Supplemental Material

Tab #3: Types of Intimate Partner Violence

This document describes some of the different types of intimate partner violence (IPV) that you may see in your family law practice.[29] When reviewing this document, it is important to bear in mind the *Divorce Act's* broad definition of family violence. See **Overview – What is family violence?**

In addition, for a non-exhaustive list of specific behaviour/conduct that may constitute IPV, see **Tab #9: Asking about Specific Forms of Family Violence**.

There are many manifestations of IPV, ranging from isolated incidents to long-standing abuse. In some relationships, the violence may be occasional at the beginning, but become more frequent and severe over time. In other relationships, the first act of violence may be lethal and come with no warning.

In social science research, the concept of IPV is often described by various typologies or categories, which can be helpful in understanding the ways IPV can manifest in different relationships. Familiarity with different typologies can help in:

- understanding what IPV might look like;
- assessing the harm caused by the violence and future risk of harm;
- determining appropriate legal responses; and
- identifying the services and resources required to protect family members.

However, while these categories can be helpful, IPV is complex and dynamic. Real-life situations rarely fall exclusively into one category. In addition, there is not one set of universally-accepted typologies or categories.

Legal professionals should not rely on these typologies to assess risk, but should focus on a client's individual circumstances. In particular, it is important to look for patterns of behaviour and cumulative effects, rather than looking at isolated incidents.

1. Coercive controlling violence

Coercive controlling violence is a pattern of abusive behaviour people use to control or dominate another family member. It often includes the use of multiple forms of abuse (e.g. physical, sexual, psychological, social, financial) that cause the victim to live in fear of their partner or ex-partner; it gives the abuser power and control over them. Coercive controlling violence may or may not involve physical violence.

While all genders may engage in or be a victim of coercive controlling violence, research shows that most coercive controlling violence is perpetrated by men against their women partners.[30] In the family law context, coercive controlling violence is an extremely dangerous type of violence. It puts victims at high risk of serious psychological and physical harm. Exposure of children to coercive controlling violence in the home is a very harmful form of child abuse.

Throughout this toolkit, the term “coercive controlling violence” is used to describe conduct that constitutes a pattern of coercive and controlling behaviour, as reflected in the definition of “family violence” in the *Divorce Act*.

Coercive controlling violence can follow different patterns. Many victims describe a cycle of violence that begins with a period of tension-building, during which the abuser’s behaviour becomes increasingly threatening. Then there is an explosive incident, which may be physically violent, but could also be psychologically abusive. After this, the cycle moves into what is often called the “honeymoon phase”. During this phase, the abuser is apologetic and remorseful, offering gifts and promises to change, and the victim becomes hopeful and agrees to stay in the relationship.

Other victims of coercive controlling violence do not experience abuse as a cycle with a honeymoon period. Instead, they experience fear and domination as a constant presence in their lives. Even when their abuser is being “nice,” they are conditioned by past incidents and still live with the fear instilled in them through the coercive controlling tactics their abuser uses.

Coercive controlling violence is more likely than other forms of IPV to continue and to escalate after separation. Risk often increases after separation because the abuser feels a loss of control.

Following separation or divorce, an abuser may use different ways to try to assert control over their former partner, either directly or through the children. For example, an abusive spouse may attempt to assert control by:

- refusing to comply with court orders;
- threatening their former partner with the loss of parenting time with a child;
- making unilateral decisions about children;
- picking up or dropping off children late;
- refusing to make support payments on time or at all;

- sharing inappropriate information with children;
- excessively e-mailing, phoning or texting the former partner;
- stalking, harassing, or threatening to hurt someone;
- filing false reports with the police or a child protection agency; and/or
- engaging in abusive tactics in relation to the legal process.

Perpetrators of coercive controlling violence have been found to be less able to differentiate their role as a spouse from their role as a parent, and are more likely to abuse their children after separation and divorce.[31]

2. Separation instigated violence

Sometimes when people separate, one person may be unable to accept that the relationship is over. They may react by engaging in what is known as separation instigated violence. This can happen for couples where there is no prior history of abuse. While separation instigated violence is typically limited to a few episodes during the separation process, the violence can range from minor to severe, and can even be lethal. Again, it is necessary to assess the pattern, severity and impact of the violence. Even a single incident of separation instigated violence can be extremely dangerous.

3. Minor, isolated violence

In some cases, IPV may involve one or more relatively minor, isolated incidents of abuse. The abuse is not rooted in the dynamics of power and control, but rather results from an inability to manage conflict or anger in a particular situation.

4. Violent resistance / victim resistance violence[32]

Violent resistance or victim resistance violence are terms used to describe the violent response by some victims to violence perpetrated by their partner. This occurs most often in response to ongoing coercive controlling violence, but may also occur in response to other types of family violence, such as when there is a perceived imminent threat, or in response to psychological harm caused by previous experiences of IPV. Since coercive controlling violence is primarily committed by men, violent resistance is primarily committed by women.