

Factsheet Intimate Terrorism



Intimate terrorism often goes unrecognized. The purpose of this factsheet¹ is to explain the scope of intimate terrorism to a wide audience of professionals in the domain of care, safety, but also, for example, education and sports clubs.



What is intimate terrorism?

Intimate terrorism is a serious form of violence between intimate partners and is characterized by a pattern of control and coercion. This can manifest itself in isolating, humiliating, and intimidating the partner into serious physical and sexual violence. It may also involve control of finances and threats (against the victim, children, or pets). Research shows that intimate terrorism is mainly – but not exclusively – perpetrated by men. It is a process in which dependence is increased and resilience is undermined.

There is a continuous threat, as a result of which the victim lives in fear, and which also affects the children. Intimate terrorism is not just about behavior, but also about a continuous process in which personal rights and freedom are infringed upon.

Intimate terrorism can start subtly and has a gradual course, so cooperation is needed to recognize the problem. Intimate terrorism carries a high risk of physical and psychological damage which could even lead to death.

What do you need to know?

- Women, men, and children can be victims of intimate terrorism. Know that gender plays a role in coercion and control: women are more often victims.
- Intimate terrorism happens in all layers of society.
- Do not be guided by first impressions and your own preferences. In intimate terrorism, one person involved may appear calm and pleasant, the other confused and erratic.
- Intimate terrorism is one-sided but can be accompanied by resistance by the victim. When it comes to violence by both partners, it's important not to automatically assume: "Where two fight, two are to blame".
- Intimate terrorism does not always have to be accompanied by physical violence.
- The impact on children is huge. In intimate terrorism, children themselves are often belittled, forced or controlled by the perpetrator.



What should or shouldn't you do?

- Speak separately with those involved and ask follow-up questions about the facts.
- Discuss the situation and the next steps with the children.
- Consult the link for useful questions to ask:
<https://gezinsprofielen.augeo.nl/augeo-special-gezinsprofielen/goede-screening-en-analyse>
- Discuss the insecurity with the victim. Check the red flags and ask about the risk of escalation of violence.
- Take the victim seriously, the victim's fear is an important signal.
- In case of acute unsafety: priority = safety!
- Also have a conversation with the perpetrator, this can have a de-escalating effect.
- When they want to stop, express your concern and ask if you can keep in touch.
- Make concrete and feasible agreements about follow-up steps.
- Do not make promises you cannot keep.
- Involve other professionals.
- Involve the social context: your own network, fellow sufferers, the local team.



If acute insecurity is established: contact Veilig Thuis or the Police

¹ This fact sheet has been developed on behalf of the 'There is no place for violence' program and was produced in part with the support of Anne Groenen (Resilient People Expertise Centre), Katinka Lünemann (Verwey-Jonker Institute), Sander van Arum (Civil Care Foundation), Gerda de Groot (Fier), Heleen Sillekens (Sterk Huis), Pascale Franck (EFJCA) and Gerriane Rozema (Sterk Huis).



Which red flags can indicate an escalation of violence or even a fatal outcome, even in the case of intimate terrorism?

- Stalking
- Death threats (towards the victim or the children or threat of suicide)
- Possession or use of weapons
- Recent violent behavior
- Violence during pregnancy
- Non-consensual sex
- Refrain from care that poses an acute threat to health
- Attempted strangulation, suffocation or drowning
- Extreme fear in the victim that her life or that of the children is in danger
- The victim does not dare to speak when the partner is near and/or shows signs of fear of the partner
- Increasing escalation of severity and/or frequency of violence

Several studies have confirmed that the motive for the partner killing often turns out to be a fear of being abandoned by the victim. This fear is followed by seeing the victim as 'their property'. These red flags are especially important to recognize in combination with additional factors: personality problems, possessiveness and control, jealousy as an expression of possessiveness, substance use (drink and drugs) and stress factors such as: unemployment/financial stress/psychological stress.

A red flag = acute insecurity.

This means prioritizing safety & protection in collaboration with Veilig Thuis and Police.

Characteristics

In case of intimate terrorism, the characteristics often occur in combination:



1. Speeding up the Honeymoon Phase & Isolating

At the start of the relationship, an attempt is made to win over the victims and tempt them to move in together or get married. Controlling partners will try to cut off their partner from friends and family or limit contact with them so that they do not get the support they need, for example by:

- Suggesting a shared phone and social media accounts for convenience.
- Cutting off contact with the family.
- Giving false information or making up lies about the partner to others.
- Monitoring all phone conversations with family and friends and hanging up if someone tries to intervene.
- Convincing the partner that her family does not care about her and does not want to talk to her.
- Blocking social media channels and deleting accounts.



2. Activity monitoring & digital terror

Compulsive control can also manifest itself in:

- Equipping the house (this might include bedroom and bathroom) with cameras or recording equipment.
- Sometimes using two-way surveillance to speak to the partner at home during the day.
- Tracking devices on mobile phone or in car, for example to determine location, with or without the partner's knowledge.
- Shaming on social media, and openly or secretly looking at search behavior on the internet, emails and social media (for example, there are apps that you can use to hack into WhatsApp anonymously or catfishing (where one partner creates a false profile in order to accuse the other of infidelity).
- The central message is to point out that perpetrator fully controls the victim. Humiliation thus becomes part of what is already a clear violation of their boundary.

3. Limit/deny autonomy and increase dependency

This can manifest itself in:



Restricting freedom of movement:

- Not allowing the partner to go to work or school.
- Limiting access to transport.
- Tracking all movements outdoors.
- Gaining access to the partner's mobile phone and passwords, for example.

It can also manifest itself in total control over activities in the home situation, ranging from the time of dinner to the way in which toilet paper should be hung.



Reinforcing traditional gender roles

By sharply distinguishing between the male-female roles in the relationship, a claim to breadwinnership can be made to force the partner to take care of cleaning, cooking and childcare.



Financial control

Controlling finances is a way of limiting one's freedom and ability to leave the relationship.

Financial control can be done by:

- Making little money available, barely enough for essential things, such as food or clothing.
- Restricting access to bank accounts.
- Hiding financial resources.
- Preventing the partner from having debit or credit cards.
- Closely monitoring expenditure.



Control over health and body

Coercive control may also apply to how much the partner eats or sleeps, or how much time they spend in the bathroom. For example, the partner may be required to count calories after each meal or adhere to a strict exercise regimen or restricted in which – or how much – medication may be taken. Partner may be required to take medication for a non-existent disorder or be restricted in seeing a doctor.



4. Psychological manipulation (gaslighting)

The perpetrator is out to mentally disrupt the victim. The perpetrator tries to achieve this by creating doubts in the victim's own conscience. The perpetrator will deny reality outright or will claim the exact opposite of statements he made earlier. They will manipulate, lie to get their way, and convince you that you are wrong.



Cursing, humiliating, and criticizing

Malicious comments, curse words and frequent criticism are all forms of bullying aimed at undermining self-confidence. As a result, the victim has the experience of feeling unimportant and not being good enough.



6. Jealousy and blackmail

Jealousy can be an expression of coercive control. For example, complaining about the amount of time spent with family and friends, both online and offline. This is a way of reducing and minimizing contact with the outside world, by making the victim feel guilty. The perpetrator can also blackmail their partner to control their actions.



7. Turning children against the partner (parental alienation)

A perpetrator of intimate terrorism may turn the children against his partner by telling them that the other is a bad parent or by belittling the partner in front of the children, which can increase the victim's feeling of powerlessness.



8. Using or setting up third parties against the partner & deception

- Bystanders, family, and friends are being manipulated into taking actions against the partner like spreading rumours and gossip, rejecting or shaming the partner. They can also be used to get back into contact with the partner.
- By means of lawsuits, (false) reports to Veilig Thuis or the police, influencing the general practitioner, school doctor, coach or teacher or school board, neighbours, work environment...



9. Sexual compulsion

This can manifest itself in, for example, demands made on the frequency of sex or in actions during sex. For example, they may be compelled to take sexual photos or videos or asked not to wear a condom. The partners receive the message that they must conform to their partner's requirements and wishes, otherwise, this could lead to major abuse.



10. Threatening to commit suicide or threatening children or pets

If physical, emotional, or financial threats do not work well enough, an attempt can be made to control the partner by using suicide and threatening children or pets. For example, by:

- Threatening to harm oneself.
- Making violent threats against the children.
- Threatening to call in child protection services to deceitfully report partner allegedly neglecting or abusing children. Intimidating the partner by threatening to make important decisions about the children without their consent.
- Threatening to kidnap or kill the children.
- Threatening to dispose of or harm the pet.

Be aware: intimate terrorism – often – does not stop when the relationship ends!

After the relationship has ended, abuse can continue through, for example, stalking or the use of many legal procedures. It is often the ending of the relationship that leads to escalation!

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The national program
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