

***Let's Put Science First: Assessing Predatory
Helpfulness and Coercive Control to More
Accurately Understand Domestic Abuse and Sex
Trafficking***

Talk given at: National Judicial Network Webinar

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Poll 1: Let's see who is on the webinar with us

Please check the box that best describes you:

- A. Judge/court staff
- B. Victim service provider
- C. Attorney
- D. Law enforcement/prosecutors
- E. Other – type in the chat



BROAD THEME

- Use predatory helpfulness and coercive control to close the gap between victim and system?
- How to better map gender-based abuse experience of the victim as they experience it?
 - Assessment reflect forensic psychology/criminal justice lens
 - Doesn't reflect the lived experience of victim
 - Gap between information gathered and what actually happened
- Stronger victim story = higher credibility = more accurate judicial response

THREE OBJECTIVES

- **Timeline:**
 - Importance of the very beginning
 - Context or landing ground
- Fundamental “**core**” of most abuse is
 - Abuser wants victim to stay/obey
 - Abuser needs to be correct
 - Abuse needs to be deceptive
- Part abuser psychology and inherent part of the coercive control/abuse process
- How you **measure** abuse dynamic (IPV or other power relationships) sets the basis for supporting **victim credibility**
 - **Are you detecting nuances of more invisible elements of abuse?**

HISTORICAL DEFINITIONS OF IPV

- Intimate partner violence (IPV) was typically defined as
 - Relationship with physical and psychological aggression
 - Quantity over dynamic
 - No context—including limited attention to deception early in the relationship
- **Problematic because**
 - Missing Data-- nuances of abuse dynamics
- Misclassifies perpetrators and victims
 - Women using violence = its bidirectional
 - Dismissive of same sex /queer violence
 - Misclassify incidents as minor
- Missing data = Invisible to community, friends, police and courts

FEEDS INTO VICTIM CREDIBILITY

Long tradition in psychiatry/psychology:

Women (and some sexual minorities) seen as

- Hysterical/Neurotic/Overwrought/Irrational
- Hostile
 - Lying about abuse
- Evidence?
 - Story makes no sense

MISSING DATA = INCOMPREHENSIBLE BEHAVIORS = VICTIM CREDIBILITY

- Why stay if abuse was so bad?
- Why not report to police? Or tell close friends?
- Why disclose sexual abuse so late in the investigation?
- If really raped, how come returned to partner?

Poll 2: Have you had cases where victims behaved in ways that did not make sense?

Check all that apply:

- A. Yes, to myself
- B. Yes, to the judge
- C. Yes, to others
- D. No

POLL

Poll 3: Which of the following has happened in your cases?

Check all that apply

The survivor:

- A. Returned to the abuser
- B. Delayed reporting
- C. Did not reveal sexual assault until much later
- D. Was forced to do criminal acts
- E. Other – type in the chat



**BAD SCIENCE IS
SUSTAINING
HOSTILITY
AGAINST WOMEN
AND QUEER
VICTIMS**

**BURDEN OF
ESTABLISHING
ABUSE SHOULD
BE WITH THE
EVALUATOR NOT
THE VICTIM**

STEPS TO NARROWING THE GAP

- Timeline: Get the relationship history
- Measure coercive control

- When did you meet?
- When did things go wrong?
- When did he first use violence?
- Coercive control start?

HISTORICALLY INITIAL INTERVIEW

- Affection
- Intent to help provide a solution to the barriers
- Create a sense of connection
- “Intense but not openly controlling”

**WHAT THEY
EXPERIENCE...**

- Wrong question to ask
 - Burden on victim to define
 - Moment is obscured by deception
- Replace with assessments of deception
- She sees intense affection = What do we see?

**INITIAL
STAGES/
GROOMING
/SEDUCTION
PREDATORY
HELPFULNESS
(BASRA, 2022)**

The extent to which there was deception and more invisible coercive control influences:

- 1) Ability to recognize abuse overall
- 2) Ability to pinpoint when it became abusive

- If deceptive = victim cannot identify abuse

- If victim/they cannot identify abuse = victim story is weak = they are unreliable

- Willingness to report (internal clarity)
- Self-blame
- Loyalty/ambivalence (internal clarity)

**WHY
IMPORTANT?**

**INITIAL STAGES/
GROOMING
/SEDUCTION
PREDATORY HELPFULNESS
(BASRA, 2022)**

The first three months we were together, very attentive, always seemed to care about my needs or wants, did nice things for me."

LOVE BOMBING (52%)

"I was crazy about him; he was romantic, kind, thought he was too good to be true."

- *We were living at a DV shelter that only let you stay there six weeks*
- *God sent [her] this savior*

**HOUSING/
FINANCIAL AID
(42%)**

- Nonjudgmental

DRUGS (42%)

- Helpful and kind

- *“Parked next to the [foster care group home] and started talking to”*
- *“Cool guy, sweetheart”*
- *“Were going to be a team”*

**EMOTIONAL
SUPPORT
/FAMILY (36%)**

- 1) What was the PH/deception (if any)
- 2) When did flip/exploitation start?
- 3) What form did it take?
- 4) In hindsight, does witness/victim recognize the deception to coercion?
- 5) Did we ask the question correctly?

**CONSIDER
EXPLORING:**

**THIS IS OUR JOB NOT THE
VICTIMS'**

STEPS TO NARROWING GAP

- Timeline: Get the relationship history
- Measure coercive control not just discrete acts of abuse

**Poll 4: Have you worked in cases with victims whose romantic partner or trafficker provided:
Check all that apply**

The survivor:

- A. Financial support
- B. Housing
- C. Access to drugs or money for drugs
- D. Emotional support
- E. Other type in chat



How is this information useful in a domestic violence or human trafficking trial in criminal or family court?





UTILITY OF COERCIVE CONTROL

- Increase sensitivity to abuse dynamic measurement
- Provides better theoretical framework to understand use of tactics including sexual violence
- Accounts for queer violence in a sensitive gendered way
- Provide better theoretical framework for “incomprehensible” behaviors and traumatic outcomes
- **NARROWING GAP = HIGHER VICTIM CREDIBILITY**



WHAT IS COERCIVE CONTROL?

Power Imbalance

- Continuously exploited
- Abuse dynamic vs. acts
- Dynamic = ongoing and looping, “auto-catalyze”
- End goal
 - Dependency and submission
 - **She stays**
 - Abuser is validated as correct = victim is unreliable



BIRD'S EYE VIEW

- Tactics are continuous – a dynamic not discrete acts
- Privileged knowledge
- Pervasive not situational
- Obvious vs. Invisible
- Context-dependent

- Targets all domains
- No negotiation or resistance
- Retaliation and increased coercion (Raghavan, Cohen, & Tamborra, 2015).

**DIFFERENT
FROM
“NORMATIVE
CONTROLLING
”
BEHAVIORS?**



**KEY TACTICS AND SELECTED
ILLUSTRATIONS OF COERCIVE
CONTROL**

1. Surveillance
/Stalking

2. Isolation

3. Microregulation

4. Deprivation

5. Degradation

**CRITICAL
TACTICS OF
COERCIVE
CONTROL**

6. Intimidation

7. Manipulation

8. Sexual Abuse

**CRITICAL
ELEMENTS OF
COERCIVE
CONTROL**

SURVEILLANCE AND ISOLATION

- Surveillance

- Keeping tabs until public and private space is reduced

- Isolation

- **External** world via seduction, pressure, nuisance
 - May already be in place in immigration contexts
 - Language issues
- **Internal** world
 - No one can help me/feeling cut off or mistrustful

MICROREGULATION

- Constant, trivial, unpredictable demand
- Strict rules or details
- Never get it right
- Economics
- Clothing, appearance, weight, diet

DEPRIVATION AND DEGRADATION

DEPRIVATION

- Access to shelter, money, safety
- Sleep

DEGRADATION

- Attacks core vulnerability of the person
- Reduces self-esteem
- Destroys hope

- Creation of fear, dread, anxiety
- With or without physical violence
- Threats of force
- Past references

INTIMIDATION



MANIPULATION

- Make something seem like it is, when it is not
- Rewrite the narrative/Lying
- Gaslighting
- Using rewards and punishment
 - Rewarded if submit but temporary

SMILED AT A STRANGER CASE EXAMPLE

- **BACKGROUND: OCCASIONAL VIOLENCE, DAILY YELLING, DEGRADATION AND INSULTS, THREATS TO CALL CPS,**
- Harangued until she agreed she was flirting (child nearby)
 - Praised and rewarded
- Microregulated
 - Don't smile at strangers
 - Loss of bodily agency not just public networks
- Gaslit her when protested
 - "You agreed that you flirted—now you're lying?"
- Autocatalyzed his right to :
 - Surveil her
 - Isolated her
 - Materially
 - Psychologically

- Afraid to act/give in to him
- Doubt your own reality
- Rely on abuser/or paralysis
- Loss of autonomy and agency
- **Validating the abuser as correct**

EFFECTS OF INTIMIDATION AND MANIPULATION

- Invisible—
private domain
- No language to
describe it
- Don't know the
law

SEXUAL ABUSE

- Confused/Overwhelmed
 - Is this really happening?
- Loss of bodily autonomy
 - Shame
 - Emotional paralysis
 - Covering up the abuse
- Loss of agency
 - Self-Blame

EFFECTS OF SEXUAL ABUSE



TAKEN TOGETHER...

- Hesitant/Silent/Invisible
 - Fear, anxiety, dread from harassment, physical force
 - Paralysed by sexual abuse
 - Humiliated
- Isolated
- Undetected effects
 - Sleep deprived after assaults
 - Anxiety = more confusion
 - Tension ; Questioning authority vs, self-blame for giving in
- Interacts and Loops into **END GOAL**
 - Silence
 - Dependency and submission
 - Abuser is validated as correct

MISSING DATA = INCOMPREHENSIBLE BEHAVIORS = VICTIM CREDIBILITY

- How does understanding the following impact court cases?
 - Why stay if abuse was so bad?
 - Why not report to police? Or tell close friends?
 - Why disclose sexual abuse so late?
 - If really raped, how come returned to partner?

Understanding of Coercive Control Required in Custody Cases

- “[C]oercive controlling” domestic abuse ... can be associated with uniquely problematic and dangerous parenting”
- Families and Children Model Code on Domestic and Family Violence – Revised Chapter Four – NCJFCJ (January 2023)
<https://www.ncjfcj.org/publications/revised-chapter-four-families-and-children-model-code-on-domestic-and-family-violence/>



EFFECTS OF COERCIVE CONTROL

CAPTIVITY AND THE ILLUSION OF FREE WILL

- Early relationship sets tone of captivity
- Psychological captivity is more powerful
- Durable
- Confuses free will
- Muddies how to measure consent

**WHY GO TO SO
MUCH
TROUBLE?**

- Affirmation that he is correct
 - Gratitude
 - Love
- Continues to appear like willing victim
- Non-credible

CREATES PSYCHOLOGICAL CAPTIVITY

WHY DOES SHE STAY/SILENT?

Because that is the goal!

SUMMARIZE

- Relationship history sets context
- Abuse is a dynamic not act
- Increase sensitivity to abuse dynamic measurement
 - Makes visible the invisible
- **Provide better theoretical framework for “incomprehensible” behaviors and traumatic outcomes**

How do you decide
that a relationship is
coercive?



Poll 5: After hearing this information about predatory helpfulness and coercive control, have you seen these dynamics in your:

Check all that apply

- A. Divorce cases
- B. Custody cases
- C. Protection order cases
- D. Child welfare cases
- E. Criminal cases
- F. Other cases type in chat

POLL

**BURDEN OF
ESTABLISHING
ABUSE SHOULD
BE WITH THE
EVALUATOR NOT
THE VICTIM**

How could you get evidence of coercive control and predatory helpfulness into court?

- Conduct an evaluation of the victim
 - Evaluator provides expert testimony
- Other options

12 Question Predatory Helpfulness Screener

Inderjit K Basra, Tatum Kenney, Shandra Forrest-Bank, Lisa K. Zottarelli & Chitra Raghavan, Predatory Helpfulness: An Empirical Framework to Identify Fraudulent Tactics Used by Pimps to Recruit and Commercially Sexually Exploit Young Girls and Women

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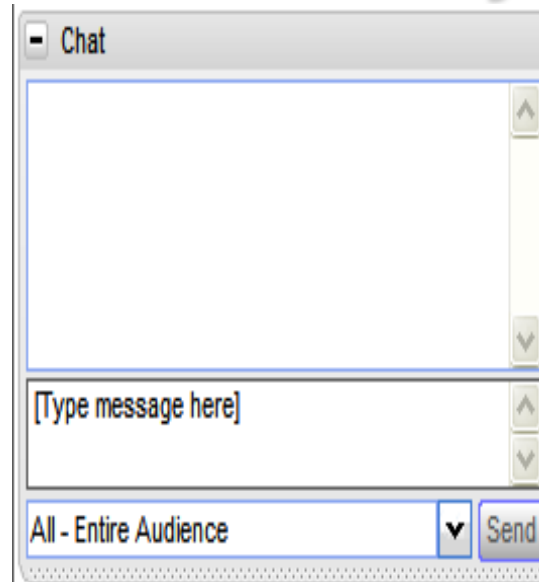
Appendix A

12 Question Predatory Helpfulness Screener

These are guiding questions that should be reviewed to best fit yours and your client's relationship.

- (1) How old were you when you met them? (Indicate if client was a minor)
- (2) How old were they? (Indicate if trafficker was a minor)
- (3) Please tell me about what was going on in your life at the time you met your trafficker/exploiter/pimp?
- (4) Were there things that you felt were not going well at that time in your life? Can you describe what you felt would improve your situation at the time, if anything?
- (5) How did you meet?
- (6) What can you tell me about how [NAME] acted when you first met? Did they do anything to help improve your situation during that time in your life?
 - (a) Love Bombing: Was it romantic? Can you recall if [NAME] did any of the following? (E.g., shower you with affection and gifts, tell you that you were special/unique/beautiful, wanted to be with you forever)
 - (b) Financial Bombing: Did they offer to help you financially after a place to stay?
 - (c) Business Relationship/Emotional Support: Did [NAME] offer you a business opportunity or emotional support?
 - (d) Drugs: Did they introduce you to drugs/offer you drugs/keep drugs through them?
- (7) Did they make any promises to you that were unfulfilled? Examples: a place to live, gifts, marriage, etc.
- (8) Did they give you any reason why those promises were unfulfilled?
- (9) Can you recall when the first instance they ask you to sell sex for money? Can you tell me what they did or said to influence your decision? (Examples: demanded threatened, said it would only be once/it's just, said you could then control a decision)
- (10) How did you feel when they asked you? Were you shocked/surprised/didn't expect it?
- (11) Did you feel like you had a choice? Why or why not?
- (12) Can you identify if you experienced any of the following pressures?
 - (a) Forced physically or threatened (Physical Force)
 - (b) Thought: I need them (Debt/No for Payback)
 - (c) Not persuaded/choice/wanted to make them happy (Localized Coercive Control)

Who could help you obtain information about coercive control and predatory helpfulness from a victim in a trauma informed way?



Why are judicial findings that coercive control and predatory helpfulness is occurring important?



**TELL IT LIKE IT
REALLY
HAPPENED!**

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Technical Assistance and Materials

- NIWAP Technical Assistance:
 - Call (202) 274-4457
 - E-mail info@niwap.org
 - Web Library:
www.niwaplibrary.wcl.american.edu
- Materials for this Workshop:
 - <https://niwaplibrary.wcl.american.edu/njn-predatory-helpfulness-coercive-control-dec-2023>
- Contact NIWAP to join the NJN, a community of practice or provide training for your jurisdiction

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