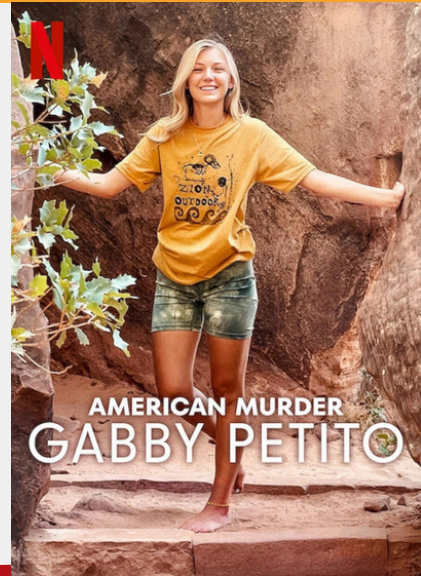


COERCIVE CONTROL

& THE GABBY PETITO CASE

You have certainly heard of physical abuse, but are you aware that abuse comes in many different forms? Another type of abuse that is equally as serious is **coercive control**. The Gabby Petito case is an example of a victim who was subject to coercive control, an illegal form of domestic violence carried out by her partner.



What is Coercive control?

When someone in a relationship uses an ongoing pattern of behaviour to **control** their partner, this is known as **coercive control**. The day-to-day life of a victim can be severely affected by coercive control. This is because not only does a person control the victim but this type of abuse could include behaviours that isolate, intimidate or put fear into their partner. Although there may not always be physical violence involved, coercive control leaves the victim feeling trapped and unable to escape safely as a result of this kind of behaviour.



WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE?

& WHY IS IT HARMFUL

Coercive control is often hard to identify. It usually starts with small controlling behaviours but eventually becomes a form of **domestic abuse**. These are some examples of what Coercive control could look like:

- ➔ Isolation – Prohibiting you from seeing friends and family.
- ➔ Threats – Making you fearful of ever ending a relationship.
- ➔ Belittling – Criticising you, name-calling, and gaslighting you.
- ➔ Controlling – Telling you what to wear, who you can talk to etc.
- ➔ Monitoring – Looking through your phone without permission and tracking your location.



Does coercive control cause harm?

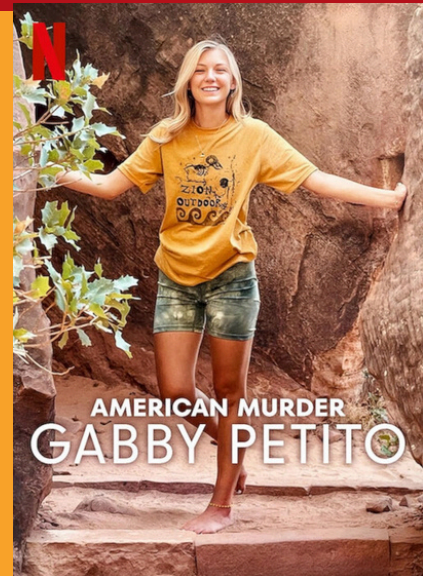
Although coercive control may not cause physical harm to the victim, its impact can be just as damaging. This form of abuse completely depletes the victims self-esteem and confidence, leaving them feeling **powerless**. It takes away their freedom as the victim feels trapped in a toxic relationship without any safe way to leave. This is due to the extreme fear from constant threats and manipulation from the abuser.



THE GABBY PETITO CASE

A REAL LIFE EXAMPLE

Gabby Petito was unfortunately a victim of coercive control in her relationship with her partner, Brian Laundrie — a pattern of abuse that ultimately led to her murder in 2021. Gabby went missing during a road trip across the United States with Brian. Gabby's story gained worldwide attention and was made into a Netflix documentary American Murder: Gabby Petito, which you may have seen. This case showcases the warning signs and terrible consequences of coercive control.



What were the signs of coercive control in this case?



Love-Bombing:

Brian overwhelmed Gabby with love and affection during the beginning of their relationship — a tactic used by abusers to create a strong emotional bond quickly.

Mental Health Used as a Weapon:

Both Brian and the police blamed Gabby's anxiety. This is known as gaslighting, when someone makes you question your reality.



Isolation:

Brian forced Gabby to cut off her friends, he criticised her job, and made her feel as though only he understood her.

Public vs. Private:

Gaby and Brian showcased a perfect life on social media. In reality, Gabby was isolated and terrified. Coercive control often goes unnoticed as it is hidden behind a positive image.

Self-Blame:

In a bodycam footage of the US police, Gabby was shown to be apologising repeatedly. She blamed herself for the issues in her relationship, — a typical response in abusive relationships.



Fear of leaving:


Gabby expressed to her ex-boyfriend that she wanted to end the relationship but was scared of what Brian would do. This showcases Gabby as a victim trapped in a toxic relationship, too afraid to leave.

COERCIVE CONTROL LAW

IN IRELAND

Coercive control has been recognised as a crime in Ireland under the Domestic Violence Act 2018. This act came into effect in January 2019, meaning anyone who uses behaviours of coercive control such as causing fear, repeated threats, and manipulation could be charged with a criminal offence.

What does the law say in Ireland?



Section 39(1) of the Domestic Violence Act 2018 states that:

'A person commits an offence where he or she knowingly and persistently engages in behaviour that':

- **is controlling or coercive,**
- **has a serious effect on a relevant person, and**
- **a reasonable person would consider likely to have a serious effect on a relevant person.**

Punishment:

The punishment for being found guilty of coercive control in Ireland could be a fine or 12 months to 5 years in prison.



Lets break it down!

Under Irish law, coercive control occurs when someone **intentionally** and **repeatedly** uses abusive behaviours to control the victim. If the person's behaviour seems to **seriously affect** the victim — such as causing extreme fear that affects their day-to-day life, this could be seen as a criminal offence.

Evidence:

It can be difficult to prove this type of abuse. The victim should gather evidence to show this behaviour is a repeated pattern — this can include texts, emails, or witness accounts.

STATISTICS

& SOME ADVICE

- Between 2019 and 2021, there were **259 incidents** of coercive control that were reported to the Gardaí.
- **42 offenders** have been prosecuted for coercive control from January 2019 to June 2022.
- A 2021 study, identified that **40% of Irish adults** surveyed did not know what coercive control meant!



Important advice!



It is extremely important to learn about and understand coercive control so that you can recognise the signs and behaviours – whether you are personally the victim or it is happening to someone you care about. Coercive control is a damaging criminal offence, you should always talk to a trusted friend, adult, teacher or member of authority if you identify this behaviour. Raising awareness will save lives and ensure justice is served.