

## What happened?

On the morning of July 19th 2016, a man drove to the leisure centre in Spalding with a shotgun and ammunition and waited. His wife, Claire Hart, who had recently separated from him, came out the swimming pool some while later with their 19-year old daughter Charlotte. As Claire and Charlotte walked towards their car, he confronted them both. Claire evidently saw him approaching and had raised her arms; however he shot them both at close range. Claire was struck in the abdomen and died almost immediately. He re-loaded the weapon and shot Charlotte, before again re-loading and instantly killing himself. Whilst being given first aid, Charlotte told a witness that it was her dad who had shot her. She suffered catastrophic injuries and died despite the efforts to save her.

Claire's two grown up sons knew instantly they heard media reports, that it was their mother and sister who had been shot. They have now given heartrending accounts about how their father bullied them as children and the rest of their family was harassed and oppressed on a daily basis. This man came to control every aspect of their lives including his wife's finances and movements. To the rest of the outside world all appeared fine and only occasional comments about problems were made to local doctors, when discussing medical problems and ailments.

The sons worked closely with their mother and sister to re-locate them to a house in the area and escape this abuse. At no time did anyone in the family try to seek external help, as at no time was violence used against them.

Since this tragedy, both sons have appeared on national television to tell what happened to them and their mother and sister. In doing so they hope that more people will see that what happened in this case and any similar circumstances as being a crime of Coercive and Controlling Behaviour, recently created under Section 76 of the Serious Crime Act 2015.

## What can we do now?

All professionals should make sure they know what the **new offence of coercive and controlling behaviour** involves. Just because there is no violence doesn't mean it is not Domestic Abuse

Look out for **critical risk factors** around cases of coercion. Research has shown partners at much increased risk of harm when they reveal their intention to leave a controlling or abusive partner

## What did we learn?

Despite the way this perpetrator completely dominated and oppressed the entire family, nobody in this situation thought at the time that they were victims of Domestic Abuse (DA). All in the family had a strong view that DA involved some sort of physical violence and so despite bullying, controlling and dominating every aspect of their lives, the perpetrator was not committing DA. This of course is incorrect but from within the situation, the victims did not think they could turn to others, like the police, for help.

This means it is vital for all professionals to be able to recognise the criminal cases of Coercive and Controlling and respond to them- as the victims themselves may not either see themselves as victims or be physically unable to break free.

Whenever there is a glimpse into such oppressive situations through a chance remark or a tentative disclosure, professionals must feel responsible for following up such insights to establish the true reality of the situation.

This lack of awareness is not confined to those suffering Coercive or Controlling behaviour. Most of the general public are not familiar with this form of DA and are unable to recognise it if their family, friends or work colleagues are subjected to it. There needs to be a co-ordinated awareness raising campaign particularly involving professional agencies, including medical General Practitioners and in Schools where such disclosures may be made.

Cases of Coercive Control damage families and young people to a devastating degree and the victims become an isolated, mutually supporting group. Through adopting a SLP wide definition of Coercive and Controlling behaviour, (which recognises that violence is not always a key part of the offending), - as professionals we can start to prevent future cases such as this.

Be professionally curious! GPs and others should **ask those difficult questions** if someone hints they are being controlled. Look out for signs and symptoms.

**Spread awareness** about coercive behaviour. Most times even the victims themselves- especially children- fail to recognise the situation they are in.