



Covid-19 & Domestic Abuse: Similarities between Government Policies & Actions during the Covid-19 Pandemic and Domestic Violence/Coercive Control

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Abstract

This paper will outline a model of domestic violence (DV)/coercive control (CC) which is then used to help us to understand better how the Irish government, along with most Governments in the Anglosphere, was so successful in gaining population compliance with draconian measures used in the Covid 19 pandemic.

Keywords: Domestic violence (DV), Coercive control (CC), Covid 19 pandemic

Introduction

Covid-19 (C19) first appeared in Ireland in March 2020. It was quickly followed by draconian Government regulations to prevent the spread of this virus which involved the suspension of key democratic freedoms such as freedom of movement & assembly, freedom to worship, freedom of speech and freedom to run one's home inside your own front door without Government interference. Compliance with these regulations was extremely high which demonstrated how fragile our democratic freedoms are. Indeed, many surveys showed that the Irish population (supported by the Mainstream Media – MSM) wanted even faster, longer and harsher, lockdown measures. Women's Aid reported in 2021 that there was a 40% increase in calls for help to their service following the introduction of the restrictions and they suggested that it was the Lockdown and being forced to stay in the same abode as their abuser which was responsible for this increase.

This paper will attempt to show how Irish Government policies, regulations and restrictions, unwittingly perhaps, closely mirror the dynamics of Domestic Violence (DV) and/ or Coercive Control (CC).

I shall first outline Biderman's¹ 8 principles used by perpetrators of DV/CC and then provide real-life examples which demonstrate how the Irish Government controlled and coerced the Irish people into compliance with Lockdown and other measures similar to the actions used by perpetrators in DV/CC situations, contrary perhaps to their (Government) stated intentions.²

Coercive Control

Biderman¹ outlined 8 techniques which the communist armies used to extract false confessions from captured soldiers following the Korean War in the 1950s. It is now generally accepted by professionals working the field of DV/CC that abusers in many different situations use similar methods to control their victims.³ The 8 techniques are listed below:

- Isolation
- Monopolization of perceptions
- Induced exhaustion / debilitation
- Threats
- Occasional indulgences

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- Demonstrating ‘omnipotence’ and ‘omniscience’
- Degradation
- Enforcing trivial demands

I shall outline each one with examples of how the Irish Government gained compliance from the population through each of the above techniques.

Isolation

Lockdown is the most obvious technique and involved the injunction on all of us to “Stay at Home” and not move more than 1Km (in the early days) from our homes for exercise. This was well advertised in the MSM, Radio & TV, Roadside hoardings, Road Signage on Motorways etc and enforced by Garda Road Blocks throughout the country. The second part of the message, the carrot as it were, “Save Lives” played into our deeply ingrained need to be accepted by other people. After all, who could object to saving lives? Anybody challenging this message or objecting to it was highly likely to be rejected by peer groups and the wider society.

The 2 Metre Rule was another way of forcing people to isolate from each other, as if humans were walking biohazards. The World Health Organization (WHO) only recommended 1 metre. So why was 2 metres chosen? And by whom? And on what scientific basis is 2 metres more effective at controlling the spread of C19 than 1 metre? The main purpose was to keep people apart from each other. The “espoused theory” by the Irish Government was of course trying to be seen as having the peoples’ best interests at heart - “*Doing this for your own good*”. Anyone working in the field of DV/CC will be familiar with this refrain. The “theory-in-use” was to increase compliance with the restrictions.²

Monopolization of Perceptions

This involves the control and manipulation of access to information outside the immediate environment. For the average citizen their access to information comes from their families, friends, neighbours, peer groups, co-workers and, only lastly, from Radio & TV but nowadays more likely for younger people, to be from social media (Facebook, Instagram etc). Social media and the 24/7 news cycle was dominated by Government and Public Health advertising and messages. Alternative views were censored by Big Tech companies (any opinion diverging from the Government viewpoint was labelled as “misinformation”). Social, leisure, cultural and artistic venues as well as places of worship were all closed.

Induced exhaustion/ debilitation

Humans are essentially social animals so any reduction in social contact with other people results in isolation and loneliness which in turn affects sleep patterns and physical health. This in turn, brings about exhaustion and reduced immunity, which is ironic, given that the whole rationale of lockdown was to maintain the

physical health of the nation by controlling the spread of the C19 virus.

Threats

To get the population to comply with the Lockdown, the Irish Government introduced fines for people doing the ordinary things of everyday life such as seeing friends in one’s home, walking for exercise, attending church services and funerals, dating etc. These were normal activities before the emergence of C-19 in Ireland. Suddenly, the government enacted laws and regulations to compel people to stay at home. In DV or CC, threats are a commonplace to control the victim.

Occasional indulgences

The Taoiseach (Irish Premier), Micheal Martin, in December 2020 announced that he wanted people to have a “meaningful Christmas” and so restrictions were lifted to allow families to meet over the Holiday period. This relaxation of the Lockdown rules represents the type of occasional treats or indulgences which perpetrators of DV/CC typically use to keep their victims compliant. In this way, the perp can appear benevolent and kind and keep their victim in the dynamic of the dysfunctional relationship in the long term. It can also be used by the perp to demonstrate how reasonable and kind they are if accused of any wrongdoing. The Lockdown restrictions were criticized by some senior civil servants as being too lenient and immediately after the Holiday period was over, the Lockdown restrictions were re-imposed as severely as before.

Demonstrating ‘omnipotence’/ ‘omniscience’

The objective of demonstrating omnipotence is to inculcate the futility of resistance and to show complete control over the victim. This was achieved using the “omnipotence/omniscience” of science – by claiming the medical and scientific authority for Lockdown the Irish Government could, and did, argue that they were only “following the science”. Basic human instincts and needs such as hand-shakes, hugs and other physical, friendly contacts were denigrated in the interest of “Flattening the curve”.

Degradation

The purpose of degradation is to make the cost of resistance higher than the cost of capitulation using demeaning punishments, insults and denial of agency. This was especially so in relation to the wearing of masks (or “face coverings” in government speak). This was achieved by shaming anyone who refused to wear a mask despite any scientific or empirical evidence for their effectiveness in preventing the spread of C19 or catching it. On March 8th 2020, Dr Anthony Fauci in the US declared “**People should not be walking around with masks**”.⁴ On December 1st 2019 the World Health Organization (WHO) said “*At present there is only limited and inconsistent scientific evidence to support the effectiveness of*

masking healthy people in the community to prevent the infection with respiratory viruses including C19".⁵ And yet by the summer of 2020 masks were made compulsory in most public places and anyone who objected to the wearing of masks was subjected to ridicule and refused entry to shops, hospitals, restaurants etc such that not to wear a mask meant that one could not live one's normal life fully.

Enforcing trivial demands

Enforcing trivial demands and minute rules develops the habit of compliance in the victim of DV/CC. Standing on yellow dots on the ground in shops and public spaces is one such minute rule as is following irrational rules such as entering a restaurant wearing a mask, removing the mask when you sit down and then putting it back on if you go to the toilet. These demands build up compliance with the social control regime which the government enforced over the period of the lockdown and many people are still following them today even after the need for such rules is redundant.

Discussion and Conclusion

This paper has outlined a model of DV/CC based on Biderman's¹ research following the Korean War in which prisoners displayed all the manifestations of what we now call victims of DV/CC. This model is useful in helping us to understand how the Irish government, and indeed governments throughout the Western democratic world (with the notable exception of Sweden), controlled and compelled their populations to obey government diktats never before seen in peacetime. Even peaceful demonstrations in many different countries against various aspects of the C19 pandemic response (Lockdowns, mandated vaccines etc) were met with brutal police

tactics using baton charges, water cannon and tear gas in the UK, Australia, the Netherlands, Canada etc.

As we are now, apparently, out the other side of the C19 pandemic, there is no reason for complacency that such methods won't be adopted again. Already there are calls to use fear as a driver for climate change policies.⁶

Thus it would appear that old adage is still true: "The price of Democracy is Eternal Vigilance"

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Conflict of Interest

Regarding the publication of this article, the author declares that he has no conflict of interest.

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