



Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police
Association canadienne des chefs de police

Submission for the House of Commons' Standing
Committee on the Status of Women (Revised)

Study of Coercive Behaviour

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On behalf of:

Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police

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In March 2022, the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police (CACP) appeared before the House of Commons' Standing Committee on the Status of Women to present a [submission](#) as part of the study on intimate partner violence (IPV) and domestic violence in Canada. At that time, we stressed the importance of criminalizing coercive control in the context of IPV, and of addressing the current limitations of the Criminal Code when it comes to intervening in cases of domestic violence.

Since then, the CACP presented a [submission in support of Bill C-202](#) in October 2023, and we are currently supporting [Bill C-332](#).

The CACP has a long history of working with the University of New Brunswick to better understand the phenomenon of IPV and coercive control from a police perspective, and to develop the tools necessary to detect it. We participated in an online survey, conducted in January 2022, to better understand how police officers perceive and respond to IPV, whether or not it involves tactics of physical abuse. The final report, entitled [Coercive Control, Risk Assessment and Evidence of Intimate Partner Violence \(IPV\): Police Response](#), was published in July 2023.

Coercive control includes repetitive tactics involving all forms of violence - emotional, financial, physical, sexual, spiritual - that go beyond frightening victims, and have the effect of isolating, humiliating, intimidating, exploiting and dominating them. It is not a one-off act that can be observed or witnessed with photos or medical tests. It consists of a variety of repetitive and persistent actions, resulting in cumulative effects over time.

Criminal Code offences currently used to prosecute IPV rely heavily on the presence of physical altercations. The Canadian criminal justice system treats IPV from the perspective of episodic events, ignoring repetitive tactics of violence including exploitation, isolation and micromanagement of daily life. The power conferred to the police under the current clauses of the *Criminal Code* offers no legal option for intervening in cases of IPV involving clearly coercive behaviour but not criminal offences such as physical assault or threats.

Furthermore, for many victims of IPV, the growth of technology and social media means that even if they have taken action to end a relationship, they are not necessarily free of their ex-partner's controlling behaviour. That's why the CACP applauds revisions to Bill C-332 that now specify that **former intimate partners, regardless of the household situation, be subject to a coercive control offence.**

In our view, **section 264 of the *Criminal Code* on criminal harassment, while very useful, is insufficient** on its own to curb acts of micro-management and deprivation of freedom caused by coercive control. This is why the CACP believes **it is necessary to create a separate section within the *Criminal Code*, specifically focused on coercive control in the context of intimate partner violence, as some countries have done, such as the United Kingdom and Australia.**

While there seems to be a consensus among Canada's political parties, provinces and territories on the importance of criminalizing coercive control, there are still many concerns regarding the implementation of the offence and its practical application by the police and prosecutors.

With this in mind, in the spring of 2024, the Regroupement des maisons pour femmes victimes de violence conjugale du Québec (Quebec association of women's shelters for victims of domestic violence) and the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police embarked on a mission to London and Edinburgh to ask police officers, prosecutors, domestic violence victim support organizations, researchers and other legal stakeholders about the real challenges encountered in implementing the offence, the underlying reasons for them, and concrete solutions to address or, better still, avoid them in Canada. The [**Report of the Mission to Great Britain \(Scotland and England\) on the criminalization of coercive control**](#) was published on September 25, 2024.

Several recommendations, both general and intended for police and prosecutors, were put forward. Some deal specifically with the eventual implementation of Bill C-332 in Canada, while others are broader in scope, aimed at improving practices for the benefit of all victims of domestic violence.

Along with required legislative changes is the need to develop indicators of coercive control to guide interventions by police and justice system stakeholders. **The CACP strongly believes in the need for the creation of an assessment tool** to enable police officers to clearly and consistently recognize the elements that constitute coercive control behaviour.

The [**DARA risk identification, assessment and management tool**](#) could serve as a model. The acronym stands for Domestic Abuse Risk Assessment. This tool, developed by the College of Policing in the United Kingdom, could be adapted to the Canadian context.

In addition, **it is essential to lay the groundwork for a new law**, by deploying efforts to raise awareness and train the police community and all stakeholders within the criminal justice system, before the law is to be enforced.

These efforts to ensure the immediate implementation and impact of a new law should be coupled with the **pursuit of education and awareness-building initiatives targeted at the general public**, and more specifically at Canada's youth.

In conclusion, we need to provide police with the tools to help them recognize and intervene in situations of intimate partner violence, in order to adequately protect IPV victims before it's too late.