

'This is Not Love. This is Control' – new campaign launched to help people in controlling relationships

The Welsh Government campaign, "This is Not Love. This is Control" aims to help people identify coercive control behaviours.

Coercive control is a form of abuse – it can be subtle, making it difficult to identify and to recognise as wrong and abusive. Those experiencing it are often left feeling belittled and isolated.

Limiting a person's access to money, dictating what they can wear and making them cut contact with their friends and family are examples of coercive control.

An estimated 2 million adults in England and Wales experienced domestic abuse last year – 65% women and 35% men.

Coercive control has been a criminal offence since 2015. Last year, 9,053 offences of coercive control were recorded by Police across England and Wales and those being prosecuted faced on average 17 months imprisonment.

'This is Not Love. This is Control' is part of the Welsh Government's long-standing commitment to ending domestic violence in Wales. The Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act was launched in 2015 and an information and advice service, Live Fear Free, offers support 24/7 via a helpline and live chat.

At yesterday's launch event (Thursday 17th) at the Riverfront in Newport, the audience heard moving speeches and audio clips from survivors of coercive control.

One of those speaking today was Luke Hart. Luke's mother Claire and younger sister Charlotte were murdered in broad daylight by their father using a sawn-off shotgun. He then committed suicide.

Following the deaths, Luke and his brother Ryan started a project called CoCo Awareness. The pair now spend their time raising awareness of coercive control and speaking out against male violence towards women and children.

Speaking ahead of the event, Luke said:

"'This is Not Love. This is Control' is a vitally important campaign. We grew up under a coercively controlling father and neither we nor anyone else saw the signs for 26 years until he murdered our mother Claire and 19-year-old sister Charlotte in 2016.

"The perpetrator's desire for control lies behind all abuse, we

must stop seeing abuse as 'an emotional loss of control' but rather as driven by masculine belief systems, in particular an obsessive demand for power, control and dominance: the perpetrator in fact demonstrates an excess of control, not a lack of it.

"Currently, most people are surprised and shocked by domestic abuse when it surfaces, but this is precisely because we are looking for the wrong things. This campaign will help educate us all on what we need to be looking for."

Jane Hutt, the Deputy Minister and Chief Whip, said:

"The 'This is Not Love. This is Control' campaign is the next step in our on-going pledge to tackle violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence in Wales.

"Coercive control had been fairly under the radar until recently. With the remarkable support of survivors and partner organisations, we hope this campaign will raise awareness of this toxic behaviour and empower more people to come forward."

Gwendolyn Sterk, Policy and Public Affairs Manager for Welsh Women's Aid, said:

"Welsh Women's Aid welcomes the Welsh Government focusing on and highlighting coercive control as a form of violence against women and girls. We feel that it is very important to raise awareness of coercive control and to make it known that it is a criminal offence.

"Often, all it takes for a woman in a controlling or abusive relationship to seek help, is to have a conversation with someone who believes them, understands what they are experiencing, and knows where to direct them for specialist help and support."

Yasmin Khan, Welsh Government National Adviser on violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence, said:

"Survivors tell us they feel humiliated by the control they've experienced and this is compounded by the fact it can be hard for them to prove what's happening. They describe a 'drip, drip' effect of coercive control; a cumulative build up and escalation, often towards physical abuse, over time."

"Whether someone is experiencing coercive control themselves or witnessing it, we would urge them to get in touch with our free helpline, Live Fear Free, or contact the Police."

If you've experienced coercive control or any kind of domestic abuse, call the free and confidential Live Fear Free helpline on 0808 8010 800 or visit livefearfree.gov.wales to message an adviser 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.