

# Coercive control linked with murder and detection avoidance

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Men who use coercive control are more likely to kill their partner and extend their control to conceal her murder as a suicide or accident.

QUT criminologists Dr. Claire Ferguson and Dr. Freya McLachlan, from QUT's School of Justice, investigated why and how so many intimate partner femicide (IPF) offenders attempted to conceal the murder and avoid detection.

Their findings give insight to investigators for combatting perpetrators' head start given their tendency to plan, foreshadow their innocence and to prime witnesses beforehand. The article "Continuing Coercive Control After Intimate Partner Femicide: The Role of Detection Avoidance and Concealment" was published in *Feminist Criminology*.

"We conducted a collective case study to compare the control tactics used by offenders to capitalize on the victim's vulnerabilities during their relationships with the tactics used surrounding concealed IPF," Dr. Ferguson said.

"The picture that emerged was that IPF concealers are calculating, domineering, goal-directed and deliberate—'expert' [coercive control](#) (CC) offenders.

"We found IPF perpetrators appear to use concealment and the same types of control tactics they used in the relationship to dominate the narrative surrounding their partner's death, to control shared property and children, terrorize the victim's family, and remain unaccountable.

"If a woman tries to leave a controlling partner, killing her may become preferable to separation because when she has no voice, he can retell the story of their relationship and use the way she died as evidence of his version.

"For example, her supposed suicide is used to suggest she was troubled all along and made up complaints about him.

"In other words, IPF and concealment are part of a much broader controlling behavior pattern."

Dr. Ferguson said they looked at coercive control tactics in five case studies of IPF perpetrators who attempted concealment of the murder, by making it appear as an accident, suicide or missing person.

"For example, taking just one form of coercive control, [emotional abuse](#), an expert coercive controller works to belittle her, make her reliant upon him, make her feel bad about herself, or think that she is crazy," she said.

"After her death, he exerts control over the narrative by continuing to undermine her in the same way, claiming the death was an accident or suicide and resulted from her being depressed, crazy, suicidal, drunk, drugged, or clumsy.

"Gerard Baden-Clay attempted concealment by claiming his wife was depressed and had just walked out; in the relationship he was found to have put Allison down, monitored whom she talked to, blamed her for his abusive behavior and hidden their finances.

"Post-homicide he used the care of his children as an alibi, implied the death was her fault, denied previous abuse, portrayed himself as a devoted dad, but then also delayed her estate going to their children."

Dr. Ferguson said the study shed new light on the links between IPF and detection avoidance by the perpetrator and the red flags for prevention or uncovering the concealment in the death investigation.

"One of the most notable findings is that perpetrators may leak signs of their plan for concealment such as threatening homicide and how they would conceal it, how they would dispose of the body or make it look

like a suicide to avoid being held accountable.

"These threats can assist with controlling the woman in the relationship, but they might then also be acted upon later.

"Other behaviors, such as falsely reporting [mental health issues](#) or suicidality to family and friends in the live victim may also point to an offender's intentions."

**More information:** Claire Ferguson et al, Continuing Coercive Control After Intimate Partner Femicide: The Role of Detection Avoidance and Concealment, *Feminist Criminology* (2023). [DOI: 10.1177/15570851231189531](#)

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