

Submission to the Standing Senate Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs



CANADIAN NETWORK for
the PREVENTION of ELDER ABUSE
RÉSEAU CANADIEN pour la PRÉVENTION
du MAUVAIS TRAITEMENT des AÎNÉS

Re: Bill C-332: *An Act to amend the Criminal Code (coercive control of intimate partner)*

From: Benedicte Schoepflin, Executive Director, Canadian Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse (CNPEA); Dr. Amy Peirone, Coordinator, Violence Against Women Coordinating Committee Windsor-Essex, Board member CNPEA.

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Introduction

Bill C-332, titled *An Act to amend the Criminal Code (coercive control of intimate partner)*, represents a commendable advancement in addressing coercive control within intimate relationships. However, its current scope overlooks the multifaceted nature of coercive control experienced by one of the fastest growing segments of the Canadian population - older adults. This narrow focus neglects the realities faced by older adults who may be subjected to coercive control by adult children, other relatives, caregivers, or individuals in positions of trust.

Coercive control is a form of elder abuse that extends beyond intimate relationships

Coercive control, characterized by a pattern of behaviours aimed at dominating and manipulating another person, is not confined to intimate relationships. It can manifest as “gradual but escalating abuse, which can engender in the older adult a state of fear, anxiety and dependency, along with the loss of autonomous decision-making and personhood” ([Quinlan et al., 2024, p. 287](#)). **Research by Quinlan and colleagues highlights the experience of coercive control of older adults in filial relationships**, demonstrating how adult children often exert control over their parents through financial manipulation, isolation, and threats. A report by the Australian Government Attorney-General's Department titled *Understanding How Coercive Control Can Affect Older People*, further emphasizes that coercive control of older adults can be perpetrated by an intimate partner, family members, and others. The report underscores that coercive control erodes an older person's freedom and independence, reinforcing the urgent need to recognize it as a form of elder abuse that extends beyond intimate relationships ([Australian Attorney General](#)).

The recognition and call to attention that coercive control affects older adults outside of intimate partner relationships is not new. In the House of [Commons Report of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights](#) (2021), witnesses testified that “coercion and control...also play out in elder abuse situations...with one organization recommend[ing] that the offence proposed in Bill C-247 on coercion and control in intimate relationships be expanded to

include elder abuse between family members beyond intimate partners and those living together” (p. 23).

Legal experts have also raised concerns that Bill C-332 overlooks the coercive control of older adults by family members. [Pope \(2024\)](#) argues that limiting coercive control legislation to intimate partner relationships “fails to account for the widespread abuse suffered by older adults at the hands of their own family members, particularly adult children and caregivers.” She further stresses that legal reforms should explicitly recognize coercive control as a key mechanism of elder abuse, rather than solely focusing on domestic violence frameworks (Pope, 2024).

International Response to Coercive Control

Internationally, England and Wales have already taken steps to address this gap. The [Serious Crime Act \(2015\)](#) criminalizes controlling or coercive behavior in an intimate or family relationship, explicitly recognizing that coercive control is not limited to intimate partners, but also occurs within familial relationships, representing a broader element of abusive dynamics. This example highlights how other jurisdictions have expanded legal protections to account for coercive control within familial relationships. **Adopting a similar approach in Canada would ensure older adults facing coercion from non-intimate partners are equally safeguarded.**

Older Women, Elder Abuse and Coercive Control

While both older men and older women can experience abuse in all its forms, [available data](#) on intimate partner violence suggest that women in Canada are disproportionately affected. Similarly, being a woman is considered a risk factor for elder abuse (including emotional abuse and coercion).

2024 statistics recently released by the [Canadian Femicide Observatory for Justice and Accountability](#) outlined that femicides by family members represented 28% of cases where the relationship was known. In 55% of femicide cases where the perpetrator was a family member, it was a son. This figure is a stark reminder that **older women are at dual risk, from partners and children, when it comes to coercion and abuse, too often leading to their death.**

Ageism and the Housing Crisis

Coercive control can trap older people, particularly older women, in relationships where they cannot access financial resources or leave due to a lack of housing options. Ageism limits their ability to find work or secure financial independence. The current affordable housing crisis exacerbates these risks by reducing the availability of safe, low-cost housing, forcing some to stay in abusive relationships or live in poverty.

Coercive Control in the Caregiving Context

The role of coercive control in elder abuse remains under examined in the caregiving dynamic, despite growing evidence that psychological and emotional abuse play a crucial role in how older adults experience control and mistreatment ([Deadrich, 2025](#)). **Caregivers, particularly**

those supporting individuals with cognitive impairments, may unintentionally or deliberately restrict an older adult's autonomy, often justifying these actions as necessary for care and protection. As dementia and other cognitive conditions progress, some caregivers begin treating the older adult as a child, believing their role has shifted into that of a parental figure ([Oliveira et al., 2023](#)). This shift can lead to controlling behaviours, such as enforcing strict routines, monitoring and limiting their interactions, intruding on personal privacy, and withholding information in ways that diminish the individual's independence ([Oliveira et al., 2023](#)). In addition, caregivers who struggle with stress, frustration, or feelings of inadequacy may become more prone to controlling behaviours as a way to regain a sense of order or authority, which can escalate into psychological mistreatment, including criticism, verbal aggression, and blaming, leading to a dynamic whereby the older adult feels powerless ([Ali & Bokharey, 2016](#)). Understanding coercive control within caregiving relationships is essential for shaping policy responses to elder abuse. If these behaviours remain unaddressed, many older adults, especially those with cognitive challenges, will continue to face subtle yet deeply damaging forms of manipulation that undermine their dignity and self-determination.

Conclusion:

While Bill C-332 is a positive step toward addressing coercive control, **its limitation to intimate partner relationships neglects the complex and pervasive nature of such abuse among older adults.** Research and real-world cases demonstrate that coercive control is often perpetrated by adult children, caregivers, and others in positions of trust. **Expanding legislative definitions to include these relationships is essential to provide comprehensive protection for this vulnerable and growing segment of our population.** Recognizing that coercive control extends beyond intimate partner violence to include family, caregivers and others in positions of trust is critical. Without such legal recognition, older adults who are particularly vulnerable to coercion, financial exploitation, and manipulation, will remain invisible and inadequately protected under the law.

Respectfully submitted by:

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About CNPEA:

The Canadian Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse (CNPEA) is a pan-Canadian network supported by leaders in aging, research, health care, and elder abuse prevention and response, among others. CNPEA builds awareness, support, and capacity for a coordinated pan-Canadian approach to the prevention of elder abuse and neglect. We promote the rights of older adults through knowledge mobilization, collaboration, policy reform, and education. www.cnpea.ca.