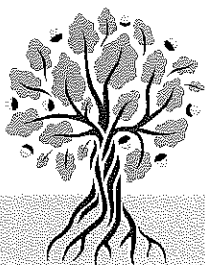


How technology is fuelling Britain's hidden domestic abuse epidemic

A third of young women in the UK have been victims of 'coercive control' but most do not know it's a crime and have experienced a form of domestic abuse that could be on the rise with the spread of mobile technology. Research by Women's Aid found that almost 40 per cent of 16 to 24-year-olds interviewed said they had been subjected to "controlling behaviour", mainly including having their phone, messages, emails and social media accounts checked. But only a tiny fraction of those recognised the behaviour as a type of "coercive control", which is now illegal under a law passed last year.

Polly Neate, the charity's CEO, said that many girls and young women are abused in their first relationships, when they have nothing to compare it to. "Domestic abuse is so much more than just physical abuse, and in our experience coercive control underpins the vast majority of all abusive relationships."

The Serious Crime Act 2015 made "controlling or coercive behaviour in an intimate or family relationship" illegal and punishable with up to five years in prison and hefty fines. But many of the people interviewed were not aware of the recent law and considered some of the behaviour it encompasses normal. One in 20 think that being scared of your partner was part of a "normal relationship", the research found, while 10 per cent thought having their phone repeatedly checked was acceptable and only one in three knew what coercive control was. But only a tiny fraction of those recognised the behaviour as a type of "coercive control", which is now illegal under a law passed last year. Some blamed the abuse on themselves for not making their boyfriend or husband trust them and others took it as a sign they "care".



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