

Controlling behaviours and help-seeking for family violence – NZCVS Cycle 4 in-depth module FAQs

How often do people experience controlling behaviour?

Thirteen percent of respondents, an estimated 500,000 adults, reported experiencing at least one specific act of controlling behaviour perpetrated by their partner, ex-partner or other family/whānau member in the previous 12 months.

How harmful is controlling behaviour?

Eighteen percent of the respondents, an estimated 700,000 adults, reported experiencing harm as a consequence of some form of controlling behaviour by a partner, ex-partner or other family/whānau member in the previous 12 months. The most common type of harm reported was 'being made to feel ashamed or bad', which was experienced by 11% of respondents.

Which demographic groups were more likely to experience harm and acts of controlling behaviours?

People who are young (15-29 years), Māori, bisexual or disabled are more likely to experience controlling behaviour and harm because of controlling behaviours. Māori females were significantly more likely to experience harm because of controlling behaviour by family or whānau members than Māori males. Females were significantly more likely than males to experience anger, tears, loss of confidence, anxiety, depression, difficulty sleeping, fear and shock as a result of harm because of a family or whānau members behaviour.

Is the number of people experiencing controlling behaviour increasing or decreasing over time?

This was the first time when the NZCVS included questions about controlling behaviour, so we don't know if it is changing over time yet. Further reports will allow to analyse if the number of people experiencing controlling behaviour increasing or decreasing over time.

Why is it important to look at help-seeking for family or whānau violence?

Understanding who is seeking help, and what kind, is necessary to address gaps in the family violence response system. Results from the survey can provide a basic understanding of who is accessing help, and whether that help is local in their families and communities or via formal services. The survey also illuminates the cohort of people that are not accessing any support for family violence, which allows Government and the wider sector to investigate how to support these people to improve their safety and wellbeing.

What aspects of help-seeking does the report look at?

The report explores help-seeking for different patterns of violence experienced by respondents (e.g., whether an offence was experienced alongside controlling behaviours), what the demographics of help-seekers are, where victims are going for help (such as family or whānau or formal support services) and reasons for not seeking help. In addition, the demographics of people who sought help from family, whānau, friends or neighbours were investigated to understand any trends in this group.

What data was used for this report?

The data is from Cycle 4 of the New Zealand Crime and Victims Survey (NZCVS) (2020/21). Cycle 4 interviewed 6,244 New Zealanders over the age of 15. Respondents were asked about their experience of crime during the previous 12 months. In addition to questions on offences, respondents answered questions relating to harm from a family or whānau members behaviour and any experiences of specific acts of controlling behaviour by family or whānau members.

What offences are included when we refer to “offences by family members”?

Offences by family members are defined as offences perpetrated by partners, ex-partners and other family members (such as parents, siblings, step-parents and other extended family). These include property damage (personal and household), robbery, sexual assault, other assault and harassment and threatening behaviour.

What acts of controlling behaviour were specified in the questionnaire?

Respondents were asked how often a partner, ex-partner or family or whānau member had done any of the following acts of controlling behaviour, in the last 12 months:

- Kept track of where you went, or who you spent time with
- Monitored or restricted your access to your phone, the Internet, transport, etc.
- Made it difficult for you or your children to get healthcare or medication
- Pressured you into work or study, or pressured you not to work or study
- Monitored or controlled your money, or pressured you to take on debt, or sign legal documents
- Made it difficult to access or use birth control or contraception
- Forced you to use alcohol or drugs, or to use more than you wanted to
- Threatened legal action unless you did what they wanted

Respondents could select “all of the time”, “most of the time”, “some of the time”, “a little of the time”, “none of the time” or “don’t wish to answer”.

What harms from controlling behaviour are included in the questionnaire?

Respondents were asked how often they have experienced the following because of how a partner, ex-partner or family or whānau member had behaved or how they thought they may react, in the last 12 months:

- Changed your routine, behaviour, or appearance
- Were unable to contact family, whānau or friends
- Felt ashamed or bad about yourself
- Felt your spiritual power / mana was stamped on, or your spirituality / wairua was attacked
- Worried about your own safety or wellbeing
- Worried about the safety of your child or dependents
- Worried about the safety of a pet
- Feared false accusations could lead you to lose contact with your children
- Feared damage to your reputation, or the reputation of your family or whānau

Respondents could select “all of the time”, “most of the time”, “some of the time”, “a little of the time”, “none of the time”, “don’t wish to answer” or “not applicable” if this was not applicable to the respondent.