

Presentation title:

## Criminalization and its consequences: the case of coercive control

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The purpose of this paper is to reflect upon four decades of activity that has focused the policy agenda on the law, and the associated work of criminal justice professionals as the vehicle through which to change the nature and extent of violence(s) against women. Those four decades have culminated in moves towards criminalizing coercive control. These decades of work do not comprise a totally negative story. Richards and Haglund (2020) make a compelling case for the role of the law, both globally and locally, in making change possible and it is indeed the case that violence(s) against women have steeped up policy agendas over this time. However, this paper documents the extent to which the disproportionate attention paid to this agenda has resulted in (un)intended consequences, especially for women belonging to marginalised groups. These consequences are especially evident in the context of legal responses to coercive control. This paper will argue that this is a result of over-expecting social change as a result of legal change alongside the ongoing failure to recognise to powerful presence of the responsible subject of law (Lacey 2016) in a wide range of jurisdictions. This responsible subject is gendered and impacts on women's experiences of the law in multiple ways from notions of the blameless victim to those of the mad or bad offender. Thus, when women living with violence engage with the law the complexity of their lives, including coercive control, must be rendered manageable and controllable to 'fit' with this responsible subject since they are 'imperfect victims' (Goodmark, 2023) yet at the same time dependent on the state Bumiller (2008). For some the coercive control of their partners is simply replaced by the coercive control of the state. Herein lies a cautionary tale for those who remain committed to the power of the law in changing women's lives.