

Observing Coercive Control Beyond Intimate Partner Violence: Examining the Perceptions of Professionals About Common Tactics Used in Victimization

Jacquelynn F. Duron
Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey

Laura Johnson
Temple University

Gretchen L. Hoge
Lewis University

Judy L. Postmus
University of Maryland

Objective: Coercive control has traditionally been used as a concept to describe the coercive strategies used by perpetrators in intimate partner violence (IPV). Yet, these strategies are often experienced across a wide range of victimizations including child abuse, trafficking, IPV, sexual violence, and elder abuse. Professionals working with victims and/or perpetrators of coercive control are uniquely positioned to describe how they have observed coercive control in their clients, allowing for an examination of commonalities across victimization types. This study explored the perceptions of professionals who identified common tactics used by perpetrators to isolate, groom, and control individuals. **Method:** Key stakeholders ($N = 22$) with expertise working with perpetrators and victims of child abuse, elder abuse, IPV, human trafficking, and gang or cult recruitment completed semistructured interviews to discuss their perspectives of predatory tactics. **Results:** Using a directed content analysis procedure, emergent themes revealed that perpetrators engage individuals in exploitative relationships by (a) identifying potential victims, (b) infiltrating lives through grooming, (c) isolating to gain control, and (d) maintaining control through any means necessary. **Conclusions:** Although nuanced victimization experiences exist, professionals working with perpetrators and/or victims of abuse describe a common pattern of predatory strategies implemented by perpetrators that transcends victimization type. Applying the language of coercive control to these tactics broadens the recognition of instances when an individual's personal freedoms are limited by another individual's exertion of control.

Keywords: coercive control, predatory tactics, victimization, professionals, interviews

The concept of coercive control (Stark, 2007) was initially developed to explain the dynamics of violence used by perpetrators against their intimate partners and has long been a primary

theory for understanding intimate partner violence (IPV; Hamberger, Larsen, & Lehrner, 2017). However, victims of child abuse, sexual violence, elder abuse, and trafficking are all subject to the same type of coercive control tactics (i.e., grooming and isolation) that draw and trap them in relationships with their perpetrators and alienate them from their support systems. Even gangs and cults recruit members using similar coercive practices. This article seeks to expand the concept of coercive control from a singular focus on IPV to a broader one based on the use of coercive control tactics that, at the most general level, could improve identification across various types of victimization. Hence, the purpose of this study was to explore the perspectives of professionals working with or on behalf of victims to derive a framework of commonly used victimization tactics.

Theory of Coercive Control

Coercive control theory draws parallels between psychological coercion techniques and the tactics used by perpetrators of abuse in intimate relationships to entrap victims, particularly women (Stark, 2007). Stark described how coercive control is founded on gender inequality and the devaluation of women that targets the victim's

This article was published Online First October 15, 2020.

✉ Jacquelynn F. Duron, School of Social Work, Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey; ✉ Laura Johnson, School of Social Work, Temple University; ✉ Gretchen L. Hoge, Department of Social Work, Lewis University; Judy L. Postmus, School of Social Work, University of Maryland.

The authors would like to acknowledge the support of Karen Zurlo who served as an expert consultant on older adults and Delaney Cronin who helped to coordinate this project and write the organizational report. This research received funding from the Department of Children and Families and Department of Human Services, State of New Jersey, under Contract 17AAMA with Rutgers University. The points of view shared in this document are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the Department of Children and Families or the Department of Human Services.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Jacquelynn F. Duron, School of Social Work, Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, 390 George Street, Suite 713, New Brunswick, NJ 08901. E-mail: jduron@ssw.rutgers.edu

sense of agency and results in a loss of freedom through domination by the perpetrator. More recently, the adaptation of coercive control in criminal law in England and Scotland has demonstrated the applicability of this framework for victims who experience these patterns of behavior perpetrated by family members or intimate partners, regardless of gender or sexual orientation (Stark & Hester, 2019). Perpetrators use tactics such as physical or sexual violence, intimidation, isolation, and undue influence to suppress an individual's freedom (Stark, 2007). Perpetrators also use grooming tactics by promising to end the abuse, seeking help for problematic behaviors, or offering gifts. Perpetrators physically and emotionally isolate victims from supportive networks of friends, family, coworkers, or helping providers to have total control (Stark, 2007). Ultimately, the tactics used create a condition of authority for the perpetrator—a sense of fear in the victim and an “invisible cage”—to perpetuate the victim's entrapment (Stark, 2007). Stark (2007) highlighted how there are similar tactics used across various types of victimization, such as isolation of victims and rituals of degradation; however, he also identified partialities central to IPV such as its frequency and direct gender entrapment that distinguish IPV from other forms of power and control.

Dutton and Goodman (2005) have also conceptualized coercive control as it relates to IPV. These authors suggested that perpetrators prime victims for coercion through four means: (a) creating the expectation of negative consequences for resistance to demands, (b) creating or exploiting the victim's vulnerabilities, (c) wearing down the victim's resistance to coercion, and (d) facilitating and exploiting emotional and other forms of victim dependency. Surveillance is also a key element for exerting control and creating fear (Dutton & Goodman, 2005).

These conceptualizations of the theory of coercive control provide an important lens for examining coercive tactics used by perpetrators of IPV that might also extend to behaviors used across different types of victimization, building on Stark's (2007) identification of commonalities between coercive control in IPV and other contexts of power and control. Coercive control is the phenomena of victimization that is grounded in relational interactions, namely, behavioral tactics, such as the use of grooming, including normalizing behaviors, and isolation as mechanisms in which perpetrators gain and maintain power over their victims. What follows is a review of such tactics used by perpetrators of other forms of abuse beyond IPV.

Grooming Tactics

Grooming techniques used by perpetrators center on establishing trust with the victim, desensitizing the victim to the abuse or exploitation they are experiencing, providing a sense of family, and romancing or buying gifts for the victim. In some cases, a perpetrator will use high pressure tactics to groom the victim.

Establishing Trust

Perpetrators groom victims by first establishing trust, which often begins with the cultivation of a relationship between the perpetrator, victim, and sometimes the victim's family (Olson, Daggs, Ellevold, & Rogers, 2007). Trust has been described as a central dynamic in cases of online relationships and cyber abuse

(Mishna, McLuckie, & Saini, 2009), and financial scams and exploitation of older adults (Langenderfer & Shimp, 2001). Traffickers also rely on the development of trust, doing so by helping victimized youth and young adults in ways they need, such as by providing shelter, food, clothing, money, personal items, or transportation (Reid, 2016).

Desensitizing the Victim

Another key tactic in the grooming of victims involves desensitization through gradual, incremental exposure to abuse or exploitation that limits victims' feelings of distress as the frequency and intensity of acts slowly increase. In cases of sexual predation, perpetrators begin by verbally and physically desensitizing youth to sexual contact (Olson et al., 2007) and using previous sexual acts as leverage for engagement in new acts (Mishna et al., 2009). Traffickers often use peers, such as friends and boyfriends, to recruit new victims and glamorize the sex trade by describing it as a smart way to make money that also demonstrates an individual's worth (Reid, 2016). Older adults may acclimate to new caregivers and surroundings, readily responding to financial requests for help (Whitty, 2013). Among cults, involvement incrementally increases through engagement in activities like bible study, thus keeping victims unaware of their increased entrapment in the group (Singer & Lalich, 1995).

Creating a Family-Like Bond

Perpetrators also provide an alternative family connection for victims. Research on gangs suggests that youth perceive membership as an escape from their own dysfunctional families (Moore & Hagedorn, 2001). Victims of online sexual predation recount engaging in cybersex or meeting for sexual encounters as a way to engage with someone who would listen to them or as a distraction from trouble at home (Mishna et al., 2009). The idea of perpetrators providing love and affection not found elsewhere has been found in research on sexual predation of youth (Olson et al., 2007) and in trafficking (Reid, 2016).

Gift Giving

Romancing and gift giving is also used to lure victims during the grooming process. “Love bombing” refers to providing a victim with extreme attention and affection, or by offering a prize in exchange for an agreement by extremist groups (Hills, 2015), sexual predators (Gilgun, 1994), or traffickers (Reid, 2016). This form of targeting and control is also used in cases of exploitation of older adults, where a perpetrator will send a small gift such as flowers hoping that the victim will then send the requested money in return (Whitty, 2013).

High-Pressure Tactics

In some situations, high-pressure tactics may be used, such as in scams where victims are lured into paying money up front for goods or services, or for a prize to be released upon receipt of “customs duties” paid by the victim (Langenderfer & Shimp, 2001). In these instances, the perpetrator skillfully focuses the victim's attention on the reward, pushing aside any concerns raised by the victim (Langenderfer & Shimp, 2001).

Isolation Techniques

Coupled with grooming tactics, isolation techniques are another signature approach involved in coercive behaviors to maintain power and control over victims. Isolation may occur in physical or mental forms and serves to keep victims away from social supports, including family and friends (Baldwin, Fehrenbacher, & Eisenman, 2015).

Physical Isolation

Perpetrators act as gatekeepers who control incoming and outgoing information, using isolation to limit victim communication with those who provide social support (Singer, 1992; Whitsett & Kent, 2003). In cults or with older adults, isolation may involve taking control over the victim's social, physical, and/or online environment, including how they spend their time (Singer & Lalach, 1995; Whitsett & Kent, 2003; Whitty, 2013). Physical isolation may also include the geographical relocation of a victim to another place away from their support networks, as in cases of trafficking (Reid, 2016). Traffickers isolate youth by checking and controlling access to cell phones and social media, and by changing phone numbers and passwords (Reid, 2016).

Mental Isolation

Mental isolation occurs when the perpetrator creates or enlarges a psychological and emotional separation between the victim and their support networks, so the perpetrator can then occupy that space (Olson et al., 2007). In trafficking situations, women have described how their traffickers limited their exposure to the outside world; traffickers would call frequently as a way to monopolize their attention (Baldwin et al., 2015). Cults may interfere with a victim's ability to accurately assess and react to their environment through control tactics such as the disparaging of members' pre-cult lives (Whitsett & Kent, 2003). Victims of elder abuse who are highly stressed and held captive may be manipulated into believing in a false version of reality beyond their confines, leading them to form bonds with and become dependent on the perpetrator for fear of the outside world (Singer, 1992).

Current literature reveals how perpetrators of various forms of abuse use multiple, often similar tactics to exert power and control over individuals. Questions remain as to which of these tactics are commonly identified by professionals working with or on behalf of victims or perpetrators from a variety of settings to inform screening efforts across a range of victimization types. This study addresses this gap by examining how coercive control is experienced across types of abuse from adolescence to adulthood. Professionals working with or on behalf of victims often have exposure to multiple narratives of coercion, allowing for greater breadth of discovery in consideration of numerous types of victimization.

Research Goal 1: To examine the perceptions of professionals working with or on behalf of victims regarding how coercive control is applied across various types of victim experiences of abuse, control, and/or exploitation.

Research Goal 2: To identify the perceptions of professionals working with or on behalf of victims regarding what common strategies are used to facilitate coercive control across various

types of victim experiences of abuse, control, and/or exploitation.

Method

This qualitative study took a phenomenological approach (Creswell, 1998) based on data collected as part of a statewide initiative to understand *predatory alienation*—a new term created by an advocacy group to describe

a person's extreme undue influence on, or coercive persuasion or psychologically damaging manipulation of another person that results in physical or emotional harm or the loss of financial assets, disrupts a parent-child relationship, leads to a deceptive or exploitative relationship, or isolates the person from family and friends. (New Jersey Senate Bill 2562: <https://legiscan.com/NJ/text/S2562/2016>)

The charge by the state was to understand common predatory practices used to victimize individuals across the life span.

The research team was composed of academic experts on child abuse, IPV, trafficking, and elder abuse who had familiarity with predatory practices particular to these subjects. All experts identified as cisgender females between the ages of early 20s and late 50s and identified as White or Latina.

Participants

The research team used agency referrals and snowball sampling to identify professionals who represented a wide variety of human service and criminal justice positions with expertise in predatory practices. A list of potential participants was created by the research team with suggestions from several state departments (e.g., child welfare, human services) from the researchers' home state. In addition to this list, at the conclusion of each interview, each professional was asked to provide the names of other possible participants.

Within the United States, social service providers most commonly work with one particular population (e.g., victims of IPV¹) as opposed to victims of coercive control more broadly. As such, we determined that the inclusion of various professional roles would best facilitate the goal of achieving a comprehensive understanding of the issue of predatory practices as it pertained to various victim types rather than specific professional role or type of victimization. Hence, criteria for participation included professional engagement in issues of predatory victimization through advocacy or direct services (e.g., human services, law enforcement, legal services). Professionals worked with a variety of victims including those experiencing child abuse, human trafficking, IPV, gang activity, elder abuse, and cultic influence. Although most professionals interacted with victims who had experienced some form of interpersonal abuse, others worked with or on behalf of individuals who had been isolated from family and friends through coercion. A few professionals, particularly those in law

¹ IPV professionals included in this study work with survivors of all types of abuse including physical, sexual, emotional, and financial, as well as stalking and dating violence, depending on what abuse experiences are presented by victims seeking services. Hence, the term IPV in this article includes all these types of abuse that are perpetrated in intimate relationships.

enforcement, also worked with perpetrators of interpersonal abuse and coercion. Some professionals had experience researching issues of coercion in addition to engaging in advocacy efforts.

The majority of professionals were over the age of 40 years (90.9%) and identified as White (86.4%). Slightly more than half of the sample was male (59.1%), and the majority held a master's degree or Ph.D., law, or medical degree (72.7%). Slightly more than half of the sample worked in a role consistent with service providers (59.1%), whereas other participants worked in law enforcement and legal services (40.9%). Service providers included direct service providers, expert consultants, and advocates. Law enforcement and legal services included professionals such as prosecutors, investigators, and lawyers serving in administrative roles. Most of the professionals worked in a nonspecific field with multiple populations (27.3%), but many also worked in the fields of trafficking and sexual abuse (22.7%). The majority of participants had been in their current professional positions for an average of 12.08 years ($SD = 9.49$).

Data Collection

The research team contacted 33 professionals via e-mail and invited them to participate in a one-time, in-depth interview on a date and at a location that was convenient for them. Of these, three declined to participate because of lack of agency permission or other reasons and eight did not respond. A total of 22 professionals participated in semistructured interviews between July and September 2017. Interviews ranged from 21 to 118 min, with an average interview completed in 56 min. The final sample size was determined by evaluating the quality of information gathered (Sandelowski, 1995), which included an evaluation of saturation of ideas and repeated descriptions (Bertaux, 1981; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Saturation was defined in terms of the discovery and stability of codes, but also in terms of a full exploration of the meaning of such codes (Hennink, Kaiser, & Marconi, 2017). Interviews were conducted in person, via phone, or over a video conferencing service. The study protocol described here was approved by the university's institutional review board.

Two research team members attended each interview, with one facilitating the interview and the other taking detailed notes on a laptop. Each interview was also audio recorded. To protect confidentiality, each participant was assigned a numeric identifier. Interview notes referred to the participant by this unique identifier and did not include any information that could be used to identify the individual. Members of the research team debriefed following each interview and then transcribed the interviews using the audio recording and notes.

To ensure that the research team accurately interpreted key themes expressed by the study participants (Krefting, 1991), member checking interviews with five of the 22 professionals were completed to gather feedback on the findings and recommendations. These five participants were selected because they each worked with a different population represented within the study. To ascertain feedback, a summary of study findings and a summary of recommendations were separately presented to the participants, who were then asked to share their impressions with a member of the research team. Findings from the member checking process were used to expand upon study findings by aiding in the interpretation of themes.

Interviews

A semistructured interview guide was developed based on an in-depth literature review of predatory behaviors using terms including predatory alienation, coercive control, and undue influence. The guide was reviewed by the team of researchers and assistants and edited for salience, comprehension, and clarity. The interview guide (see Appendix) covered the participant's understanding of predatory behaviors, professional role and experiences related to predatory victimization, identification of victims, risk factors, and common predatory tactics. Nine core areas of questioning were pursued with follow-up prompts initiated as needed. Though the team used the term "predatory alienation," most participants were unfamiliar with the term. Once defined, participants instead focused on predatory tactics used or experienced by their clients. As such, the research team also adjusted the questions to focus on generic predatory practices instead of using the term "predatory alienation." The semistructured interview guide allowed the research team to study complex phenomena guided by theory, with the flexibility to elicit descriptive information about the lived experience of participants (Galletta, 2013).

Data Analysis

A directed content analysis approach was used to code interview transcripts, using NVivo to manage the data (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Vaismoradi, Turunen, & Bondas, 2013). The directive approach was deductively informed by sensitizing concepts drawn from the literature review, such as "isolation techniques" and "grooming tactics," that acted as an initial coding scheme for the coding process. Following preparation that included reading all transcripts, a member of the research team applied the initial coding scheme to participant responses by question, but also inductively identified new codes that allowed the codebook to be expanded and refined (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). After completing the first level of analysis, the researcher compiled the codes that emerged into categories and subcategories. To enhance the rigor of the analysis, a second member of the research team then independently coded the interviews. Codes from this second level of analysis were also collapsed into categories and subcategories. The team members met to review and refine codes, coming to consensus about the codebook and then applied these codes to refine their analyses. Memos were written and discussed throughout the analysis process to manage each researcher's views of the data, assist in structuring the content, and reconcile codes. The coders then compared categories and subcategories, discussing interpretations and refining these groupings into a joint consensus version (Patton, 2002). There were no significant discrepancies in codes and categories, and differences that arose in coding were easily resolved. Member checking was then completed with a subsample of participants, such that each person represented the diversity of victim experiences including IPV, human trafficking, gangs and youth violence, cults, and elder exploitation. Notes taken during member checking were analyzed by both coders and used to refine the descriptions of emergent themes.

Findings

Interviews with professionals revealed four primary strategies exemplifying a coercive control pattern of approach and tactics

commonly used by perpetrators across abuse types and victim ages to engage individuals in exploitative relationships. These strategies are as follows: (a) identifying potential victims, (b) infiltrating lives through grooming, (c) isolating to gain control, and (d) maintaining control through any means necessary. Within each theme, we describe strategies described by professionals that globally apply across victims. Collectively, these strategies illuminate a process used by perpetrators to coercively gain and maintain control.

The findings presented here identify commonalities reported consistently, regardless of victim type. As one professional reflected, "I've worked in the domestic violence and sexual violence field for a long time and human trafficking. For everything we talk about the isolation of coercive control tactics. It's the same thing to me. It's what a perp does to control their victim." [human trafficking] If any distinctions in strategies were found by victim type, these are also presented. Quotes have been ascribed to the participant's primary area of professional engagement, such as human trafficking. A range of quotes from professionals with mixed areas of victim expertise are presented to demonstrate how commonalities were indicated across participants. Congruity in experiences described across the diversity of victimization types illustrates how coercive control applies to predatory interactions across a range of circumstances.

Identifying Potential Victims

Professionals were asked to describe what makes individuals vulnerable to perpetrators. Participants indicated that some perpetrators lure victims, whereas others target them. In this way, perpetration is a process that involves considering the potential for baiting someone and calculating the potential response to gain something. The "something" perpetrators want is oftentimes power and control over the individual; this leads the perpetrator to make demands, both of the person and their property. One participant described this motivation as "self-satisfaction out of being able to control someone else." [cults] Consistently, participants described perpetrators' gain as having someone "do certain things you want them to do" [youth] including granting access to personal finances, fulfilling sexual demands, acting as a servant, or committing crimes like stealing goods or selling drugs. Professionals across the areas of expertise noted a common vulnerability for victimization. One participant shared,

In each case the vulnerability is going to be different. But these guys do not pick on you because of your vulnerabilities. They exploit your vulnerabilities . . . the reason they target you is because of something that they want . . . that you have, not something you do not have. The vulnerability in these cases is as much defined by what people do have as it is by their weaknesses . . . and they're not selected because they are weak. [IPV]

Although global risk for perpetration exists, there are also elevated personal, interpersonal, or environmental vulnerabilities that make individuals susceptible to victimization. Professionals recounted stories of individuals who were exploited because of risk factors that included lack of family involvement or supportive systems, feelings of loneliness, social isolation, and limited options or resources. In many cases, participants indicated that the victims they served identified as female. Cultural factors, especially lan-

guage differences and legal status, could also attract the interest of predators. Although anyone is susceptible to predatory behaviors, these risk factors increased the likelihood of exposure to and experience of victimization. One participant considered how youths' desire to be part of something could be a hazard:

That dynamic is wired into your psyche for your entire life, just the playground changes . . . So I think that these master manipulators, these predators key in on it, they know that some kids are more susceptible to wanting to be . . . Some kids their desire to belong to anything is greater . . . some kids may have the tools necessary to resist. Maybe a strong family, strong religion, stronger set of friends and values so that they resist any type of lure. But there are other kids that have absolutely nothing so any group is better than no group. Any attention becomes better than no attention . . . [gangs]

Although similar vulnerabilities exist across groups, there were also some variations based on age or developmental capacity. Older adults and adolescents are often perceived to be trusting or gullible and easy to exploit. Older adults were described as having higher levels of dependency, lower levels of cognitive functioning, less mobility, or greater health issues. These vulnerabilities were identified for both elders in the community and those in institutional settings. However, one professional noted that community dwellers may face more social isolation making it "easier to disconnect them from other people." [IPV] Among adolescents and young adults, risks were also linked to greater exposure to social media, gaming, the Internet, and phone technologies that heighten perpetrator access to these youths. Participants also reported that youths' lack of cognitive and emotional maturity or experiences of developmental delays could increase risks for victimization.

Infiltrating Lives Through Grooming

Professionals described how perpetrators carefully craft relationships with victims by cultivating victim allegiance through psychological coercion. This process generally occurs over the course of weeks or months and is distinguished from single event crimes. At the core of the grooming process is gaining the victim's trust, often through fulfillment of the victim's needs and goals. These needs can be physical such as a need for money or food, relational such as a need for friendship, or aspirational such as the goal for advancement. The most common way perpetrators enact grooming is through "love bombing." Participants described this tactic as offering compliments, affection, and gifts to a victim to make them feel special. One professional described this as "flattery, but to an excessive extent." [cults] For youth it may be serving as a "Romeo . . . who will give them care and love . . . Initially, they will give them clothes, food, a place to stay, get their nails done." [human trafficking] For older adults, perpetrators may run errands for them or complete tasks they cannot do themselves.

He would bring her groceries, he would stop by and see her after work . . . he would cut the lawn for her. He would do a lot of things that she needed to do that she couldn't do herself . . . He started filling a lot of those gaps in her life. [older adults]

The gradual dependency that is established between victims and perpetrators helps perpetrators create new memories that disrupt victims' beliefs. One service provider explained,

The common one is to criticize or somehow upset or destroy the existing belief system or contacts . . . It's by destroying a connection with the people you love, oftentimes by alienating someone from their belief system, so that could be from their family or from their religious beliefs, spiritual beliefs, social beliefs, that sort of thing. . . . "well if you love me you'll stop doing that" . . . so it's the severing of ties . . . the use of guilt . . . [cults]

Incremental escalation of exploitation is another technique used that desensitizes victims. A participant who worked with victims of cults referenced this as "the foot in the door technique"² in sharing how victims may be swindled for more money after making a small charitable contribution that appeals to the victim's sense of compassion or "good" nature. In reference to gang activity, another participant reflected, "There is always an escalation of violence. They start them out with small crimes like robbery, then selling drugs, and eventually shootings." [gangs]

Professionals described the role of technology in grooming as a way of facilitating communication. Perpetrators use the Internet, chat rooms, social media, and gaming platforms to find victims, particularly for trafficking and sexual abuse. Through virtual communication, the perpetrator becomes familiar with the victim and makes increasingly larger requests. These requests intensify as entrapment progresses until a victim is convinced to meet in person. The ability of perpetrators to maintain control over a victim, even in the absence of physical restraint, was discussed by some participants: "A lot of them [victims] are 'compliant.' They are not really compliant because they don't have physical chains on them but there are psychological chains on them in order to maintain control and compliance from the victim." [human trafficking]

Isolating to Gain Control

As grooming occurs, professionals described how perpetrators begin to isolate victims from their support systems as a way of increasing dependency on the perpetrator. Isolation serves to entrap the victim in the relationship, making it difficult for the victim to leave the perpetrator.

These groups, in order to control that person, have to isolate them from everything and have to isolate them from everyone in order to have the focus on them. [cults]

Isolation from friends and family is a tactic across the board . . . taking people out of the circle of individuals that would maybe say "hey this is a red flag" or you know, do you need some support? [human trafficking]

Incrementally, perpetrators consume the victim's time with constant contact, either electronically or in person. Perpetrators begin to influence the places victims go by exerting strong opinions or demands about activities, encouraging exclusive time between the victim and perpetrator, and facilitating an expectation that the victim should seek permission from the perpetrator to engage in activities. In some situations, the perpetrator may encourage reliance of the victim on the perpetrator as the primary mode of transportation. As control becomes more pervasive, the perpetrator will restrict and monitor access to basic necessities.

[An outsider may notice that] there is usually the one person in their life that . . . it seems that they have control over their medications,

their feeding, their grooming, their toileting, their physician's appointments, and their money. [older adults]

[This control becomes] regulation of everyday life, beginning to set rules and expectations. [IPV]

Creating distance between victims and their social supports often includes restricting communication, particularly by limiting access to a mobile phone. In reference to an older adult who was victimized by a caretaker, one professional shared, "Slowly and slowly [sic] the phone calls stop coming into the house. They didn't really stop coming, they just hid the phone or turned off the ringer." [older adults] Preexisting limited social contact may accelerate a perpetrator's plans for severing ties to the victim's support systems to dominate the victim's life and promote dependency. Isolation as an essential dynamic in perpetration fosters control for whatever benefit the perpetrator desires.

The point of isolation . . . is to make you increasingly dependent to your own sense of reality. That also makes your own sense of self and self-esteem dependent on his approval . . . So, isolation is not only universal, it's devastatingly important element . . . but in itself its meaningless unless there's some other set of demands. [IPV]

These are people who are using intentional techniques to influence the target . . . sometimes to get their money or property for older people, for young people it might be for purposes of controlling them for sex, work, or prostitution. [cults]

As described by participants, perpetrator demands can include a variety of victimizing outcomes including assault, prostitution, trafficking, servitude, financial exploitation, gang activities, or cultic involvement. As isolation ensues, perpetrators will use multiple tactics to establish and retain control, including the use of violence.

Maintaining Control Through Any Means Necessary

The height of perpetrator control is often exhibited through the gradual transferring of power from the victim to the perpetrator, frequently achieved without violence, although abuse and threats may be used as necessary to retain control. Several professionals described how control is overwhelmingly an achievement of dominance—over body, thoughts, and feelings. One participant stated, "This coercive control has the cumulative effect of entrapment . . . Coercive control is control without physical boundaries. It crosses physical spaces" such that domination is achieved even when the victim is not within physical proximity of the perpetrator. [IPV] Once they cross that line where the combination of trust, isolation, and subordination are achieved and may be met with fear and shame, victims feel "like there's a point of no return, they have no other options but to stay." [youth] One participant offered this explanation:

The psychological effects we see are isolation, fear, not knowing where to turn for help. They do not want to be the victim so they may be reluctant to report things. They do not want to be looked at as stupid or senile or losing it. People are often depressed. [older adults]

²The "foot in the door technique" was coined by Freedman and Fraser (1966) to describe how individuals can be induced to engage in tasks they would rather not do.

As victims contend with their situations, potentially questioning or resisting their circumstances, perpetrators implement a variety of devices that perpetuate fear and hopelessness. The mechanisms for asserting control for extended periods may include surveilling the victim's whereabouts and engagements, withholding things and information, threatening, and manipulating. One participant described some of these mechanisms:

Physical isolation—milieu control, if someone controls the environment they control the money, they control the contacts with outside people and friends, they'll criticize the shopping, criticize the way the laundry is done and folded—they become critical and they undermine the person's self-esteem. Undermining the relationship with others by criticizing, by finding fault . . . they find the sore point. Typically, it's something that somebody has revealed to the person themselves. [cults]

There may be strong messages "to accentuate the vulnerabilities of the person. They start telling people they aren't able to do something, you can't do this, you can't leave the house, it is very dangerous out there." [older adults] Messages of praise often follow degrading remarks as a way of demonstrating benevolence. Violence may be deemed necessary when victim submission waivers and can include physical, sexual, and emotional abuse that "tends to be frequent but low level." [IPV] This repertoire of tactics is confounding for a victim. One participant explains,

A lot of people will not even define it as violence—pushing, shoving, even strangling . . . because it doesn't result in injury . . . There's intimidation. There's [sic] threats against family, children . . . What all coercive control is based on is the cost of noncompliance is greater than the cost of compliance . . . They have an exaggerated response to a minor infraction that has them walking on pins and needles . . . Once he shows that level of rage, he doesn't have to exercise it again . . . Treating you like a servant—basically commanding you to service . . . There's regulation of everyday life, setting rules and expectations . . . There are general practices of rewards and punishment . . . They create dilemmas of my way or the highway . . . They create a series of tests of loyalty . . . That has the effect of isolating you and making you more dependent. [IPV]

The various tactics are executed by perpetrators as they are needed to keep individuals isolated from others and continue the entrapment. Some tactics may serve as a consequence for disobeying such as "the actual physical perpetration of violence if they did reach out to their support circle" [human trafficking] or "being shunned, [or experiencing] unreasonable confinement." [older adults] Other tactics intensify the victim's fears by deliberate actions or lies that magnify the pressure to comply:

. . . they are quick to get them pregnant too. They are real quick because once you tie them with a baby . . . they'll start telling the girl you know this baby is part of the gang now. She/he belongs to the gang . . . They threaten her and her baby's lives. They are too afraid to speak up. The police cannot offer them real safety. [gangs]

[It's] very much emotional, some of the scams involve saying that a family member is in jail or hurt . . . they are able to be convinced and create an urgency that something has to be done quickly. They capitalize on vulnerability in mental capacity, dementia, or forgetfulness. [older adults]

Ultimately retaining control is often about "[using] a lot of emotion rather than an appeal to reason" [cults] so that there "doesn't always have to be physical abuse but the fear of being physically hurt it is more a psychological tactic." [IPV] Coercive control uses tactics to reinforce submission such that "perpetrators may even threaten to leave, and that victim begins to fear being left alone, and they are caught in a web of dependency on their perpetrator." [IPV]

Discussion

Although coercive control is frequently discussed in the field of IPV (Dutton & Goodman, 2005; Johnson, 2008; Stark, 2007), it is less often used to describe the dynamics of violence that occur across other types of abuse. The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of professionals working with or on behalf of victims to identify the approach and common predatory tactics that are the sine qua non of coercive control across various forms of abuse. Although theories on grooming tactics exist, scholarship tends to silo this knowledge according to specific types of exploitation. Findings demonstrate that there is a common pattern of predatory strategies that transcend the nuanced experiences of particular victimization types. These common patterns are part of a broader framework of coercive control that includes (a) identifying potential victims, (b) infiltrating lives through grooming, (c) isolating to gain control, and (d) maintaining control through any means necessary. Taken together, these strategies illuminate a common process used by predators to gain and maintain control over their victims. As Stark and Hester (2019) noted, coercive control can be reconceptualized as "a strategy for establishing dominance across a spectrum of relationships" (p. 98). The term coercive control applied globally to describe the process whereby an individual is gradually exploited or victimized could aid in early identification of the problem.

Notably, participants in this study suggested that as a first step in the victimization process, predators connect with potential targets to assess the opportunity for exploitation. As part of this initial selection, predators often recruit their victims deliberately based on a particular set of assets or attributes that they observe and find alluring. Essentially, victim selection involves perpetrators attempting to connect with individuals where the possibility of exerting influence to manipulate individuals' choices and behaviors exists. This is a unique finding, as most theories of coercive control discuss the mechanisms that predators use to gain and maintain power and control once they are already in a relationship with the victim, but not the initial contact. For example, Dutton and Goodman (2005) highlighted the means through which perpetrators prime their victims through coercion once a relationship has already been established. By understanding the recruitment processes used by predators, more targeted prevention efforts can be implemented. Further, participants identified several sociocultural vulnerabilities that reflect how characteristics such as ethnicity, gender, and poverty are associated with greater risk of victimization. In describing coercive control, Stark (2007) has long held that societal and cultural forces such as sexual inequality and discrimination are linked to the coercive control experience.

Following an initial introduction between a predator and an individual, a gradual infiltration process unfolds using grooming strategies and isolation techniques to engage the individual in

developing trust and fostering a relationship. Grooming is a predatory tactic that is often discussed in the context of child sexual abuse (Gilgun, 1994; Olson et al., 2007) although it has been used to describe the process in which predators establish trust with their victims in other violent contexts (Binetti, 2015; Roe-Sepowitz, Hickle, Dahlstedt, & Gallagher, 2014). Participants discussed grooming as a coercive process used by offenders to incrementally establish control by using strategies such as gift giving or love bombing (Gilgun, 1994; Hills, 2015; Reid, 2016), fostering a family connection (Moore & Hagedorn, 2001; Mishna et al., 2009; Whitty, 2013), and incremental escalation (Olson et al., 2007; Singer & Lalich, 1995). Although establishing trust (Mishna et al., 2009; Olson et al., 2007; Reid, 2016) also emerged as a key element in the coercion process, participants discussed building trust in the context of fostering dependency. Other mechanisms used to foster this dependency that were highlighted less frequently in the literature were reframing experiences and the victims' understanding of self, as well as appealing to emotion and serving as a savior. Collectively this list illustrates that predators have a toolkit of manipulative tactics that they use as they strive to gain victims' confidence and incrementally entrap them. These tactics transcend victimization type; predators tailor their grooming strategies to the unique vulnerabilities of their victims.

Consistent with previous scholarship on physical and mental isolation (Baldwin et al., 2015; Singer, 1992; Whitsett & Kent, 2003), participants discussed techniques used by predators to maintain control of victims by consuming their time and space (Singer & Lalich, 1995; Stark, 2007; Whitsett & Kent, 2003). Perpetrators dominate all aspects of victims' lives by constantly exerting their presence and slowly reducing contact with others. The disconnection between victims and essential sources of support allows perpetrators to enforce a state of complete reliance of victims on perpetrators. Further, this confinement in physical and emotional being for victims lends itself to the development of confusion, fear, and doubt about the circumstances experienced, essentially altering victims' sense of self (Stark, 2007).

Isolation allows perpetrators to escalate dependency and maintain control. Participants in this study identified ways in which perpetrators maintained control of their victims through the use of entrapment, abuse, and threats. Although there was some overlap between these and the compliance-inducing coercion strategies identified by Biderman (1957, as cited in Baldwin et al., 2015) such as degradation and threats, participants discussed threats in a more nuanced way by making distinctions in the types of threats made (i.e., threats to self vs. threats to family or threats via authority). Participants also discussed predators' use of high-pressure tactics, which sometimes involved generating a sense of urgency in a situation to elicit an immediate response from a victim. In this sense, the high-pressure tactics discussed by professionals were different in nature than those discussed by Langerferfer and Shimp (2001), which focused specifically on financial exploitation.

Taken together, these grooming and isolation strategies allow predators to gain control over their victims. The term *psychological chains* was used by one participant to describe how varied coercive control tactics, such as grooming and isolation, entrap victims. Stark (2007) used the term *invisible cage* to describe this phenomenon. Once predators succeed in gaining control over their victims, they will use any means necessary to maintain it. Coercive

control may be used in the absence of violence, along with violence, or as a precursor for later acts of violence (Johnson, 2008). In some instances, nonviolent coercive control strategies are sufficient for maintaining victim submission (Johnson, 2008; Stark & Hester, 2019). However, predators may use threats of or actual physical or sexual violence, or other tactics, to incite fear and ensure submission, particularly if victim compliance begins to waiver. These tactics may also escalate in nature over time and become more frequent, violent, or fear inducing.

Limitations

Although this study provided unique insight into how predators use coercive control tactics to maintain power across victimization types, there are several limitations that should be considered during interpretation. This study was exploratory, requiring further research to validate the findings. Because purposive sampling within one state was used, these themes may not generalize to other populations and circumstances. Although this study explores predatory practices, the information collected reflects the opinions of professionals in human service and criminal justice and not victims or perpetrators themselves. Additionally, though this study covers diversity in ages, settings, and abuse types, the literature and the data from professionals did not specifically consider the role that culture plays in coercive control. Finally, participants did not distinguish between the different types of abuse (i.e., physical, sexual, emotional, financial, stalking, or dating) under the IPV lens.

Research Implications

Future research should be expanded to include victims' experiences of and perpetrator's use of coercive control tactics. Research is needed to explore the similarities and differences for how coercive control is experienced by different cultures based on ethnicity, country of origin, gender, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation and identity, and disabilities. Although this research focused on commonly used tactics, we recognize that both wide-ranging and targeted tactics may be used to exert coercive control. Identifying the tactics commonly used to achieve coercive control can facilitate more expansive screenings by professionals that may also include screenings for specialized tactics or experiences according to the larger diversity of victimization. Future research should focus on the development and validation of a universal screening tool, which could be used by professionals to initially assess a range of common predatory tactics implemented according to a coercive control framework. Furthermore, additional research related to common tactics used across victimization types and research examining how the coercive control theory fits various situations would help to establish the concept of coercive control as a broader framework for using isolation and control to exploit an individual.

Clinical and Policy Implications

The language of coercive control (Stark, 2007) allows for broad recognition of the limitations of freedom that are pursued by perpetrators as they exert a self-claimed authority to victimize individuals. Viewing each phase of the predation process as part of

the coercive control framework has implications for practice. The use of a coercive control framework can lead to improvements in the ways in which potential victims and predators are screened and identified. Currently, a range of screening tools exist to assist with identifying signs of child abuse (Zolotor et al., 2009), IPV (Rabin, Jennings, Campbell, & Bair-Merritt, 2009), human trafficking (Bespalova, Morgan, & Coverdale, 2016), and elder abuse (Fulmer, Guadagno, Bitondo Dyer, & Connolly, 2004). Additionally, there are a number of risk assessment instruments designed to predict future violence or recidivism; however, similar to screening tools, risk assessments tend to be specific to a particular type of victimization or perpetration, and the predictive validity of such instruments varies (Campbell, French, & Gendreau, 2009; Singh, Grann, & Fazel, 2011; Yang, Wong, & Coid, 2010). Although there is value in the specificity of such tools for professionals whose aim is to identify particular types of victims, they may be impractical for professionals working in settings where several types of victims and polyvictimization are encountered, such as emergency rooms, doctors' offices, clinics, educational settings, and law enforcement agencies. It would be cumbersome to implement multiple screening tools and yet using just one may result in failure to identify other types of abuse beyond what is being screened and assessed. Given these challenges, professionals generally only screen for one risk area at a time.

As study findings suggest, predatory behaviors unfold through a series of stages that can vary widely from one victim to another. Therefore, it is possible that individuals seeking services may perceive their situations differently depending on their stage of predatory engagement and the degree of coercive control tactics used by perpetrators. In the grooming stage, for example, a victim may not yet fear their abuser, despite the fact that predatory behaviors and red flags exist. Alternatively, victims who feel entrapped in their relationships may hesitate to disclose abuse out of fear of repercussions.

Further, although there is a recognized need for professionals to collaborate as part of service provisions, organizations are often divided by type of victimization, despite the fact that many individuals experience victimization of several types. For example, a victim in a human trafficking situation may also view her trafficker as an intimate partner. Thus, there may be value in the implementation of a cross-systems approach in which professionals work across victimization type to address victims' experiences with predatory tactics. Often a barrier to this type of collaboration is that the professionals in each system use their own language and framework to describe victimization. This makes it difficult for professionals to communicate across systems. By using coercive control as the framework for understanding victimization across types and through the implementation of universal screening, professionals will be better able to communicate about victims' experiences and needs.

Use of a common term and screening effort for coercive control in combination with specific terms and screening efforts for particular types of abuse like IPV broaden the possibilities for earlier detection. Analogous to the generalist practice of completing an annual physical, a universal concept for the exploitation process with screening for such exposures could detect symptoms indicative of a bigger problem. This specific problem could then be further investigated by a specialist who explores the complexities of an individual's ordeal to prescribe an appropriate course of

treatment. Universal screening procedures, aside from a formal screening measure, might include such questions as "Within the last year have you had any encounters with an individual who has gained your trust or developed a closer relationship to you by meeting your most pressing needs, giving you gifts, or complementing you? Have you experienced feelings of being alone or separated from friends or family members? Have you had to check in regularly, been pushed by, pressured to engage in sexual activity, given money to, or done things for this person that you feel unsure about?" Questions such as these recognize the process revealed in this study's findings, which suggest that an individual may have a new person in their lives or a known person with a closer relationship who uses grooming tactics to gain trust and isolate the individual to achieve control that is maintained through a variety of strategies. Examining predation from the framework of coercive control can potentially help to destigmatize victimization. Although services often require a victim to identify with a particular form of victimization (e.g., human trafficking), using the standardized language of a coercive control framework may initially allow victims to focus on the particular predatory tactics they experienced.

A primary finding of this study was that predators use common tactics to maintain control of their victims. Although there are certain risk factors that may make an individual vulnerable to predation, professionals working with or on behalf of victims also emphasized that victimization is not a sign of individual weakness. In 2015, coercive controlling behaviors within an intimate or family relationship were made a criminal offense in England and Wales (Wiener, 2017). The recognition of coercive control as a criminal behavior validates the experiences of victims enduring these predatory practices and normalizes discussions around abusive behaviors beyond physical violence (Stark, 2018). The implementation of such a policy is not without challenges. It requires law enforcement to have a strong understanding of how to recognize coercive control within abusive relationships and use the criminal charge to build a case (Stark, 2018). However, the enactment of such a policy represents a broader shift of our understanding of coercive control from a behavioral tactic to a criminal behavior and perhaps can serve as a first step toward the development of broader policies that focus on the coercive control process.

References

- Baldwin, S. B., Fehrenbacher, A. E., & Eisenman, D. P. (2015). Psychological coercion in human trafficking. *Qualitative Health Research, 25*, 1171–1181. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1049732314557087>
- Bertaux, D. (1981). From the life-history approach to the transformation of sociological practice. In D. Bertaux (Ed.), *Biography and society: The life history approach in the social sciences* (pp. 29–45). London, United Kingdom: Sage.
- Bespalova, N., Morgan, J., & Coverdale, J. (2016). A pathway to freedom: An evaluation of screening tools for the identification of trafficking victims. *Academic Psychiatry, 40*, 124–128. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s40596-014-0245-1>
- Binetti, A. (2015). *A new frontier: Human trafficking and ISIS's recruitment of women from the west*. Washington, DC: Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security.
- Campbell, M. A., French, S., & Gendreau, P. (2009). The prediction of violence in adult offenders: A meta-analytic comparison of instruments

- and methods of assessment. *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, 36, 567–590. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0093854809333610>
- Creswell, J. W. (1998). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five traditions*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Dutton, M. A., & Goodman, L. A. (2005). Coercion in intimate partner violence: Toward a new conceptualization. *Sex Roles*, 52, 743–756. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s11199-005-4196-6>
- Freedman, J. L., & Fraser, S. C. (1966). Compliance without pressure: The foot-in-the-door technique. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 4, 195–202. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/h0023552>
- Fulmer, T., Guadagno, L., Bitondo Dyer, C., & Connolly, M. T. (2004). Progress in elder abuse screening and assessment instruments. *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society*, 52, 297–304. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1532-5415.2004.52074.x>
- Galletta, A. (2013). *Mastering the semi-structured interview and beyond: From research design to analysis and publication*. New York, NY: NYU Press. <http://dx.doi.org/10.18574/nyu9780814732939.001.0001>
- Gilgun, J. F. (1994). Avengers, conquerors, playmates, and lovers: Roles played by child sexual abuse perpetrators. *Families in Society*, 75, 467–480. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/104438949407500801>
- Hamberger, L. K., Larsen, S. E., & Lehrner, A. (2017). Coercive control in intimate partner violence. *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, 37, 1–11. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.avb.2017.08.003>
- Hennink, M. M., Kaiser, B. N., & Marconi, V. C. (2017). Code saturation versus meaning saturation: How many interviews are enough? *Qualitative Health Research*, 27, 591–608. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1049732316665344>
- Hills, C. (2015, January). Here's what ISIS recruiters and sexual predators have in common. *The World*. Retrieved from <https://www.pri.org/stories/2015-01-14/heres-what-isis-recruiters-and-sexual-predators-have-common>
- Hsieh, H. F., & Shannon, S. E. (2005). Three approaches to qualitative content analysis. *Qualitative Health Research*, 15, 1277–1288. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1049732305276687>
- Johnson, M. P. (2008). *A typology of domestic violence: Intimate terrorism, violent resistance and situational couple violence*. Lebanon, NH: Northeastern University Press.
- Krefting, L. (1991). Rigor in qualitative research: The assessment of trustworthiness. *The American Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 45, 214–222. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5014/ajot.45.3.214>
- Langenderfer, J., & Shimp, T. A. (2001). Consumer vulnerability to scams, swindles, and fraud: A new theory of visceral influences on persuasion. *Psychology and Marketing*, 18, 763–783. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/mar.1029>
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage. [http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/0147-1767\(85\)90062-8](http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/0147-1767(85)90062-8)
- Mishna, F., McLuckie, A., & Saini, M. (2009). Real-world dangers in an online reality: A qualitative study examining online relationships and cyber abuse. *Social Work Research*, 33, 107–118. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/swr/33.2.107>
- Moore, J. W., & Hagedorn, J. (2001). *Female gangs: A focus on research*. Washington, DC: U. S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.
- Olson, L. N., Daggs, J. L., Ellevoid, B. L., & Rogers, T. K. K. (2007). Entrapping the innocent: Toward a theory of child sexual predators' luring communication. *Communication Theory*, 17, 231–251. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2885.2007.00294.x>
- Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Rabin, R. F., Jennings, J. M., Campbell, J. C., & Bair-Merritt, M. H. (2009). Intimate partner violence screening tools: A systematic review. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 36, 439–445. e4. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.amepre.2009.01.024>
- Roe-Sepowitz, D. E., Hickle, K. E., Dahlstedt, J., & Gallagher, J. (2014). Victim or whore: The similarities and differences between victim's experiences of domestic violence and sex trafficking. *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment*, 24, 883–898.
- Reid, J. A. (2016). Entrapment and enmeshment schemes used by sex traffickers. *Sexual Abuse*, 28, 491–511. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1079063214544334>
- Sandelowski, M. (1995). Sample size in qualitative research. *Research in Nursing and Health*, 18, 179–183. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/nur.4770180211>
- Singer, M., & Lalich, J. (1995). *Cults in our midst*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Singer, M. T. (1992). Undue influence and written documents: Psychological aspects. *Journal of Questioned Document Examination*, 1, 2–13.
- Singh, J. P., Grann, M., & Fazel, S. (2011). A comparative study of violence risk assessment tools: A systematic review and meta-regression analysis of 68 studies involving 25,980 participants. *Clinical Psychology Review*, 31, 499–513. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.cpr.2010.11.009>
- Stark, E. (2007). *Coercive control: How men entrap women in personal life*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Stark, E. (2018). Coercive control as a framework for responding to male partner abuse in the U.K.: Opportunities and challenges. In N. Lombard (Ed.), *The Routledge handbook of gender and violence* (pp. 15–27). London, United Kingdom: Routledge. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4324/9781315612997-2>
- Stark, E., & Hester, M. (2019). Coercive control: Update and review. *Violence Against Women*, 25, 81–104. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1077801218816191>
- Vaismoradi, M., Turunen, H., & Bondas, T. (2013). Content analysis and thematic analysis: Implications for conducting a qualitative descriptive study. *Nursing and Health Sciences*, 15, 398–405. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/nhs.12048>
- Whitsett, D., & Kent, S. (2003). Cults and families. *Families in Society*, 84, 491–502. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1606/1044-3894.147>
- Whitty, M. T. (2013). The scammers persuasive techniques model: Development of a stage model to explain the online dating romance scam. *British Journal of Criminology*, 53, 665–684. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/bjcr/azt009>
- Wiener, C. (2017). Seeing what is 'invisible in plain sight': Policing coercive control. *Howard Journal of Criminal Justice*, 56, 500–515. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/hojo.12227>
- Yang, M., Wong, S. C. P., & Coid, J. (2010). The efficacy of violence prediction: A meta-analytic comparison of nine risk assessment tools. *Psychological Bulletin*, 136, 740–767. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/a0020473>
- Zolotor, A. J., Runyan, D. K., Dunne, M. P., Jain, D., Péturs, H. R., Ramirez, C., . . . Isaeva, O. (2009). ISPCAN Child Abuse Screening Tool Children's Version (ICAST-C): Instrument development and multi-national pilot testing. *Child Abuse and Neglect*, 33, 833–841. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2009.09.004>

(Appendix follows)

Appendix

Interview Guide

1. What is your understanding of predatory alienation?
 - a. How do you define the term predatory alienation?
 - b. How is this term similar to other terms you may use that describe the same phenomena? (this establishes the term used by interviewee for predatory tactics)
 - c. How have you seen this in your work?
 - d. How long have you worked with or on behalf of victims of (term used by interviewee)?
2. How long have you worked with or on behalf of victims?
 _____ Years or _____ Months
3. Have you received any specialized training for working with victims of (predatory alienation/term used by interviewee)?
 - a. How long was this training?
 - b. Who conducted the training?
 - c. What was the content of the training?
 - d. Did you find it helpful?
4. How do you recognize a victim or perpetrator of (predatory alienation/term used by interviewee)?
 - a. Are there specific predatory patterns and common tactics among perpetrators?
 - b. Are there certain risk factors among victims?
5. What is the nature of your work with victims of (predatory alienation/term used by interviewee)?
 - a. Do you provide advocacy? If so, how?
 - b. Do you assist with the investigation? If so, how?
 - c. Do you provide representation (legal or other)? If so, how?
6. How is a victim of (predatory alienation/term used by interviewee) identified among your clients?
 - a. Are they referred to you? If yes, how?
 - b. What are some barriers to identifying clients?
 - c. How would you improve identification?
 - d. Is there a specific screening process? If yes, what does the process look like?
7. How do online predators, human traffickers, con artists, gangs, cults, and other groups use (predatory alienation/term used by interviewee) to isolate young adults and senior citizens?
 - a. What are the grooming practices used to target and control young adults and senior citizens?
 - b. What are the high-pressure tactics used in scams and exploitative relationships to manipulate, control, and take advantage of senior citizens?
8. What makes young adults and senior citizens particularly vulnerable (predatory alienation/term used by interviewee)?
 - a. How can young adults and senior citizens protect themselves?
9. Do you have other feedback to provide about the investigation or advocacy provided to victims of (predatory alienation/term used by interviewee)?
 - a. What are the challenges with the current policy and process?
 - b. What are the strengths of the current policy and process?
 - c. Do you have any specific recommendations for improving service provision for victims?

Received July 29, 2019

Revision received July 27, 2020

Accepted August 11, 2020 ■

E-Mail Notification of Your Latest Issue Online!

Would you like to know when the next issue of your favorite APA journal will be available online? This service is now available to you. Sign up at <https://my.apa.org/portal/alerts/> and you will be notified by e-mail when issues of interest to you become available!