

March 30, 2022

Re: Written briefs from the public for its study on intimate partner (IPV) and domestic violence (DV).

The lies I told myself: I can't be a battered woman. He's only ever damaged property. He only hit me once. He doesn't know better. Don't call the police. His family won't approve. They'll protect me. They know how angry he gets. He's not controlling. I still see my friends and I'm the one that manages our finances.

I see the truth now. I might have managed our finances, but if I mentioned that money was tight, he'd verbally assault me and accuse me of being controlling and manipulative. He accused me of stealing from him. The verbal assaults, gaslighting, and violence escalated over time.

Behind the scenes, his mother controlled us. She controlled his paycheck (family business), so if either of us upset her, she would "fire" him. She owned our house and threatened to evict us. She told me if I didn't 'obey,' she'd make sure I was gone. She's now funding the legal proceedings against me (> \$100K), trying to have my children removed from my care. My ex claims he was the primary parent, and I'm mentally unstable. He seeks sole custody and decision making. My lawyer tells me that all abusive men do this. Our children told CAS repeatedly that I have been their primary parent and that their father was never home. Why is he allowed to get away with these lies in sworn documents? Why is there no punishment for lying under oath in family court?

Together with his mother, my ex has lost four motions, and the court still allows them to drag me back for another. All third parties involved have stated that I'm the more stable parent, that I should have sole decision-making authority and primary residence. Yet the Court allows them to abuse me legally and financially with his frivolous claims. How is this in my children's best interests? I have to work multiple jobs to put a roof over their heads. How is it in their best interest that I have no money or time for them? This is post-separation abuse facilitated by the Court.

The violence started during my first pregnancy. At first, I would freeze, crying while he raged and smashed my things. A few times I fled, but he'd apologize and beg for my return. False promises of change were frequent.

When my oldest child was three, my ex woke me for sex. I declined his request. He yelled, called me disgusting names, and threw me *through* the bedroom door. It splintered, hitting our three year-old who, unbeknownst to me, had woken from the noise and was standing on the other side.

He physically abused our child. There was an incident where he left his face and ear black with bruising. I asked him to leave but then helped him repair his relationship with our son when he wanted to come home.

When an anonymous call was made to CAS, I downplayed the severity of his abuse. I was terrified to tell the truth. He'd threatened I would never see a dime of support if I left. I was also afraid of his violence.

Our son has voiced that he is afraid to disagree with his father because he wants him to stay nice and not go back to "how it used to be." It's an example of how abusers use coercive control to

manipulate the behaviour of their victims, yet CAS didn't recognize the problem. Our file was recently closed.

Later, when CAS became involved again, I showed them pictures of our son's bruises and text messages his father had written acknowledging the violence he'd inflicted. They called it an "isolated incident." They didn't understand that there is no such thing as 'isolated incidents' when DV is involved.

My children come home crying from supervised visitation, telling me that dad says if he doesn't pay me money, he will go to jail. My oldest child would not leave my side for two months because dad told them mom was 'sick in the brain' and needed to go to the hospital. My child thought I was dying. When I tried to address it, I was dismissed, accused of lying, and my ex brought forth allegations of alienation.

I'm not able to speak of the abuse my children suffer because of his counter claims that I'm "lying to turn the kids against him." I've been silenced for trying to protect my children from harm. I live in fear, not only of him, but of the "court professionals" (social workers, lawyers, judges) who don't understand the constant onslaught of abuse we've been subjected to, and who have the power to remove my children from my care and hand them to their abusive father.

This brief has taken me a month to write, and I personally know many women who were unable to complete their briefs, despite wanting to. It's a reflection of the trauma of DV. It was traumatizing to write. It's also frustrating because I know these few words are woefully inadequate at explaining the complexity of what I and my children have suffered and continue to suffer.

Recommendations:

- 1. Mandatory education for ALL professionals involved with families (judges, lawyers, child protection workers, assessors, psychologists, police officers etc.) to recognize coercive control. Incidents CANNOT be viewed in isolation.** By definition, coercive control involves a PATTERN of behaviour. **SUPPORT KERIA'S LAW – Bill C-233.**
- 2. Mandatory education on trauma informed interviewing for ALL professionals involved with families as listed above.** I have been victim blamed by all professionals.
- 3. Make it easier to bring forth claims of vexatious litigation.**
- 4. Make Legal Aid unlimited for victims of IPV/DV & RAISE THE CUT-OFF TO ACCESS LEGAL AID** Currently too many children are at risk because their mothers don't have financial means when up against an abuser with unlimited funds. This is an unacceptable power imbalance.