise coercive control in DFV (as well as all forms of gender-based violence) and enforce legislation with appropriate prosecutions of perpetrators. However, we acknowledge that more work needs to be done in this context. As identified in other jurisdictions, the implementation of coercive controlling offences has not been effective in supporting victim-survivors.<sup>1</sup>

Coercive control is complex, deeply contextual, localised and highly dynamic to the circumstances of a relationship. As the discussion paper rightly highlighted, coercive control may not be recognised sufficiently.

As well, there may be some unintended consequences of criminalising coercive control that may unduly affect some population groups where barriers already exist in reporting DFV (for example, within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, those from culturally and linguistically diverse communities, and other marginalised groups).

Again, thank you for the opportunity to provide this submission. Should you have any questions please contact us per details provided.

Warmest regards

  
LOU DE CASTRO MYLES  
Convenor, Programme/Advocacy

---

<sup>1</sup> Fitz-Gibbon K., Walklate S., and Meyer S. (September 2020) Research Brief: The Criminalisation of Coercive Control. Monash Gender and Family Violence Prevention Centre