

How Abusers Use Children to Control Their Partner

Threatening to or actually taking away the children is one way that abusers can exert control over the children's mothers.

"He threatened if I left, if I went anywhere...and if he didn't know where I was, he'd take the children and put them somewhere and I wouldn't know where they were. So I was scared in every way and brainwashed so much that I didn't do anything or say anything. I just kept my mouth shut."

Threats to harm or kill the children are a form of emotional abuse that abusers may use to control their spouses.

"There were times when he literally destroyed the house and I'd have to clean it up or he'd hurt the children."

Abusers may also use direct violence towards children as a way to control their spouses.

"[I]f I wouldn't behave he'd punish the children and the only way to stop that was for me to stand in front of his fists and take it. And if he couldn't control the children, he'd punch me. There were times that he would discipline the children, and his way of doing that was he would threaten to kill them and he would demonstrate on the pets as to how he would do that."

When an abusive relationship has ended, abusers may attempt to exercise control over their former partner through the children, whom he may have more access to.

"[He] had custody of the children every second weekend, but they didn't want to go with him...[The children] were crying and not wanting to go with their father. They were terrified without me there to protect them. And Child Protection knew who I was dealing with!"

It is important to note that in homes where woman abuse is occurring, children are at an increased risk of physical and sexual abuse by the abuser of their mother.¹

1. □ Suderman and Jaffe, *A Handbook for Health and Social Service Providers and Educators on Children Exposed to Woman Abuse/Family Violence*, Minister of Public Works and Government Services Canada, 1999, pg. 2

"When he saw that he did not have the power or the hold over my thoughts or actions and beliefs that he once did, he started turning away from being rude and obnoxious to me, to turning it to the children. And if I did not comply to something that he wished or wanted or demanded, he'd start screaming, yelling, raising his hands to the children, starting to terrify them at the ages of 4 and 5."

Woman Abuse and the PEI Justice System Research Team

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The quotes in this document are from PEI women interviewed in 1999 during herStory of woman abuse and the PEI justice system, a project of the Woman Abuse and the PEI Justice System Research Team of the Muriel McQueen Fergusson Centre for Family Violence Research.