

Presentation title:

## Police responses to coercive control: examining victim-survivor perspectives on the opportunities and limits of criminalisation

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There has been significant debate and law reform activity over the last decade surrounding the adequacy of responses to non-physical forms of domestic and family violence (DFV). Within this, coercive control has become a central focus, with policymakers, practitioners, advocates and academics scrutinising the degree to which current responses to coercive control are adequate. Across Europe and United Kingdom numerous countries have criminalised coercive and controlling behaviours. However, in Australia responses to coercive control remain largely outside of the realm of the criminal law. Coercive control is a term used to capture the long-term, ongoing nature of a wide range of forms of violence which are not exclusively physical but can pervade an individual's daily lives with devastating impact. This presentation will draw on the findings from a national study conducted with victim-survivors of coercive control in Australia to scrutinize police responses to coercive control. The research team completed in-depth interviews with 170 victimsurvivors of coercive control. Drawing on the findings from a thematic analysis of those interviews, this presentation will explore victim-survivor experiences on reporting coercive control victimisation to police, including the importance of authentic and trauma-informed first points of contact, the barriers to reporting, the challenge of seeking police responses for non-physical forms of intimate partner violence, and the risks of misidentification. The paper will also examine victim-survivor views on what is needed to improve police responses to coercive control, including the value of specialization. Focusing on the importance of securing just and safe outcomes for victim-survivors of DFV, the findings from this study are relevant to the numerous jurisdictions internationally that have already criminalized coercive control, as well as those that are presently moving towards doing so. The paper centres the importance of utilising lived experience to enhance current police policies and practices.