

INTRODUCTION: USING THE WEAPONISED ATTACHMENT WHITE PAPER

Weaponised Attachment: When Abusers Use Love to Trap Victims

The White Paper (Lesiak & Gelsthorpe, University of Cambridge, 2025) shows that some perpetrators deliberately create intense emotional bonds as a strategy of coercive control. Even when victims are financially independent, live separately, and are not physically restrained, perpetrators may engineer attachment to confuse, entrap, and prevent leaving.

This mechanism is termed **weaponised attachment**: a form of manufactured emotional captivity created by the abuser, not a weakness or pathology in the victim.

HOW ORGANISATIONS CAN USE THE WHITE PAPER

Frontline domestic violence charities, nonprofits, NGOs, and victims services can use the findings to:

- Strengthen risk assessment where physical injury is absent
- Support victims experiencing confusion, self-blame, or emotional fixation
- Improve training for police, advocates, and safeguarding teams
- Update organisational language away from victim-pathologising terms
- Inform decisions and referrals where psychological entrapment is escalating
- Push for legal recognition of psychological captivity as coercive control
- Counter harmful myths such as “Stockholm Syndrome” or “she chose to stay”

THE WHITE PAPER TOOLKIT

The White Paper toolkit was created to provide frontline organisations with practical, ready-to-use materials to apply the findings of the University of Cambridge research on weaponised attachment in domestic abuse cases (Lesiak & Gelsthorpe, University of Cambridge, 2025).

The toolkit includes:

1. The White Paper on Weaponised Attachment
2. The academic research paper
3. A media kit with key talking points
4. A user guide on how domestic violence organisations and frontline victim services can use this White Paper and research, along with other useful tips

KEY RESOURCES

Full Academic Paper:

Lesiak, M., & Gelsthorpe, L. (2025). *The Invisible Abuser: Attachment, Victimisation, and Perpetrator Perception in Repeat Abuse*. *Violence Against Women* (SAGE).

<https://doi.org/10.1177/10778012251379423>

Cambridge Summary Article:

<https://www.cam.ac.uk/stories/domestic-abuse-trauma-bonds>

CONTACT

For more information about the White Paper

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For assistance with the White Paper toolkit and to sign up to add your organisation's logo in support of the White Paper

The Pixel Project

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