The Spectrum of Coercive Control: When Children are Co-Victims

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“I’ll tell you what freedom is to me: no fear. I mean really, no fear!” Nina Simone
### CHALLENGES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LOOK BEYOND VIOLENCE</th>
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<tr>
<td>• THE VIOLENCE EQUATION: GAINS AND CHALLENGES</td>
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<tr>
<th>IDENTIFY COERCIVE CONTROL</th>
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<td>• VIOLENCE; INTIMIDATION; DEGRADATION; ISOLATION &amp; CONTROL</td>
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<tr>
<th>ASSESS HOW COERCIVE CONTROL, AFFECTS PARENTING &amp; CHILDREN</th>
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<td>• THE BATTERED MOTHER’S DILEMMA</td>
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<td>• CHILD ABUSE AS TANGENTIAL SPOUSE ABUSE</td>
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<td>• THE COERCIVE CONTROL OF CHILDREN</td>
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<td>• HOW CHILDREN ADAPT</td>
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<tr>
<th>REFORM Policy &amp; PRACTICE</th>
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<td>• IDENTFY TARGETED PARENT &amp; CHILD AS CO-VICTIMS ACROSS THE SPECTRUM</td>
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<td>• REFRAME CROSS-PLANETARY REPONSES</td>
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<td>• LINK TO EQUALITY AGENDAS</td>
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WHAT DID THE VIOLENCE MODEL TELL US?
• Assault
• Incident
• Injury
• Home

Ashes
Edvard Munch
across the lifespan....

% of injuries due to domestic violence

age groups of women

- 16-18
- 18-20
- 21-30
- over 60
Significant ‘Overlap’ of Child Abuse & DV

- 45%-50% of the child abuse identified in hospitals occurs in the context of male partner abuse
- 30% (Mass) to 55% (Washington) of child welfare caseload
- 40% to 60% of disputed custody cases
- 30% of children in UK “exposed” during their life-time
Who commits child abuse?

- **Reported child welfare cases:** men 20-55% \((NCCAN; \text{Am. Humane Society})\)
- **When men are present:** 2/3rds of reported incidents \((Gil)\)
- **Men:women 3:1** \((Stark & Flitcraft)\)
You can’t hide domestic violence from your child

You can get help and advice by calling:

Local Domestic Abuse Helpline: 0114 235 1217 (Monday to Friday 10am - 2pm)
NSPCC Child Protection Helpline: 0808 800 5000
Freephone 24hr National Domestic Violence Helpline: 0808 2000 247 (Women's Aid and Refugees)
Respect Helpline: 0845 123 6569 (helpline for abusive partners)

Find out how you can help to end cruelty to children at: www.bethefullstop.com
I hide under my bed when daddy hits mommy. I am scared.

- “Jonathan”, age 5
Lavonne Lazarra

Mother protecting her child

Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot
Knock v. Knock
Mrs. Nicholson

the dead mother

edvard munch
“Effects” of Exposure

• Almost 100 studies available
• About 1/3 separated abused from witnesses
• Generally show:
  • Behavioral and emotional problems
  • Cognitive functioning problems
  • Longer-term problems

http://www.vawnet.org
Other Exposures with similar “effects”

• Parental alcohol/drug abuse
• Divorce
• Violent media and video games
• School and neighborhood violence exposure
Woman’s Resiliency

• “Ordinary magic” - competence in the face of adversity
• Mothering through domestic violence
• 98% Emotionally available to children
• 91% .....Appropriate Discipline
ABUSE vs. NEGLECT

Battered Mother
• Few Problems in Childhood
• Few Secondary Problems

Not Battered
• Multi-Problem Childhood
• “Overwhelmed” with problems
Child’s Resiliency

- Shelter population - 50-83% few or no problems (Sullivan)
  - Exposure (type, frequency)
  - Child-parent(s) relationship
  - Environmental supports/stressors
  - Personality
Judge Jack Weinstein

• It is unconstitutional for CPS to charge a non-offending parent with neglect and remove a child solely because she was a victim of domestic violence or refused services due to DV.
Family
- Custody litigation is a re-structuring of “family.”

Parenting
- “Kids need both parents.”

Neutrality
- “Whatever happened, he’s still their father.”
Seattle Findings:

• Of mothers with documented dv
  • 47% no mention in dissolution file
  • 28.9% unsubstantiated allegation
  • No more likely to gain custody

• Fathers (If documented in both files)
  • More likely to be denied visitation...BUT.....
  • 83% had no such restrictions
  • No difference if not documented
Life on Three Planets

Coercively Controlling Male & Cooperating Victim

Planet 1

Domestic Violence: Criminal Charges;
CRIMINAL COURT

Planet 2

“Good Enough” Father & Alienating Mom
FAMILY COURT

Planet 3

Neglectful Mother & Invisible Men
Child Protection

(Adapted from Radford & Hester, 2006)
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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>“Invisible”</th>
<th>“Good Guy”</th>
<th>“Bad Guy”</th>
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<tr>
<td>What we do</td>
<td>Ignore</td>
<td>Welcome/Reward</td>
<td>Punish</td>
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<tr>
<td>Practice Implications</td>
<td>Do nothing with him</td>
<td>No assessment</td>
<td>Send him away</td>
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<tr>
<td>Implications for work with mothers and children</td>
<td>All the focus is on mom</td>
<td>Her efforts are valued less</td>
<td>All the burden is on mom</td>
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CC and risk in mediation

- **Post separation**
  - 47% reported escalating violence.
  - 51.9% reported at least 1 threat to their lives.
  - 23.2% reported forced sex.

- **COERCIVE CONTROL VS. DOMESTIC VIOLENCE**
  - CC accounted for 81% of escalating violence; 80% of threats to life & 76% of forced sex.
  - DV accounted for 20% escalated DV; 17% threats & 24% forced sex.
  - 75% (CC) vs. 18% (DV) expressed fear in mediation.
WOMAN ABUSE IS NOT ONLY ABOUT WHAT MEN DO TO WOMEN BUT ABOUT WHAT THEY KEEP WOMEN FROM DOING FOR THEMSELVES, THEIR FAMILIES, THEIR COMMUNITY AND THEIR NATION

(“My client is a strong, capable woman. Look at her now. Now I am going to explain how this happened.”)
CONTROL IN THE CONTEXT OF NO CONTROL
Lavonne Lazarra

Mother protecting her child

Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot
I'd go to the bathroom and if I was in there, you know, just sitting there was relief. [She thought], “Thank God, I'm alone.” Just to go to the bathroom--To me that was like going to Paris for some women. And if I was in there two minutes longer than he thought I should be just come in there [and she motioned grabbing her hair, showing how he would drag her out of the bathroom right off the toilet]. And if I was just in there, he would say I was thinking --” conspiring.”
Assessment in the Context of Political/Human & Liberty Rights

• Violence = Right to Security

• Intimidation and Degradation = Right to Dignity & Live Without Fear

• Isolation = Right to association & support

• Control = Right to Autonomy/Independence
Coercive control is the single most common context in which child abuse occurs.
Pathways to harm

Abuse by perpetrator
- Towards non-offending parent
- Coercive control of child
- Abuse of siblings

Effect on partner’s parenting
- Depression/PTSD/anxiety/substance abuse
- Loss of authority
- Energy goes to addressing perpetrator instead of children
- Interference with day to day routine and basic care

Effects on family ecology
- Loss of income
- Housing instability
- Loss of contact with extended family
- Educational and social disruptions

Harm to child
How Batterers Harm Children

Choosing to expose them to their abusive behavior

- Coercive control of children
- Child abuse as Tangential Spouse Abuse
- Indirect harm from CC of non-offending parent
- Undermining parenting efforts
Batterer as parent

• Re: Responsibility: DENY, MINIMIZE AND BLAME

• All types:
  • Needs = Demands the world is expected to meet
  • Reflect negative attitudes toward women
  • Gender role rigidity
  • Either/or Models of Power
  • Either/or Models of Autonomy
  • May place child in fear for their own safety
The battered mother’s dilemma

- When the offending partner forces the victim to choose between her own and her child’s safety
- If I do what the court wants, I put myself and my child at risk. If I don’t, I lose my child.”
- “If I do what CPS want, I put myself and my child at risk.”
Child Abuse as Tangential Wife Abuse

**Individual =**
- When the batterer hurts, intimidates, isolates or controls the child to hurt/control/isolate or intimidate the mother

**System =**
- When the court, police, health or child welfare system use the child as a way to harm or control the parent
Coercive Control of Children

- Physical/Sexual Violence
- Intimidation
- Stalking
- Degradation
- Isolation
- Control
‘Urban Study’ (n=111 victims)  violence

• 38% children hurt in separate incidents >”rarely”
• 15.3% often or very often

• 37% ‘accidentally’ during dv
• 26% deliberately
• 13% & 10% often/very often

(Mbiliny et al., 2007)
violence

**Mothers**
- 62% strangled (choked) >1
- > 50% threatened with a weapon
- 69% “beatings”
- 28% > 15x during year
- 12.7 x pushed or grabbed on average

**Children**
- > 50% of children ‘slapped’
- > 35% ‘hit with object’
- > 3-5% burned

McCloskey, Figueredo & Koss (1995)
Child Sexual Abuse

**CSA**
- 73% of incest cases, mother is abused
- 83% repeated incidents
- 40% > 1 year
- Batterers 4-6x more likely to commit CSA than nonbatterers

**Comparative study**
- 36.8% of children sexually abused
- All but one by batterers
INTIMIDATION

SURVEILLANCE  DESTROY PROPERTY PETS DEMONSTRATE OMNIPOTENCE VIOLENCE AGAINST OTHERS THREATS AG. MOM, EXAGGERATED PUNISHMENT

WEAPONIZATION
He was everywhere we turned up. He was at my son’s basketball club. And he was upsetting the children and embarrassing them too [...] I could see Luke [son] was embarrassed, he felt awkward and he felt guilty towards me. I was visibly upset. He was very clever; there were interdicts in place that he couldn’t verbally abuse me. But he would just say a few words, that meant something to me, but meaningless to other people. And that would set me off.'
Perpetrators’/fathers’ coercive control prevented children from spending time with mothers and grandparents, visiting other children’s houses, and engaging in extra-curricular activities. These non-violent behaviours from perpetrators/fathers placed children in isolated, disempowering and constrained worlds which could hamper children’s resilience and development and contribute to emotional/behavioural problems.

Weaponizing Children

• The use of children as ‘pawns’ or ‘tools’ to against mothers
  (Bancroft, Silverman and Ritchie 2012; Finzi-Dottan, Goldblatt, Cohen-Masica 2012; Lapierre 2010; McCloskey 2001; McMahon and Pence 1995; Mullender et al. 2002; Peled 1998)
Children’s (Survival) Strategies

• COPE
  • ‘Control in the context of No control’ (‘Splitting’ e.g.)

• NEGOTIATE
  • ‘Good girl’
  • Identification with the Aggressor

• ESCAPE

• RESIST
Knock v. Knock
Reframing Child Harms

• ‘witnessing/exposure’ vs. experience/agency

• Vulnerable/Depressed Mothers vs.
  • Illegitimate Exercise of Male Privilege

Collateral Damage vs.
  ‘Secondary Victims’

Failure to Protect vs.
  ‘Control in the context of no Control.’
Use of Children  (Bybee, Bybee & Sullivan, 2007)

• 156 women interviewed described their children being used:
  o to stay in women’s lives, to harass, intimidate, frighten and to keep track of them
  o 45% reported ex-partners pressured children to acknowledge mothers should take them back
  o 47% reported that the men ‘tried to turn their kids against them’
Using family court processes

• Divorce and separation as flashpoints

• But allegations may be viewed as fabricated and strategic (Stark 2007:252)

• ‘Paper abuse’ (Miller and Smolter 2011)

• ‘Litigation abuse’ (Przekop 2011)

• Legal Sabotage

• Threatening parental alienation (Lapierre and Côte 2016)
The Spectrum of Coercive Control

• Similar strategies used to undermine mother-child relationships by perpetrators of both child sex abuse and DVA

• Grooming and alienating strategies
  • Coercive and controlling (Jennie)
Where do go from here?

- COMPLEMENT ‘SAFETY’ WITH EMPHASIS ON AUTONOMY, DIGNITY & LIBERTY AND DEVISE RESPONSES ACCORDINGLY

- DEVELOP AND ADOPT NEW DEFINITIONS, PROTOCOLS, POLICIES AND LAWS

- APPROACH COERCIVE CONTROL AS A SINGLE COMPREHENSIVE STRATEGY THAT INCLUDES CHILDREN

- LINK SUPPORT/SAFETY AGENDAS TO EQUALITY AGENDA
Evaluation in the context of CC

• Explore Multiple Sources of Abuse
• Approach coercive control as a continuum of oppressive behaviors that includes children
• Construct a narrative that emphasizes harms to rights/resources/dignity & autonomy as well as physical intimidation;
• Adapt a strengths-based approach to women and children: client is Protective Mother Operating with Constrained Options.
• Safe parenting decisions = restoring rights, dignity, social support and access to resources for all victimized parties
• Holding abusive men accountable for violation of basic liberty rights.
• How to advocate for children as co-victims without setting woman vs. child?
Strengths Based Approach to Non-offending Parent

Full spectrum of the survivor’s efforts to promote the safety and well being of the children

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<th>Goes beyond “yardstick” of Leave</th>
<th>Avoids double standard around mothers and fathers</th>
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Assess survivor’s strengths as they relate to the children

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<th>Prior traditional and non-traditional safety planning</th>
<th>Day to day care of the children</th>
<th>Positive impact on children</th>
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Develop legal strategy/case plan/court orders based on the strengths

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<th>Validating her strengths builds partnership</th>
<th>Does not mandate unnecessary services</th>
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Strengths Based Approach to Non-offending Child

Full spectrum of the child’s efforts to promote the safety and well being of themself and the victimized parent

Assess child’s strengths as they relate to the nonoffending parent

| Prior traditional and non-traditional safety planning | Day to day survival skills | Positive impact on self & others |

Develop legal strategy/case plan/court orders based on the strengths