



This guide focuses on reproductive coercion and abuse (RCA) that occurs in intimate partner relationships.

However it's important to know that reproductive coercion can occur in other relationships. Reproductive coercion can also be perpetrated by other family members such as parents, carers or by health providers¹ as well as institutions.²

The most difficult thing about the termination was not the procedure itself, but that it definitely exacerbated the violence in the relationship. I did feel let down that health services didn't pick up on what I'm quite sure were obvious red flags.³

What is Reproductive Coercion and Abuse (RCA)?

RCA is any deliberate attempt to control a person's reproductive choices or interfere with their reproductive autonomy.⁴ RCA can be focussed on preventing/ending a pregnancy or promoting a pregnancy.

RCA is a form of gendered violence. It is most commonly perpetrated against women and people who can become pregnant, by a male current or former intimate partner.⁵

RCA often co-occurs with other forms of intimate partner violence. It may be one tactic used as part of a broader pattern of controlling behaviours or can present as a distinct type of abuse that is focused on controlling or preventing pregnancy.⁶

Patients who live with multiple forms of disadvantage can face "cumulative and amplified" risks of reproductive coercion.⁷

How common is RCA?

It is difficult to estimate the incidence of RCA due to a lack of population-based research and inconsistency in how RCA is measured.⁸ One Australian study involving more than 5000 clients of two large pregnancy counselling providers identified 15% of clients had experienced RCA.⁹ Forthcoming data from the Australian Study of Health and Relationships¹⁰ found that women between ages 16-69:

- **3.9%** had experienced contraceptive interference
- **2.7%** had experienced forced sterilisation or contraception
- **4.9%** had experienced forced abortion
- **1.9%** forced pregnancy

What does RCA look like in practice?

RCA can take many forms and can be explicit or more subtle or covert. RCA may involve acts of physical or sexual violence, but it is important to understand that it is often experienced as subtle forms of pressure that may involve deception and social, cultural, spiritual and emotional/psychological abuse.

Some examples¹¹ of subtle forms of pressure may include:

- *Hiding or tampering with contraception*
- *Threatening to abandon, isolate or publicly shame the person if they continue/end a pregnancy (for example, saying things like 'if you don't get rid of it, I will leave you')*
- *Withholding money for contraception or abortion*
- *Undermining someone's parenting ability to pressure for an abortion*
- *Pressuring for abortion due to cultural or religious stigma around pregnancy outside of marriage*
- *Pressuring for sterilisation (for example, women with disabilities) through legal or institutional mechanisms*
- *Exploiting immigration, residency or legal status to pressure for a pregnancy or an abortion*
- *Applying emotional pressure and guilt to the person to end a pregnancy (for example, 'how could you do this to me, you're being selfish')*
- *Applying emotional pressure and guilt to the person to become pregnant or continue an unwanted pregnancy (for example saying things like 'you know I want to be a dad; you're taking it away from me')*
- *Applying pressure to become pregnant through manipulative tactics to reduce the risk of the person ending the relationship and increase relationship 'entrapment'.*

These experiences cause significant harm. The absence of physical or sexual violence does not mean that the patient is safe from further violence or abuse.

Identifying RCA leads to better health outcomes

The 10 year longitudinal [Turnaway Study](#)¹² in the United States found that 95% of people who were able to access abortion rather than forced to continue an unwanted pregnancy – reported five years later that it was the right decision for them.

Those forced to continue a pregnancy when they wanted an abortion were more likely to experience increased anxiety, poor physical health including gestational hypertension and chronic pain, and to remain tied to an abusive partner.

General practice settings can create a safe space for disclosure

General practice plays a key role in delivering Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) care to patients in Australia.

General practitioners along with practice nurses and midwives, deliver holistic care and are in a unique position to support women experiencing RCA.¹³ Such practitioners can develop the trusting relationships that facilitate disclosures of RCA and other forms of violence and abuse.¹⁴

There are significant barriers to disclosure of RCA in healthcare settings. Clinicians can address these barriers by proactively creating a safe, confidential and non-judgemental environment for discussing reproductive choices.¹⁵

Establishing a safe, confidential environment for disclosing RCA can be more difficult via telehealth.¹⁶



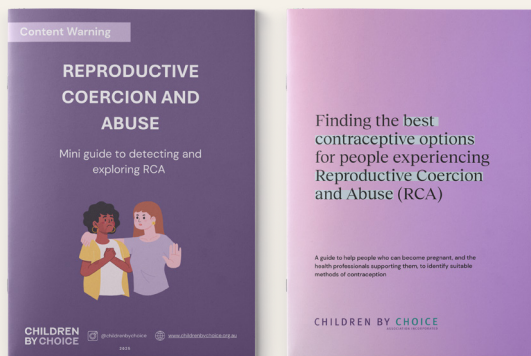
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FOR CLINICIANS:**Consultation, information and training**

Tasmanian Primary Care Family and Sexual Violence Support provides clinical case consultation, support and coaching for GPs on asking about, responding to, reporting, and documenting family and sexual violence. (03) 6268 1663

Women's Health Tasmania offers Pregnancy Options and Reproductive Coercion and Abuse training – email info@womenshealthtas.org.au for more information.

Children by Choice has two downloadable resources on RCA aimed at primary care clinicians: www.childrenbychoice.org.au/for-professionals/downloadable-resources-information



The **Australian Institute of Family Studies** has produced a **RCA Practice Guide**: <https://aifs.gov.au/resources/practice-guides/reproductive-coercion-and-abuse>

**FOR PATIENTS:****Further information and support**

1800 RESPECT offers confidential information, counselling and support 24/7 on 1800 737 732 or 1800respect.org.au

Women's Health Tasmania offers confidential, pro-choice pregnancy options and post abortion counselling, support and referral. 1800 675 028. pregnancychoicestas.org.au

Children by Choice has information about RCA: childrenbychoice.org.au/advice-and-support/reproductive-coercion-and-abuse

Family Violence Counselling and Support Service Tasmania offers confidential information, counselling and support on 1800 608 122 from 9am – midnight weekdays and 4pm – midnight weekends and public holidays.

Endnotes

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