

MEDIA KIT

WEAPONISED ATTACHMENT

KEY TALKING POINTS & RESOURCES FOR THE MEDIA

This media kit is a convenient centralised resource of key talking points and information which may be used as part of your organisation's preparation for media outreach about the role of weaponised attachment in domestic abuse cases.

WEAPONISED ATTACHMENT: INTRODUCTORY POINTS

The definition of weaponised attachment

Recent Cambridge research 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.

Key Point: Love can be used as a tool of control.

How weaponised attachment is used by perpetrators

Perpetrators may use:

- charm and idealisation
- trauma-sharing to simulate intimacy
- cycles of affection and cruelty (intermittent reinforcement, unpredictable reward and punishment)
- self-blame induction and emotional disorientation
- Victims often interpret these dynamics as “love”, creating cognitive dissonance and psychological fixation that makes leaving extremely difficult.

WEAPONISED ATTACHMENT: RECOMMENDED KEY TALKING POINTS (*Direct quotes from the White Paper in italics*)

- Domestic abuse does not require physical restraint to create captivity
 - *Psychological captivity without physical or financial restraint is not exceptional; it is a central operating mode of coercive control.*
 - *Recognition of this mechanism is therefore fundamental to ensuring legal certainty, institutional accountability, and the highest possible level of protection for victims.*

- Abusers can weaponise emotional bonds as a control strategy
 - *Trauma-sharing by the perpetrator must be assessed as a potential control tactic, not assumed to reflect mutual or balanced emotional disclosure.*
- Victims may stay not because they consent, but because they are psychologically entrapped
 - *Through grooming, trauma-sharing, and alternating cruelty with care, abusers deliberately manufacture emotional entrapment.*
- Cycles of affection and cruelty function like behavioural conditioning
 - *Exposure to inconsistent and unpredictable patterns of rewards and punishments leads to confusion and compulsion in the recipient.*
- “Why didn’t she leave?” is often the wrong question, the correct question is: “How was leaving made feel psychologically impossible?”
 - *Victims may intellectually comprehend the dangers of their situation, yet the emotional reinforcement of hope (coupled with fear of abandonment) creates a paradox that complicates their ability to leave.*
- Support systems must treat psychological coercion as a serious indicator of danger
 - *Survivors entrapped through weaponised attachment are routinely excluded from recognition and response, not because coercion is absent, but because their captivity leaves no physical or financial trace.*
 - *Victim protection systems that focus only on physical violence, cohabitation, or financial dependency risk missing a major form of entrapment.*

RESOURCES FOR THE MEDIA

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>