About the project

This project examines and synthesizes existing knowledge on coercive control in intimate partner relationships with a focus on how coercive control is experienced, measured and policed in Two Spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, questioning, intersex and asexual (2SLGBTQQIA+) individuals. Guided by a theoretical framework of intersectionality, the project assesses research progress since a 2014 narrative review of “psychological aggression,” to help inform the methods and direction of future research. The project design intentionally incorporates engagement with cross-sectorial stakeholders to inform our methods, help frame our findings and mobilize knowledge related to promising practices and research gaps. Debates regarding legislation to criminalize coercive control are underway in Canada; yet it remains unclear how police will assess coercive control, and how they can best support 2SLGBTQQIA+ victims.

Existing measures and theories of coercive control largely evaluate men’s use of coercive control in relationships with women. Thus, the study of coercive control in 2SLGBTQQIA+ communities needs timely attention and an inclusive intersectional lens. Through a scoping review of academic and grey literature on studies of experiences, measurement and police perspectives of coercive control, the project aims to:

- examine the extent and ways 2SLGBTQQIA+ individuals experience coercive control;
- appraise the methods used to measure coercive control experienced by 2SLGBTQQIA+ individuals; and
- understand how police perceive and respond to coercive control in the context of intimate partner violence and specifically in 2SLGBTQQIA+ communities.

Key findings

- Over 1,774 unique records were screened in duplicate; 264 academic and 13 grey literature full-text records had data extraction completed in duplicate.
- Most studies were conducted in the U.S.A.; 12 academic and six grey literature studies were conducted in Canada.
- Sexual, gender, and racial identities:
  - Identities were mostly determined by participants' self-report.
  - Although many studies concerned (or assumed) participants were cisgender, 112 (40%) included participants identifying as transgender.
  - 97 (35%) included Indigenous individuals, most often identified as American Indian.
- Coercive control measurement:
  - Most studies did not name the behaviour as "coercive control" but included aspects of it as part of a broad assessment of abuse.
  - One third of studies (88, 32%) used questions created by the authors as their only measure of coercive control.
  - Sexual coercion and emotional abuse were most often studied; fewer studies examined the range of coercive control including economic, intimidation, isolation and surveillance.
- Experiences of coercive control:
  - One-third of academic studies (98, 37%) and most grey literature studies (10, 77%) compared LGBTQ and other participants; coercive control was more common in LGBTQ individuals and was related to mental health problems.
● Less than one in five (46.17%) studies specifically reported on experiences of coercion related to participants’ gender or sexual identities, such as threatening to out the person or identity abuse (e.g., misgendering, coercing the partner not to transition).

● Reporting to police:
  o 38 (14%) studies inquired about participants’ perceptions or experiences with police; however, most did not describe reporting coercive control, specifically, to police.
  o Qualitative studies described participants’ hesitancy to report relationship violence to police, fearing unsupportive responses and sometimes experiencing violence and identity abuse, although actual experiences of reporting were often positive.

● Methodological gaps and future research:
  o There is a lack of agreed definition of coercive control or accepted standard of measurement; further research into measures is warranted.
  o Individuals who identify as nonbinary, questioning, intersex and asexual are often missing from samples, not identified as unique groups and excluded from study results.
  o Qualitative studies could inform more inclusive measures of coercive control by naming and illustrating behaviours specifically targeting 2SLGBTQQIA+ individuals.
  o Research surveys incorporating open-ended questions about experiences of coercive control can involve more mixed methods, avoid collapsing the diversity of gender and sexuality into singular categories and permit more intersectional analyses.

Policy implications

● Funding organizations should support research by scholars in Canada on coercive control experiences of 2SLGBTQQIA+ individuals, especially research with, by and for Two Spirit Indigenous communities.

● Policing organizations may need to examine how they will recognize and respond to coercive control in 2SLGBTQQIA+ individuals and engage with 2SLGBTQQIA+ communities as they develop their policies and practices to respond to and support individuals who report coercive control.

● There is an opportunity for engaging with 2SLGBTQQIA+ communities to develop a shared understanding of coercive control, to develop standard measurement, and to increase resources for addressing coercive control and developing research scholarship in this field.

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FURTHER INFORMATION