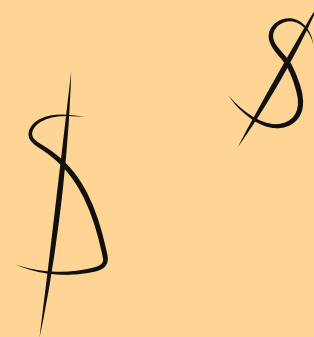


Guide for
Financial Advisors



Detecting Economic Control



REGROUPEMENT DES MAISONS
POUR FEMMES VICTIMES
DE VIOLENCE CONJUGALE

Over the course of their work, financial advisors may encounter couples with unequal dynamics when it comes to finances.

However, it's not always easy to tell a situation of financial imbalance from domestic violence.

This guide is intended to support you in distinguishing between these two situations.

This guide does not mean turning you into a psychosocial support worker. **However, you are in a unique position to detect signs of financial abuse.**

Staying alert to these red flags is more than a professional gesture: it's an act of solidarity. By recognizing the signs and guiding victims to the appropriate resources, you can break their isolation, help them regain their power to act and concretely support their financial and personal security.

However, it is important to always respect your personal and professional boundaries.

SOS violence conjugale (24/7) : 1 800 363-9010

What is domestic violence?

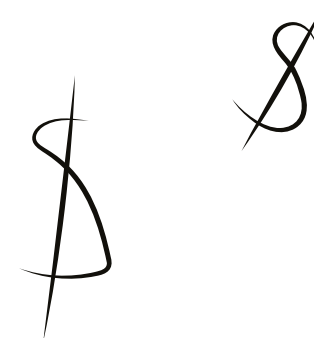
Domestic violence is not limited to physical abuse. It can include a wide range of tactics to intimidate, isolate, and control to deprive victims of their rights.

That pattern of abusive behaviours is called coercive control.

Victims often experience multiple and simultaneous forms of abuse, including financial abuse.

How can we detect financial abuse?

Pay close attention to your clients' attitudes and financial management strategies during meetings to detect financial abuse. For example:



Imposing financial decisions on their partner

Burdening their partner with debt

Using finances to punish or threaten their partner

Limiting their access to information

Control over their partner's professional life

Control over their partner's spending and financial resources

Controlling their partner's spending

monitoring accounts, setting maximum amounts for regular expenses or child-related expenses.

Controlling financial resources

control over spending, allowing access to resources only if certain rules are followed, blocking access to essential goods (medication, water, furniture).

Control over financial management

using their partner's credit/debit cards without their consent, disrespecting prior agreements about joint account use, taking money from their partner's paycheck/government child benefits.

Imposing financial decisions on their partner

preventing their partner from saving or preparing for retirement (not allowing her to open an RRSP or TFSA), forcing her to be the only one contributing to the children's RESP, etc.

Burdening their partner with debt

opening credit cards or loans in her name without her consent or through coercion/threats, borrowing money from her under false pretenses, demanding money from her (under coercion or threats).

Control over their partner's professional life

preventing their partner from working, forcing her to reduce her hours, limiting her professional development, forcing her to work in their business without adequate pay.

Financial reprisals or threats

no longer paying important expenses, blocking access to shared financial resources, trying to reduce their child support payments, no longer contributing to shared debt payments, not respecting agreements about finances.

Limiting access to information

lying about their or the family's financial situation, hiding income, hiding bills or debts, preventing access to personal documents.

Financial Imbalance or Abuse?

It is crucial to distinguish between these two situations.

Financial imbalances can often be resolved through better communication, fair budgeting and support from a financial advisor.

By contrast, financial abuse is a dynamic of control where one partner uses finances to dominate, isolate or limit the autonomy of the other. It is more than a disagreement about money: it's a form of domestic violence that requires a distinct approach.



DOES SOMETHING FEEL OFF?

Refer to the table in the annex or call the counselors at the shelters, they will help you recognize the signs.

As long as they do not divulge confidential information about their clients, financial advisors can speak to a women's shelter worker to recognize the signs of financial abuse and refer their clients to the appropriate services.

SOS
violence
conjugale
1 800 363-9010

Best Practices if You Suspect Domestic Violence (1/2)

*Systematically schedule individual meetings with your clients. Once you're in a one-on-one setting:

- Demonstrate discretion and an open mind: take the time to greet and listen to your client. Be respectful and do not judge.
- Explain your role and obligations to her, making sure to use at all times clear language. Let her know that your conversations are confidential.
- Avoid using the term "domestic violence" as many victims do not identify with this label. Instead, talk about control.
- Tell her about the problematic issues you noticed during the meeting with her and her partner. Make sure to stick only to the facts that you observed, rather than your feelings. Ask your client some additional questions to help get a clearer picture of the situation (see the next section).
- Explain the impact on her finances (short- and long-term) and the options available to her to rectify the imbalance you observed.

Best Practices if You Suspect Domestic Violence (2/2)

- Check with your client her understanding of the elements you presented and her options, so that she can make an informed decision that does not put her in danger. Regularly give space for her to ask questions.
- Help her by providing as much information and resources as possible, while respecting her decisions. Remember, the final decision is hers.
- Let her know that there are organizations ready to help her. Go through the services that are available and direct her to a local women's shelter. If needed, you can offer to call the women's shelter together.
- Guide your client to resources that can support her with her finances (e.g., Option consommateur).

Examples of Additional Questions to Ask (1/2)

- ❓ Did/Does your (ex) partner build up credit or debt in your name (credit card debts, phone bills, utility bills)?
- ❓ Did/Do you feel you have a general understanding of the family's financial situation (on savings, regular income, any debt, mortgages, lines of credit)?
- ❓ Did/Does your (ex) partner share financial information freely, including explanation of expenses or savings goals?
- ❓ Did/Do you have your own account and/or access to a joint bank account?
- ❓ Did/does your (ex) partner control how you spend money and ask for receipts?

Examples of Additional Questions to Ask (2/2)

- ❓ Did/Does your (ex) partner ever prevent you from having a job or obtaining further education?
- ❓ Have you ever checked your own credit report to see if there are any debts, loans, credit products in your name that you did not apply for?
- ❓ Did/Does your (ex) partner refuse to help financially support your family¹?
- ❓ Does it feel like your financial security is entirely dependent on your partner?

¹ The first eight questions were taken from Mayer, Michaela; Snow, Natalie; Haileyesus, Meseret. "Economic Abuse Screening Tool (EAST). A Toolkit for Social Services Providers." Canadian Center for Women's Empowerment (March 2022).

Recommended Precautions:

- Do not share information with the abusive partner that could endanger the victim
- Do not talk about domestic violence or control in the presence of the abusive partner
- Do not confront the abusive partner
- Ask the victim how you can safely contact her for follow-up meetings
- If you are concerned about a victim, contact your local women's shelter for support



To contact a women's shelter:

SOS violence conjugale : 1 800-363-9010 or sosviolenceconjugale.ca

**Always
consider the
victim's safety**

Keep in Mind

- A woman can be a victim of financial abuse even if she has a good salary, earns more or has a higher education degree than her partner.
- Financial precarity is a major obstacle in making the decision to leave an abusive partner.
- Financial abuse can continue, or even get worse, after separating. You can also play a key role in supporting and guiding your client during that period.
- Be aware of your personal and professional boundaries. Don't hesitate to get support from organizations that specialize in domestic violence: they can provide invaluable psychosocial assistance to the victim.

| | Financial Imbalance | Financial Abuse |
|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| ACCESS TO INFORMATION | One member of the couple takes care of managing the finances. However, the other person has access to all information and can ask questions about it. | One person has access to all information about finances and prevents the other person from accessing that information (lying or omitting information). They hide or lie about some information (income, debts, accounts, etc.). |
| ACCESS TO RESOURCES | Both people have access to money for their basic needs. | One person's access may be conditional to the other's approval or having followed certain rules—even money for basic needs. |
| DECISION-MAKING | Decisions are made by both people, or, if made by one person, the other partner is always able to question those decisions. | Decisions are made by one person only. If the other person questions those decisions, they will not be listened to and may experience reprisals for doing so. |
| BEHAVIOUR FROM EACH PARTNER | Both partners express themselves freely and can disagree about decisions. Neither partner is afraid of the other. | The victim may seem fearful of expressing herself and agree with whatever the abusive partner wants. She may also fear reprisals. |
| GOALS | Each partner may have the goal of protecting their financial assets and optimizing their financial situation, which can lead to an imbalance—but not necessarily abuse. | One partner's goal is control and power over the other, by limiting the victim's financial autonomy. |
| FINANCIAL CONSEQUENCES | One partner may be at a financial disadvantage compared to the other. These consequences may persist over many years, even if the partners separate. | One partner is always at a financial disadvantage compared to the other. These consequences will persist over many years, even if the partners separate. |
| JUSTIFICATION | This imbalance is explained by income disparities, debts that predate the relationship or different financial strategies. If one person is less involved in financial decision-making, it may be because they are not interested, don't have the relevant knowledge, or because of a decision made between the partners about who will take on which tasks. | One partner wants control and to restrict the other's freedom. This is noticeable in financial matters, but also in other aspects of the victim's life. The abusive partner believes it is their right to make decisions for their partner. |