lejacie

A PLAIN-LANGUAGE RESEARCH SUMMARY

Leaving did not always end the control

A plain-language summary of research on abuse after separation and experiences of the family-law system.

INDEPENDENT SUMMARY BY LEJACIE · PLAIN-LANGUAGE RESEARCH SUMMARY · DRAFT 2 · NOVEMBER 2026

THIS SUMMARY IS FOR YOU IF

- You want to know what one published study found, in plain words
- You work with people going through separation or family-law proceedings
- You have been through separation yourself and want to understand the research
- You want to know what the study can, and cannot, tell us

HOW TO USE IT

- Read the six questions in order; each one is short
- The main takeaway is on the last page
- [1] refers to the article, cited in full at the end
- It explains the study; it does not assess individual circumstances or provide legal advice

Part of the post-separation coercive control collection: a plain-language summary, a practice brief, a team activity and a policy brief, all developed from one published study.

Draft 2, 4 November 2026. Plain-language summary prepared by Lejacie. This is an independent summary, not a resource commissioned or endorsed by the researchers. It explains the study; it does not assess individual circumstances or provide legal advice. Study: Meyer, Reeves, Walklate, Fitz-Gibbon and Chalmers, Experiences of Post-Separation Coercive Control, Violence Against Women, 2026.

PLAIN-LANGUAGE RESEARCH SUMMARY · INDEPENDENT SUMMARY BY LEJACIE

Leaving did not always end the control

A plain-language summary of research on abuse after separation and experiences of the family-law system.

For women in this study, separation did not necessarily bring freedom from abuse. Some described former partners using legal proceedings to continue controlling them. Others described a costly, lengthy process that drained the resources they needed to build a safer life. The study's central message is that **safety** involves more than leaving a relationship. Financial security, emotional wellbeing and the ability to participate in legal proceedings also matter [1]. [1] refers to the article, cited in full at the end.

14 women

Whose accounts of financial harm connected with coercive control, separation and family-law involvement were analysed [1]

2021 to 2026

Information collected in 2021 through six written survey responses and eight interviews; article published in 2026 [1]

3 patterns

The financial cost of seeking safety, costs beyond legal bills, and former partners reported to use the process deliberately [1]

1 What did the researchers want to understand?

The researchers explored how women experienced coercive control after separation, particularly during Australian family-law proceedings about children and property.

Coercive control means a pattern of behaviour used to dominate another person and restrict their independence. It can include threats, intimidation, monitoring, isolation and control over money. It does not have to involve physical violence [1].

The study focused on financial harm and the use of legal processes to continue abuse. The article calls this "litigation abuse": using proceedings or related activities as a way to harass, control or exhaust someone [1].

2 How was the study done?

The researchers analysed accounts from 14 women who described financial harm connected with coercive control, separation and family-law involvement. Six accounts came from written survey responses and eight from interviews. These were selected from a larger Australian study of people who had experienced coercive control. The information was collected in 2021; this article was published in 2026 [1].

Researchers looked for recurring patterns across the accounts. This kind of research helps explain how people experience something and how it unfolds. It does not measure how common those experiences are across the population.

3 What did the women describe?

1. Seeking safety could come at a substantial financial cost

Women described spending savings, using assets or borrowing from family and friends to pay for legal help. Some had previously been financially secure.

For some, obtaining arrangements they considered safer for themselves or their children required years of proceedings. Even where they achieved an outcome they wanted, the cost could leave them in debt or with fewer resources for housing and rebuilding their lives [1].

2. The costs went beyond legal bills

Women described proceedings affecting their health, employment and ability to recover financially. Repeated appointments, preparation and court involvement took time away from work and other responsibilities. Some reported disrupted careers, difficulty returning to work and severe emotional exhaustion.

Some said they could no longer afford, or emotionally endure, continuing to pursue the outcome they had wanted [1].

3. Some former partners were reported to use the process deliberately

Some women said their former partners had threatened to leave them with nothing or drag out proceedings. They described conduct such as repeated litigation, excessive correspondence and delayed responses that they experienced as increasing costs and prolonging control.

For these women, the legal process did not feel separate from the abuse. It became another setting in which it continued [1].

4 Was the problem only the former partner's behaviour?

No. Some women also described legal processes and professional responses that failed to recognise or interrupt what was happening.

The researchers distinguish between deliberate tactics by former partners and features of the system that could enable or worsen the harm. Long proceedings, high costs and unequal access to legal resources could leave women at a disadvantage, whether or not every expense or delay was deliberately caused [1].

The study therefore raises questions about the system's own responsibilities, not just whether an individual woman can keep managing its demands.

5 What do the researchers say needs to change?

The authors call for [1]:

- Better recognition of coercive control after separation, including financial and litigation abuse.
- More specialised education for people working across the family-law system.
- Greater attention to the cumulative financial and emotional effects of proceedings.
- More accessible and affordable legal assistance.
- Responses that support women's and children's longer-term safety and recovery.

These are implications and recommendations drawn from the research. The study did not test whether a particular training programme, legal intervention or service model improves outcomes.

6 What can, and can't, this study tell us?

The accounts provide detailed insight into the experiences of these 14 women. They do not represent every person who separates or uses the family-law system.
Important limits include [1]:

- Participants were selected because their accounts concerned the experiences being studied.
- Most were white, and many had university qualifications.
- Written responses and interviews provided different levels of detail.
- The analysis draws on women's reported experiences, not an independent investigation of every event described.
- The data were collected in 2021, so the study does not by itself establish how current procedures operate.
- It cannot tell us how often litigation abuse occurs, or determine whether it is happening in a particular matter.

The authors identify a need for research with more diverse participants, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, culturally and linguistically diverse women, LGBTQI+ people and women with disabilities [1].

THE MAIN TAKEAWAY

Depletion was not a background difficulty

For these women, financial and emotional depletion were not simply background difficulties. They affected whether they could continue participating in proceedings and pursue the safety and security they wanted.

Understanding their experiences requires looking at the whole pattern: the history of control, what happened after separation, how proceedings unfolded and what those processes cost over time [1].

ABOUT THE STUDY AND THIS SUMMARY

ITEM	DETAIL
Study	Experiences of Post-Separation Coercive Control: Family Law-Involved Victim-Survivors' Perspectives on Coercion, Litigation Abuse and Financial Impacts.
Authors	Silke Meyer, Ellen Reeves, Sandra Walklate, Kate Fitz-Gibbon and Jaclyn Chalmers.
Published in	Violence Against Women, 2026. DOI: 10.1177/10778012261484130.
Source [1]	The article above.
Summary by	Chami Rupasinghe · Admitted Australian lawyer (non-practising) · Founder, Lejacie.

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VERSION

Draft 2, 4 November 2026: the Draft 1 content of 22 October 2026, set in Lejacie's current design. Independent summary by Lejacie. Not commissioned or endorsed by the researchers. Not legal advice.

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