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Coercive Control in Family Law: A Decade On, Survivors Still Face Uneven Protection

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Nearly 10 years after controlling and coercive behaviour (CCB) became a criminal offence, new analysis by Woolley & Co, Solicitors reveals significant regional disparities in how many CCB offences are being charged, and what that means for family law in the courts.

CCB – which covers patterns of intimidation, isolation, and control – was introduced as a specific offence in 2015 under Section 76 of the Serious Crime Act 2015. After a clear increase in CCB charge rates year-on-year since the law change, the latest financial year has seen a marked decrease.

Woolley & Co's research, based on Office for National Statistics police-recorded crime and outcomes data, compares charging rates in 2023/24 and 2024/25 to show which police force locations are maintaining the steady incline, and which are falling behind, almost a decade on.

The 10 police forces with the largest increases in charging rates are:

Position	Police Force Name	% of Offences Charged or Summonsed (2023/24)	% of Offences Charged or Summonsed (2024/25)	Difference in %
1	Dyfed-Powys	4.05%	8.65%	4.60%
2	South Wales	10.11%	11.16%	1.05%
3	Northumbria	8.77%	9.68%	0.91%
4	West Midlands	2.00%	2.51%	0.51%
5	North Yorkshire	4.69%	4.97%	0.28%
6	Lancashire	12.14%	12.41%	0.26%
7	Lincolnshire	5.02%	5.24%	0.22%
8	Warwickshire	7.89%	7.92%	0.03%
9	Surrey	9.53%	9.45%	0.08%
10	Humberside	4.62%	4.53%	0.08%

Conversely, the research identified the 10 police forces with the largest drops in charging rates, outlined below:

Position	Police Force Name	% of Offences Charged or Summonsed (2023/24)	% of Offences Charged or Summonsed (2024/25)	Difference in %
1	City of London	7.69%	0.00%	7.69%
2	Nottinghamshire	13.33%	7.09%	6.24%
3	Wiltshire	10.26%	4.29%	5.97%
4	Cumbria	8.36%	3.27%	5.08%
5	Suffolk	10.26%	5.95%	4.32%
6	Cambridgeshire	8.59%	4.39%	4.20%
7	Derbyshire	5.48%	1.79%	3.68%
8	West Mercia	10.74%	7.44%	3.30%
9	Leicestershire	7.01%	4.07%	2.94%
10	Gloucestershire	3.78%	1.14%	2.64%

As we can see, Dyfed-Powys stands out with the steepest improvement, more than doubling its figures across the year. Larger urban forces like the West Midlands show modest gains from a low base, while others, such as Surrey and Humberside, remain static.

Contrastingly, the City of London saw the sharpest fall, dropping from 7.69% to zero, however, due to small sample sizes, swings here can be exaggerated. Nottinghamshire and Wiltshire also recorded significant declines despite previously high rates.

Kathryn McTaggart, family law solicitor and Director at leading UK law firm, Woolley & Co, Solicitors, comments, "Almost ten years on from the coercive control law, the figures highlight how uneven prosecutions remain, and for families, the same inconsistency is mirrored in the family courts.



Kathryn McTaggart

"When it comes to divorce cases, coercive control is a prevalent issue. Clients often describe years of financial restriction, emotional manipulation, or social isolation; behaviours that don't just end when the relationship does. They continue to shape how safe someone feels during separation, whether they can engage in mediation, and the tone of negotiations.

"Turning to children proceedings, courts are expected to follow Practice Direction 12J, which requires allegations of abuse to be properly investigated before contact arrangements are decided. In reality, the way this is applied varies widely. Some parents see the risks they've lived with taken seriously, while others feel it's overlooked. That inconsistency can have life-changing consequences for families.

"In financial proceedings, coercive control is frequently raised but rarely has any impact on the settlement. The law sets a very high threshold for conduct to affect the division of assets, so many survivors feel the financial consequences of abuse are simply invisible in the outcome.

"Worryingly, for some, the abuse even continues through the litigation process itself. We often see people use delay, non-disclosure, or non-compliance as ways to exert control. What should be a protective system can, without proper safeguards, become another arena in which victims feel trapped.

"These are the realities we deal with daily. Just as criminal prosecutions reveal a postcode lottery, family outcomes can vary dramatically depending on the court, the judge, and the resources available. Until coercive control is treated with consistency across all areas of family law, survivors will continue to face uneven protection."

If you're experiencing controlling or coercive behaviour, Woolley & Co offers confidential advice on protective orders, safety planning, and the legal process, alongside connections to specialist support services.

Call us on 0800 321 3832 or complete our quick online enquiry form to request a free call back.

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