

The Centre for Social Justice  
1 Westminster Palace Gardens  
Artillery Row  
London SW1P 1RL

Telephone 020 7340 9650  
Website [www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk](http://www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk)



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**PRESS RELEASE FROM THE CENTRE FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE**  
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## **Cruel mind games amount to domestic abuse and should be outlawed, says major new report**

A new offence of “coercive control” should be introduced to help curb domestic abuse, according to a report from a major independent think-tank.

Under the proposal, a man (or woman) who resorts to “mental torture” to subjugate a partner would face the threat of criminal prosecution.

In the report, the Centre for Social Justice warns that physical violence sparked by emotions running high in the home is not the only form of domestic abuse, which in all its forms affects 2 million people a year and costs the country £16 billion a year.

Coercive control, the use of mind games and controlling strategies (which may or may not include those involving physical violence), is the most harmful and insidious form of domestic abuse.

Christian Guy, Managing Director of the CSJ, said: “It is time to put the law on the side of those trapped in coercive abuse. Without this action many people who could be free and restored, will remain trapped and broken”.

The report, ‘Beyond Violence: Breaking abusive cycles in families’, says: “Coercive control involves one partner subjugating the other through a variety of strategies.

“These strategies attempt to deprive the victim of autonomy, freedom and dignity and place the perpetrator in a position of absolute power over him and her.

“Strategies include depriving the victim of money, making requests that become gradually more and more unreasonable (such as requests about not going out, not seeing friends, or checking levels of cleanliness around the house), locking the victim up and making threats of harm to any children involved.

“Research suggests that many victims seeking help from refuges do so because they have experienced this form of abuse.

“We have a particular duty towards victims of coercive control. In straightforward terms, although they may walk past us in the street, they are living the lives of tortured prisoners – yet without the public outrage.

“Their minds and lives are wasted as they focus all their resources on survival, and yet this goal is in no way assured. Significant numbers are killed every year or commit suicide, and thousands of others end their lives as ghosts of their former selves.”

The Government has recently consulted on the need to include coercive control in its cross-departmental definition of domestic violence.

But the CSJ argues that beyond this, and in order to achieve justice in the most serious case of domestic abuse, the law needs to be updated to include a crime of coercive control.

This would recognise abusive behavioural strategies, such as those that are used to control, isolate, intimidate and degrade victims, and classify them as serious wrongdoings.

“Consideration should be given to a new serious criminal offence whereby a prosecution can be brought on the basis of a ‘course of conduct’ in which a person has acted strategically to control, isolate, intimidate and/or degrade their victim,” the report says.

The report, written by clinical psychologist and CSJ associate Dr Elly Farmer and senior CSJ researcher Dr Samantha Callan, highlights the scale of domestic abuse in the UK.

Prosecutions doubled in the five years between 2004/5 and 2009/10 from 35,000 to 74,000 and the conviction rate over a similar period rose from 46 per cent to 72 per cent.

Yet one in four women and one in seven men report being abused by their partner or ex-partner and one in four young adults lived with domestic abuse when they were children.

Domestic abuse accounts for eight per cent of the total burden of disease in women aged 18-44 years. It accounts for more ill health than high blood pressure, smoking and obesity.

In a foreword to the report, Mr Guy says: “Couple relationships characterised by the coercive control of one partner by another can lead to the shrinking of victims’ worlds, the crushing of their potential and a depth of trauma that can make it impossible even to care for their children.

“Even when a woman escapes from such a situation she will often need significant support to manage the emotional aftermath – and avoid becoming a victim again.”

Professor Julie Taylor, Head of Strategy and Development: High Risk Families, at the NSPCC warmly welcomed the report. She said “This evidence-based report is welcome at a time when we are recognising increasingly both the short and long term harms that domestic abuse creates: for society, the economy, family structure; victims; and most especially children. The emphasis on parental support and the parent-child relationship is a central feature of the report and is to be commended”.

For media inquiries, please contact Nick Wood of Media Intelligence Partners Ltd on 07889 617003 or 0203 008 8146 or Alistair Thompson on 07970 162225 or 0203 008 8145.

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## **NOTES TO EDITORS**

**The Centre for Social Justice (CSJ)** is an independent think tank established in 2004 to put social justice at the heart of British politics.

In 2007 the CSJ published its landmark report, *Breakthrough Britain*. This publication, which set out 190 evidence-based policy recommendations to tackle poverty in Britain, transformed the social policy and political landscape and was awarded Publication of the Year by *Prospect* Magazine in 2008.

Since *Breakthrough Britain* the CSJ has published over 40 reports which have shaped government policy and influenced opposition parties. These have included the seminal papers *Dying To Belong* and *Dynamic Benefits*, which has led the Coalition Government’s welfare reforms.

Further to this, the CSJ manages an Alliance of over 250 of the most effective grass roots, poverty-fighting organisations.