

Situational Couple Violence – Guidance Paper

No persisting imbalance of power in the relationship

Recognising Situational Couple Violence

Where a pattern of coercive control is **absent**, behaviours may be evident either as an incident or as a relational pattern, examples as below but not limited to:

- There has been repeated violence and the instigator of violence varies.
- There has been an incident of violence which is not part of a pattern and may be related to a specific context or event.
- High or persistent mutual verbal abuse, violence instigated and inflicted by both partners, shifting patterns of control.
- Neither partner is significantly restricted in their choices or fearful of the other in everyday life
- Physical and emotional impact on either partner is not clearly asymmetrical.
- Violence can on occasions escalate to become chronic and severe.
- Alcohol can play a significant role in SCV as a source of conflict in itself and as a factor which leads to escalation of violence/abuse.

Points to consider

- Situational couple abuse/violence may be low or high risk as the frequency, severity and impact on adults and children as well as the context need to be assessed. The impact and consequent risk may fall anywhere along a continuum of severity from verbal arguments and /or involving minor acts of violence by each partner, to ‘mutual combat’ involving severe violence by each partner. It is therefore important to be clear as to the frequency and pattern of incidents in the relational context.
- Persistent ‘low-severity’ abuse is very likely to cause significant emotional harm to children who have to live with this, and violence that carries a high risk of severe harm can still be used in a context where neither partner has (yet) established a pattern of control over the other.
- Women are as likely as men to engage in SCV but impact on women (when committed by men) is larger (due to physical size etc.) in terms of physical injury as well as fear and psychological consequences.
- Some who are experiencing quite severe violence and abuse will deny victim status because they do not want to feel like a victim.

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NB: Where a victim of coercive control uses violence and abuse as a defence this should not be misinterpreted as situational couple violence.

Some additional notes regarding a victim of coercive control who is using violence and abuse as a defence:

- Violence is a response to the perpetrator's violence/coercive control
- Perpetrator will present this as mutual – “she gives as good as gets”. Identify not by who initiates the abusive violence but who ends it and who is most scared and at risk.
- Allegations of violence by parent, but information about the context of assaults indicates that this took place in a context of fear and threat. Victim (generally female) often accepts responsibility and can be self-blaming. This kind of violence can be severe in situations of imminent or sustained threat to the victim, may involve use of a weapon to compensate for superior size/strength of perpetrator.
- Where the victim has been subject to sexual abuse and psychological control this may not be disclosed and therefore the victim's behaviour looks like situational couple violence, as the underlying threat is not visible.

References: *If you would like to see any of the items listed, send the 5 or 6-digit item numbers (in **bold**) to library@cafcass.gov.uk (for internal use only)*

199125: Johnson, M.P. (2008). A Typology of Domestic Violence: Intimate Terrorism, Violent Resistance, and Situational Couple Violence. Boston: Northeastern University Press. These are modified items from the Psychological Maltreatment of Women Inventory (Tolman, 1999)

301023: Michalski J (2004) Making Sociological Sense Out of Trends in Intimate Partner Violence: The Social Structure of Violence Against Women Violence Against Women 10 (6) 652-675