

## Insights from the EIDA Network Meeting:

### *Understanding and Responding to Coercive and Controlling Behaviour*

In December 2022, EIDA hosted a quarterly network meeting on understanding and responding to coercive and controlling behaviour. You can [find out more and watch the recording back on our website](#). Here are some key insights from the event.

#### **What is coercive and controlling behaviour?**

An act or acts designed to control somebody, limiting what they can do or making them do things that they don't want to do. This can include, but is not limited to:

- Isolating someone from sources of support like friends, family and colleagues
- Physical violence, sexual violence or threats
- Humiliation or intimidation
- Controlling daily activities such as what someone eats, wears or where they go
- Using access to money, work, family courts, health/social care or immigration status to threaten and/or control somebody

Coercive control is not well understood. Each individual act may seem small, but together they can create a constant feeling of 'walking on eggshells' and a climate of fear. [Visit Women's Aid for a more in-depth definition](#).

The controlling and coercive behaviour offence was introduced in 2015, recognising the harm and long-lasting effects of this type of behaviour. The offence was extended to include post separation behaviour through the Domestic Abuse Act.

#### **How can an employer support an employee experiencing coercive control?**

- Ensure your employees know what coercive control is: share stories and examples
- Look out for signs of coercive control amongst your colleagues with the knowledge that they may be well hidden
- Ensure coercive control is openly discussed, building a culture of trust so that employees feel comfortable coming forward to seek help

- Ensure people in your organisation are trained to respond, that everyone knows who those people are, and that they are ready to signpost those impacted to external organisations who can help
- If an employee makes a disclosure, consider offering time off, remove the pressure to perform at work, offer counselling (including for affected children if you can) which can help someone gain a sense of self, away from the world of control created by their perpetrator
- Check that your EAP provides the right specialist support
- Be aware that the trauma of coercive control can last for years and be flexible and understanding in response to this
- If a perpetrator within your business comes forward seeking help to stop their coercive or controlling behaviour, be ready to signpost them to specialist support

**What should employers consider when supporting employees of diverse backgrounds and communities impacted by coercive control?**

- Be aware of institutional and personal biases and how these may affect someone's response to coercive control
- Consider cultural barriers to disclosure such as experience of institutional racism<sup>1</sup>, lack of knowledge or awareness of coercive control, or how to navigate support systems
- Consult specialist organisations such as The Lioness Pride CIC that runs The Lioness Circle, a 'by and for' service, particularly for survivors born of the African or Caribbean heritage, Sistah Space, which is a community-based charity that supports African and Caribbean heritage women affected by domestic abuse and H.O.P.E. Training & Consultancy, which offers training courses including 'Domestic Abuse within Racialised Communities' and 'Forced Marriages & So Called Honour Abuse Training'

**Thank you to all our speakers and contributors to this event including ...**

Emily Fei, Chief of Staff to the Domestic Abuse Commissioner for England and Wales, Lorna Gavin, Head of Diversity and Inclusion at Gowling WLG, Lioness Tamar, Founder of The Lioness Circle, and Natalie Curtis, EIDA Ambassador and Regional HSES Advisor at Balfour Beatty<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> For example, Black women are 14% less likely to be offered specialist support than white survivors: <https://refuge.org.uk/news/refuge-better-protection-of-black-women-domestic-abuse/>.

<sup>2</sup> Balfour Beatty are happy to partner with members of EIDA of any size, to share their journey and materials and help develop a supportive work culture in relation to domestic abuse.