

More than a third of men in the UK have been a victim in a coercive control relationship

Monday 4 March, 2019

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New research reveals that a third of men in the UK have been a victim in a coercive control relationship

Only a quarter of the UK population are aware that 2015 UK law made coercive controlling behaviour a criminal offence

More than a third of men in the UK (34%) have admitted to being a victim in a coercive control relationship. However, over half of respondents (53%) reported having experienced some kind of bullying or controlling behaviour at the hands of their partner. Exactly the same percentage of female respondents had experienced being in a coercive /controlling relationship.

The research was commissioned by IBB Solicitors and conducted by independent research agency Atomik amongst 2000 UK adults (1000 women/1000 men) aged 18-65.

The research found that coercive control relationships are most common amongst those aged 18-44; 70% of those aged 25-34 reported being in such a relationship at some time and 50% of 35-44s. The percentages fall off amongst older respondents with only 13% of those aged 65+ saying they had ever been in this kind of relationship.

In addition, IBB Solicitors also conducted ten qualitative interviews amongst victims of coercive control, police officers and detectives working /who have worked in domestic violence and homicide units, a family law barrister specialising in domestic abuse cases, domestic violence advisory groups and charities, as well as a psychotherapist and leading forensic psychiatrist in the UK.

In conjunction with the quantitative research, the firm was keen to find out from the victims and all those working with and supporting victims what more they believe could be done to make the current legislation work even more effectively as well as in conjunction with the Domestic Abuse Bill published on 22nd January 2019. Details of the full report can be found at

Breakdown of Quantitative research

Gender differential

When asked about bullying behaviours, men were just as likely to experience most of the issues asked about. There are a few exceptions men were more likely to experience the issue than women.

Amongst those who said they had experienced bullying or abusive behaviour, nearly half of men (48%) said they did nothing about it, significantly higher than the figure for women (33%).

By contrast, women were much more likely to say they had ended the relationship (37%) compared with only 1 in 6 (16%) of men experiencing issues.

Only a quarter of the UK were aware of the 2015 legislation

When respondents were asked whether they were aware that in 2015 the UK Government had made it law that coercive controlling behaviour is now a criminal offence – carrying a penalty of up to five years in prison and a fine -only 25% replied 'Yes' with the remaining 75% stating No (46% had no awareness about the change in law whilst 29% stated that they seemed to remember something about it in the news,

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but were not aware about the legal and monetary implications).

Obstacles to reporting

Even with the knowledge that coercive and controlling behaviour is considered a criminal offence (and they felt they were a victim of behaviour), nearly half (48%) would not report or are unsure whether they would report it to the police or relevant authorities. Just over a quarter of adults (28%) would report the activity immediately whilst a further 45% would wait to see if this was an isolated case and would report it if it happened again.

Victims do not feel protected

The main reasons for not reporting this behaviour to authorities is because they are worried about how they would be protected, they worry that if their partner ended up in prison it would impact on their lifestyle and family's reputation, they are worried about splitting up the family or worried their partner would continue with their controlling behaviour. Amongst those who specifically said they would not report abusive behaviour the biggest reason (32%) was not wanting to burden others with their problems.

The reasons for not reporting abusive behaviour vary significantly between the genders. Men are more likely to say they would be worried about their partner going to prison (22%) while women are more likely to be concerned about how they would be protected (28%).

Further details of the research revealed that a wide range of controlling behaviours (being lied to by their partner regularly, bullying about body size, controlling financial spend, hiding objects, intrusion on privacy etc) was endemic in many UK relationships

However, despite these shocking admissions **four in ten adults (41%) said they would take no action** as either their partner would deny it and they want to keep the peace, they were worried about creating an argument or feared their partners' reaction. A quarter of adults admitted that as a result of the actions they ended the relationship/marriage.

Other highlights

- Four in ten UK adults have been in a relationship where they were convinced their partner was lying to them on a regular basis
- More than a quarter of UK adults have been in a relationship where their partner has regularly bullied or belittled them about their body size - for example telling them their clothes were too small so that they dieted or regularly making positive comments about other people's physical appearance in comparison to their partner's
- Nearly a third of adults (30%) had been in a relationship where their partner had restricted their daily activities or controlled which friends or family they could meet
- More than a quarter (26%) had been in a relationship where their partner continually monitored their spending or controlled how much of their own-earned money or allowance they could spend
- More than a quarter (27%) had been in a relationship where they suspected their partner was spying on them and their activity including checking phones, emails, possibly tracking or following them
- 17% have been in a relationship where their partner had deprived them of food, such as taking food away or limiting the amount of food
- Nearly a quarter (23%) had been in a relationship where their partner intentionally destroyed possessions or deleted important emails or texts
- Nearly a fifth of respondents (19%) had been in a relationship where their partner had hidden or taken away their phone
- One in ten adults have been in a relationship where they questioned their own judgement, memory, perception and sanity and were concerned about their own mental health.
- ENDS -

Kate Ryan, a family law partner at IBB Solicitors comments:

"Coercive and controlling behaviour in a relationship is insidious and the effects can be hugely harming to the victim's mental state. Whilst the Government's move to make this type of behaviour a criminal offence in 2015 is a significant legislative move for family law – a core issue is many are not aware that

they have legal rights to report such behaviour and put an end to their misery and entrapment.

“Clearly more needs to be done to educate people in the UK about how coercive and controlling behaviour can manifest itself in relationships, what steps victims can take and, crucially, how they can feel protected.

“Whilst male domestic violence support groups are campaigning tirelessly to show that this is not a gender specific crime, we would urge the Government to support a UK wide media campaign to address the current misperception that men are more often than not the perpetrator.”

For further information

Notes to Editor

IBB Solicitors is a full services law firm based in West London, with clients across the Capital, Thames Valley and the western Home Counties.

Its family law practice (familylaw@ibblaw.co.uk) provide expert advice for high-net-worth individuals in divorce cases involving assets ranging from £2m to £10m; pre-nuptial and post-nuptial agreements, co-habitation agreements and pre-civil partnership agreements; and representing children in private law cases in disputes involving contact and residence arrangements following the breakdown of parental relationships".

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