

Social abuse

A perpetrator of domestic and family violence may exert control over the victim by engaging in behaviours that spatially confine or restrain the victim; assert exclusive possession over the victim; monopolise the victim's skills and resources; or prevent the victim from keeping in touch with social networks, escaping the abusive relationship, or seeking help and support [Bagshaw 2000]. These behaviours may intersect with those known as **economic or financial abuse** and **emotional or psychological abuse**. The effect may be to physically and socially isolate the victim, and, over time, undermine the victim's sense of identity, independence and self worth. Typically, a perpetrator will be the victim's current or former intimate partner and, as such, may have special knowledge of the victim's circumstances that may be used to carry out these abusive behaviours [Stark 2007].

To physically isolate the victim, a perpetrator may lock the victim in a cupboard, room or car for long periods. The perpetrator may prevent the victim from leaving the house for work, driving a car, or going out alone or with others by blocking the driveway or hiding the victim's clothes, keys or mobile phone. The perpetrator may forbid the victim to work other than in the home, demanding that domestic chores and **sexual acts** be performed according to a schedule and standard imposed by the perpetrator.

A perpetrator may also dominate or regulate the victim's external activities and connections. For example, where the victim's income is critical to maintaining the perpetrator's lifestyle, the perpetrator may **stalk** the victim at the workplace; call repeatedly through the workday; contact co-workers to check on the victim's whereabouts; collect the victim at lunchtime to prevent occasions with co-workers; or force the victim to get a second job. Where the victim has valued relationships with family, friends and neighbours, or ties with a church, club or community group, the perpetrator may erode these connections by preventing the victim from making contact; insisting that the perpetrator accompany the victim; or sabotaging the victim's means of communication by stealing or destroying mail, deleting phone contacts and email messages, or impersonating the victim.

In instances where victims attempt to restore their freedom or reassert their independence by, for example, buying new clothes, making new friends, returning to study or joining a sporting team, the perpetrator may respond by imposing further and more stringent restrictions and monitors on the victim.

Where a perpetrator feels threatened by the prospect that the victim may escape the abusive relationship or seek help and support, the perpetrator may cut off the household telephone connection or destroy the victim's mobile phone; ring the police first to prevent the victim from making a complaint; or cancel the victim's medical or counselling appointments, refuse to drive the victim to the hospital, or deny the victim access to funds to cover necessities.

Research [Outlaw 2009] documents a range of experiences of victims of social abuse. The following are extracts of accounts by victims describing how perpetrators behaved towards them:

- > Put down my physical appearance
- > Told me I could not manage
- > Criticised the way I took care of the house
- > Became upset if household chores were not done
- > Treated me like a personal servant
- > Monitored my time
- > Irresponsible with money, but stingy when I needed it
- > Jealous or suspicious of my friends and other men
- > Turned my family against me
- > Accused me of having an affair
- > Threatened to have an affair
- > Tried to convince me I was crazy.

Social abuse may be one aspect of a complex pattern of behaviours engaged in by perpetrators in order to control another person, sometimes referred to as **coercive control**.