



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

Submission to the Department of Justice Canada

**Virtual panel on a potential coercive control offence in the
context of intimate relationships**

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Community Safety and Well-Being Committee

On behalf of:

Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police

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Good morning and thank you for this opportunity to address this group on behalf of the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police.

I'm Francis Lanouette, Chief of the Régie intermunicipale de police Thérèse-de Blainville and Co-Chair of the CACP's Crime Prevention, Community Safety and Well-Being Committee.

Police officers are often the first to witness the tragic and sometimes fatal effects of intimate partner violence on victims, their families and our communities.

The CACP has long emphasized the need for consistent national approaches to intimate partner violence.

In 2014, a partnership between leading academics and the Association was formed to bolster knowledge development based on a critical examination of the police response to intimate partner violence, and to support efforts to improve interventions across Canada. This partnership led to the development of the [**National Framework for Collaborative Police Action on Intimate Partner Violence**](#), adopted nationally in 2016.

The work continued, and in 2019, the [**Canadian Framework for Collaborative Police Response on Sexual Violence**](#) was introduced. The success of these frameworks has been measured and continues to be observed, serving, for example, to guide police interventions, policies, practices, and training across the country.

In addition, various awareness-raising sessions have been offered to the police community on the victim-centred and trauma-informed approach.

The COVID pandemic raised Canadians' awareness of the dangers faced by people living in abusive relationships and revealed that current Canadian law does not adequately protect them.

As police officers, we know that by the time a domestic violence charge goes to court, it's likely that the victim has been subjected to some form of violence or controlling behaviours by her partner over a long period of time.

Our experience has taught us that coercive control behaviour is almost always present in the context of intimate partner violence and is often a significant predictor of homicidal risk. That's why our association has broadened its focus on domestic violence to include coercive control.

In fact, the CACP is collaborating on research conducted by the University of New Brunswick to better understand this phenomenon from a police perspective, and to develop the tools required to detect it.

In January 2022, the CACP conducted an online survey of police officers across Canada about their response to intimate partner violence (IPV). The survey aimed to better understand how police officers perceive and respond to IPV, whether or not it involves tactics of physical abuse.

During the survey, 36 well-documented IPV risk factors were presented to officers. These factors are used to assess the level of risk posed to victims by the suspect.

Preliminary results of this research remind us of the importance of each of the factors, and the need for police officers to master them. Respondents also emphasized the importance of gathering additional information on the context of the relationship, to help identify risk factors and thus better protect potential victims.

The association also offered a webinar on coercive control to the Canadian police community with the aim of improving their understanding of intimate partner violence. This initiative is directly linked to one of the conclusions of the research report which identifies training as a key factor in the quality of police interventions in the context of domestic violence.

Our association proposes to pursue its training efforts. At the same time, it suggests other avenues of intervention to further its progress and help protect victims.

First, we must address the current limitations of the *Criminal Code* when it comes to intervening in cases of domestic violence. That's why, in February 2021, [we spoke out in favour of Bill C-247](#) (now [Bill C-202](#)), which proposes the addition of coercive control as a new offence to the *Criminal Code*.

In July 2021, CACP members adopted [Resolution 2021-05](#) calling for the creation of a criminal offence for coercive control.

In March 2022, we appeared before the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women to present [our submission](#) as part of their study of intimate partner and domestic violence in Canada. Once again, we stressed the importance of criminalizing coercive control in the context of intimate partner violence.

Coercive control includes repetitive tactics of 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's 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 tactics, leading to cumulative effects over time.

The *Criminal Code* offences currently used to prosecute intimate partner violence 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 the micromanagement of daily life.

The power granted 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.

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 liberty caused by coercive control. That's why the CACP believes **it's necessary to create a separate law from the *Criminal Code* specifically focused on coercive control in the context of intimate partner violence, as some countries like the United Kingdom and Australia have done.**

Moreover, for many victims of IPV, advances in technology and social media mean that even if they have taken action to end a relationship, they are not necessarily free of their ex-partner's controlling behaviour. This is why the CACP believes **it is essential to ensure that former intimate partners, regardless of the household situation, are encompassed by the offence of coercive control.**

At the same time, coercive control indicators need to be developed to guide police interventions and justice system stakeholders. **The CACP firmly believes in the need to develop an assessment tool** to enable police officers to clearly and consistently recognize the elements that constitute coercive control behaviour.

We could draw inspiration from the [DARA risk identification, assessment, and management tool](#). DARA stands for Domestic Abuse Risk Assessment and this tool, developed by the College of Policing in the UK, could be adapted to the Canadian context.

Finally, **it is essential to lay the groundwork for a new law**, with awareness-raising and training efforts for the police community and all stakeholders in the justice system.

These efforts to ensure the immediate use and impact of a new law should be coupled with the pursuit of **education and awareness-building initiatives aimed at the general public**, and particularly at young people.

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