

## WHEN COERCIVELY CONTROLLING FATHERS SABOTAGE MOTHERS' RELATIONSHIPS WITH THEIR CHILDREN

NATALIE: Welcome to Episode 305 of the Flying Free Podcast. Today, our guest is Dr. Emma Katz. Dr. Katz is a researcher in domestic violence and coercive control, and her work has helped shape legislation and professional practice globally. She is the author of *Coercive Control in Children's and Mothers' Lives*, and she also brings her research to the public on her Substack platform called "Decoding Coercive Control with Dr. Emma Katz," which is read by over 10,000 people in more than 90 countries around the world. And I will put a link in the show notes to her Substack for anyone who is interested in going over and checking that out.

Her research has illuminated children's experiences of coercive control, which were previously invisible. She argues that children are impacted by many forms of abuse inherent to coercive control, including the breaking down of close relationships with loved ones, deprivation of resources, constrained behavior, and isolation from the outside world. So today we're going to be talking with Dr. Katz about something called CAMS, which is a term that she and her colleagues coined that stands for "child and mother sabotage." So welcome, Dr. Katz.

DR. KATZ: Hi, thanks so much for having me.

NATALIE: So why don't we just dive in and have you tell us what coercive control is? I think probably we've heard of that, but maybe you could define it more succinctly for us, and why it's so dangerous.

DR. KATZ: So to put it in a nutshell, coercive control is when one person, the perpetrator, is subjecting another person or persons, usually their family, to persistent and wide-ranging controlling behaviour over a long period of time. And in addition to doing this, they're giving their family a very clear message, "Do what I say or else." So if you resist, the perpetrator makes it very clear they're going to create some very negative consequences to counteract your resistance and discourage you from resisting again in the future.

So you find that your life is being controlled by another person, you can't really actualize your human rights anymore, you're being treated really poorly, and if you resist, they punish you further and it gets worse. So what people find is that their life is just shrinking down and down and down, and their autonomy is getting smaller and smaller. Their ability to make decisions based on their own preferences is just getting

smaller and smaller and smaller.

And it's very dangerous because living like that in a state where you're basically a puppet on a string and somebody else's moods and reactions are dictating everything that you can and can't do, is crushing to the human spirit. And also when you resist, perpetrators, they can create consequences that are very dire. So they can create consequences that ruin you economically, that separate you from your children, that they might physically attack you, and sometimes it can even end in murder. So there's a whole spectrum of awful outcomes ranging from if the perpetrator is violent. If they're not, the outcomes are still awful because your human rights are being violated. You can't live like a normal person and make your own decisions and choices the way that normal people can.

And for children growing up in this, it's particularly devastating because for children, they're experiencing all of the coercive control from a position of even more powerlessness than the adult victim because they can't up and leave because they're children. The adult victim can't really do that either because the perpetrator will usually keep on abusing them even when they try to leave. So leaving is never simple, but for children, it's even more impossible. And even when children want to stop seeing the perpetrator, they're often forced into continuing. So it's a really difficult, awful, grim, situation.

In some parts of the world, it's been made a crime in recognition of how severe and harmful it is. So where I'm speaking from today in England, coercive control was made a crime in 2015. And it's so tough. And I just want to emphasize that all of the responsibility for coercive control lies with the perpetrator. This isn't something that the victim is bringing upon themselves or inviting or wanting or participating in. They were just trying to have a nice relationship with someone.

But it turns out that someone was a coercive control perpetrator who ultimately, no matter how nice they might have been at the start, really had no interest in having a normal, loving, life affirming, life-enhancing relationship with another person. They wanted to control, they wanted to dominate, they concealed that at the beginning so it wasn't apparent when you were choosing them, and then they just tighten their grip over time. And society really allowed and encouraged them to do that through legal structures and financial structures that once people are together, make it really hard for them to pull apart again.

So that's how I would explain coercive control to people. I think it's something that is absolutely central to domestic abuse and yet is not very well understood. People tend

to be over-focused on the question of, "Well, was he violent? Did he hit you?" And for some people, the perpetrator never hit them, but they had a life-destroying impact on them, a profoundly harmful impact on them through their use of coercive control.

NATALIE: So I'm curious, the audience that we're talking to right now are mostly Christian. And when I was growing up and in my Christian circles, we were almost taught that this kind of way of men relating to women was actually godly and normal.

But as you're describing coercive control, I can see how even what we would call a complementarian marriage where a man is in charge, the man is the leader, the woman needs to follow the man's lead, she needs to submit to him, he's the head of the home, he makes all the decisions, she can have an opinion in some homes, but it's really not valid and it bears no weight, and so, therefore, she really doesn't have any autonomy, it's almost like the word coercive control describes that type of relationship.

DR. KATZ: Yes, I would say that that is a kind of institutionalized form of coercive control, that the groups of people in religious communities can be taught and that can be normalized to them. And I think that coercive control is normalized much more broadly as well. For example, so many very unhealthy signs of coercive control are treated by mainstream media as romantic and sexy. So when men are possessive, when they're love bombing, when they're following you around, which is stalking you, when they're leaving you unwanted gifts, pursuing you when you say "no." This is often glamorized in just the mainstream movies that we see.

So whether it's in particular Christian communities that have a very particular view of what a marriage between a man and a woman should be like or just in mainstream society in Hollywood blockbuster movies, I think this behavior of men having the final say in relationships, always being the one in charge, always being the leader, the woman not being allowed an opinion, is very normalized for us.

So of course that adds an extra layer of it being difficult for women to see why this is so harmful for them, to see why it's breaking their heart, and to see why it's dangerous and why it's eating away at them over time because it's so normalized by us on a number of different layers in our cultures, whether it's our particular religious community or the much, much broader society, which influences people all around the world.

NATALIE: Yeah, I see that. I'm even thinking of my teenage daughters and their relationships and what is what they think is normal. And actually, some of them are getting clued into things and are asking questions about the ways that boys are talking

to them or treating them and questioning that and saying, "I don't feel good about this. I think there might be something wrong with it," even though it might seem romantic. So interesting.

So let's say that a victim or a survivor ends up leaving her relationship or somehow getting out. You mentioned how complicated that can actually be. How does coercive control show up even after she leaves that relationship?

DR. KATZ: So, I would say that during the relationship there can be many different forms of coercive control. It can involve economic abuse, so keeping you short of money, ruining your credit rating, pushing you into debt. It can involve emotional and psychological abuse, just making you feel terrible about yourself, making you feel like you're going crazy, making you feel like everything is all your fault.

It can involve technology, so monitoring you via technology, so perhaps using GPS trackers to check where you're going or bombarding you with texts whenever you go out or making you delete a load of people from your social media, or just many different ways that they can make your world smaller and make you more monitored through technology. And threats, and then there may well also be physical violence and sexual abuse as well.

And then post-separation, a lot of that continues. And it can happen in slightly different ways if you're not in the same household with them anymore. But perpetrators will do things like abusing you through the courts, which is often economically draining because you're having to spend all this money on lawyers and legal representation. So it's a further extension of that economic abuse that they were doing before.

And also keeping you apart from your children and harming you through your children, which they were probably doing pre-separation and now they use the courts to do that post-separation. Just generally keeping you impoverished post-separation, perhaps refusing to pay the child support that is owing and that they should be paying. Making threats and endangering the children, which they were probably doing before, threatening the children and putting them in dangerous situations, whether through deliberately harmful behaviors or through neglectful behaviors, like not supervising the children properly and allowing them to get hurt.

During the relationship, they probably isolated and discredited the victim survivor by whispering amongst her friends and her family that she's crazy, that she's to blame for the problems in the relationship, that she's difficult to live with. And then they carry on doing that kind of character assassination post-separation, so discrediting you among

your community, turning people against you, making you isolated.

And then that kind of stalking behavior that I mentioned during the relationship can often carry on post-separation. They're hanging around outside your house, they're demanding to know what you're doing all the time. And again, they'll often continue to do this to the children, asking the children to report what mum's doing all the time, putting tracking devices on the children's tablets or even hiding them inside their teddy bears so that they know where the mother and the children are all the time, and just giving them no privacy and making them feel totally spied upon.

So, so many of the things that they were doing pre-separation, they will often try and carry on doing post-separation. And I think that as societies, we are so asleep to that. We're not recognizing that because what women are always told when they're being abused by a partner is, "Leave. Come on, girl—pack up, grab your baby, grab your children, run." It's like the common advice that I see on social media all the time.

And leaving can be really helpful, but it's naïve to think it's going to solve all the problems because that perpetrator is still going to feel entitled to control. And if nobody's doing anything about that, if no one's putting any roadblocks in that perpetrator's way, and if communities are not demanding that the perpetrator stops it, if communities are just letting the perpetrator get away with that, all of their friends, their family, their neighbors, their employers, their church, if they're all letting the perpetrator carry on this post-separation abuse and not speaking up and saying, "Man, you've got to stop this," then it just carries on for years and years and years.

And then people will then say to the victim survivor, "Why are you still struggling? Why are you still traumatized? Why are you still broke? You left him, it's over." And she's like, "Oh, well, it's actually not over, but why does nobody understand this? I'm still going through all of this," and she's still being abused. And because she's now living in a different house from him, people are so slow to recognize this. And I think our societies and communities need to wake up to this, start telling the perpetrators they've got to stop, and it would be really good if the police would intervene and force the perpetrators to stop. But so often that won't happen.

But communities have a lot of power to tell the perpetrator to stop and to make it socially unacceptable for the perpetrator to carry on. If communities would pick up the baton and take on that responsibility of doing that would have a transformative effect. But at the moment, that's very rare that that happens. And people need to circle the wagons around the victim survivor and her kids and support them and help them to get back on their feet and to protect them. But so rarely does this happen, so I think that

we have such a long way to go with that.

NATALIE: Yeah. I remember when I was separated from my ex, he put a tracker on my car, and a friend of mine reported back to me that she heard some of the pastors from my church and the elders cracking jokes about how he was tracking me and followed me to a friend's apartment. When you think about that they're not only not supporting victims of this kind of behavior, they're actually thinking it's funny. And if your religious leaders think it's funny and think it's no big deal, then what hope is there... Sometimes I just think, "Good heavens."

DR. KATZ: Oh, I totally agree. It's disgraceful. But again, we live in a culture that absolutely enables men in coercive control. It doesn't enable women in coercive control. When women are coercively controlling, they are all the nasty names you can think of under the sun. But men are totally enabled in their coercive control by our culture, which is why coercive control is primarily male perpetrated and the vast majority of perpetrators are male. That doesn't mean you don't get an occasional female perpetrator, but it's much rarer because society totally enables male coercive control.

NATALIE: Yeah. So I'm curious, in England, you said it was made illegal in 2015. Are you seeing some turnaround socially on a larger scale, as far as society being more supportive of victims because of that?

DR. KATZ: I wish I could say yes. I'm not entirely sure that we are seeing that. I think the forces that keep it misunderstood and trivialized are probably stronger than a law that few people have heard of and a tiny faction of people have ever come across. I think a legal change needs to be supported by a much more wide-scale, public awareness raising. I think politicians need to be talking about this in their speeches. It needs to be on the news a lot. There needs to be campaigns all over billboards and public transport. In the UK we have a lot of buses covered in posters. And I think it needs to be accompanied by a much bigger campaign.

Changing the law by itself can be influential for individual victims and survivors sometimes if they can get that law to work for them. But even that is an uphill battle because you report to the police, they say, "No further action." A tiny minority of perpetrators are ever convicted. So getting law enforcement to actually enforce the law is always very difficult for women who are reporting male violence, whether it's domestic violence or rape or sexual violence—whatever it is—harassment, stalking. I think maybe it's a tiny bit better, but I'm not seeing a big revolution here in the UK yet, no.



NATALIE: There's still a lot of work to be done everywhere. So let's talk about the kids now. How did they experience coercive control?

DR. KATZ: So, for so long we've had completely the wrong sort of approach to understanding how the kids are affected. How a lot of people have tended to think of it is, "Was there violence that the kids saw? Did the kids see the violence? If the kids saw the violence, that's bad. But if the kids didn't see the violence, then there's probably nothing to see here. The kids were probably just in their kid world, living their kid life, and they probably weren't affected."

And that is completely the wrong approach. That's totally misunderstanding what's going on, because coercive control hangs like a web, like a big nasty spider's web over the whole home. It doesn't just affect the adult victim survivor. And most perpetrators use their children in the coercive control in one way or another. So if the mom isn't doing what the dad wants, the dad will often use hurting the children as a punishment, whether that's physically hurting them or neglecting them, or more often breaking their hearts about something. So ruining a special day that they were looking forward to, ruining a special moment or event, canceling the plans at the weekend that the kids were so looking forward to.

So upsetting the children is often used as a form of punishment, and that works really well because the mum will go a long way to avoid that, so the dad gets what he wants a lot of the time because the mum's trying to stop that from happening.

Perpetrator's isolation of the mum means that the kids are often isolated. If she can't go here or there without being accused of cheating or being looked at by other men, being desired by other men, then she can't take the children here or there, and then the children aren't going here or there. So a lot of mums and children describe how they live this life of just school and home, school and home, school and home. And of course, in communities where homeschooling is pretty common, that would be just home, home, and more home, wouldn't it? Or perhaps home and church, home and church, home and church, but no wider life outside of that.

If the mum is punished every time she tries to see her own family or friends, the children aren't seeing the mum's family or friends, so they're cut off from good, supportive adults who might be in their life, if the mum's family and friends are indeed good, supportive adults—they may or may not be.

If the perpetrator is keeping the mum broke and short of money, then she wouldn't be able to give the children the things that they want, and then the perpetrator will just

use that to give them occasional treats and indulgences from him in order to manipulate them and get them thinking he's the fun one and mum never gives them anything, and mum's really unfun and depressing and miserable. But it's all his economic abuse and manipulation of that situation.

And yes, if the children do know about any violence that's happening, that's going to be obviously having an impact on them too, but that will only be one of many different things that are disturbing them and traumatizing them. And then mum will be constantly being degraded in front of them. There'll be always hearing from dad about how mum is lazy and incompetent and stupid and unworthy and unfun and all of these sorts of things. And it will be really hard for the kids to constantly hear that. Some kids will start to believe that and some of them won't, but whether or not they believe it, it will be really hard to hear and it will be having a really negative influence on them. So there are so many different ways that it will harm the children.

And then post-separation, one of the key ways that he can continue his coercive control is through continuing to abuse the mum through the children. So he'll be using every contact visit and every minute of time he has with them to continue his coercive control through them. Perhaps manipulating them into thinking of mum in a negative way, or allowing them to behave any way that they want to in his home so that when they go home to mum, they won't listen to a word that she says, and then she feels desperate and despairing that she has these wild kids that she can't reason with them because it's like, "Well, Dad lets me never do my homework and Dad lets me stay up all night and Dad lets me go wherever I want." So he could be extremely permissive with them when they're with him so that they love him and dislike mum who's trying to keep them in a healthy routine.

But then if they ever do something that he feels is challenging his authority, he'll be brutally harsh with them for it. So very permissive a lot of the time, but also they know that they have to always stay in his good books at the same time. And staying in his good books may well mean disliking Mum, disparaging Mum, calling Mum names in order to please him and keep him happy. So there are so many different ways that these perpetrators drag their children into this, and it's not the victim survivor dragging their children into this.

Most victims survivors really desperately want to be good parents and are good parents. And I just written about this on my Substack. In my most recent article, I identified five ways that domestic violence victim survivor mums are great mothers. And I wrote it like that—five ways that they're great mothers—because I wanted to really draw attention to the good parts of their mothering because we get so little



information about that. And these mums are so rarely affirmed. They do some really great things as mothers. They try really hard.

It's the perpetrator who is willfully allowing the children to be brought up in this throughout their childhood, to allow it to overshadow and dominate their childhood, and that's just the most terrible parenting from the perpetrator. People like to say, "Well, he might have abused his wife, but he's a good dad." No, he abused his wife. He's not a good dad. He abused the children's mother. And there would have been so many ways that that affected the children. If only you would ask a few questions about that and learn about what their lived reality was like. He's not a good father if he abused the children's mother. No way.

NATALIE: Yes. Well, sometimes even victims, they've been brainwashed to think that. I've seen that even in recent shows that have tried to illustrate how that works. It can be something that we hang on to as a victim to just make it okay, to protect our own sanity for having to be forced to live in that situation.

DR. KATZ: And I totally get that, especially when the children are being forced to keep seeing him and the victim survivor can't do anything about that because it's court-ordered. So if they have to protect their sanity by telling themselves he's a good father, I totally get why they're doing that. And I wish it was true for their sake and for the kids' sake. And more so, I wish that the courts wouldn't force the children to keep seeing these fathers, because they're not good fathers, and they bring a lot of harm into their children's lives.

NATALIE: Okay, let's talk about this thing that you guys created, and I'm guessing... Well, you can tell me if this is true or not. It's called CAMS, and it stands for child and mother sabotage. Did you create this as kind of a reaction to the whole parental alienation terminology, or what was your thinking there? I know I'm kind of combining two different things here, but I'm just curious how they fit together.

DR. KATZ: Yeah, so it's quite an involved story, I guess, so bear with me. What I would say is that we've known in the domestic violence research and response world, people who research this, organizations, charities that try and support victims and survivors, we've known for a good long time that abusers often try and turn children against the victim survivor mum. So we've known this for a long time, and it comes up in a lot of research papers, in a lot of books going back 20 or 30 years.

So for example, a recent study from 2021 called the use of children as a tactic of intimate partner violence and its relationship to survivors' mental health. That study

found that 62% of intimate partner violence survivors reported that their abuser had tried to turn their children against them.

So we've known for a long time that abusers do this, but there hasn't been a suitable term to explain this behavior. So we wanted to come up with a term that explained this behavior that's already well identified in the literature. And the practitioners who work with these mothers and work with these children probably see all of the time in many, many, many of the families that they work with, but there just wasn't a term to capture it.

So we came up with this term, child and mother sabotage, and we've written an introductory piece about this, but we want to write more about this and raise more awareness about it as we go along, we being myself and my colleagues.

So this term applies to the post-separation period where the abusive father is manipulating others, including the children, but also other family members, friends, neighbors, extended social networks, professionals, even, working with the family, into believing that the mother is disordered, vindictive, mad, bad, evil, untrustworthy, unsafe, dangerous.

So perpetrators try to convince people that the problem is all with the mother. So CAMS applies in that kind of situation. Also when the abusive parent's manipulation plays on this kind of sexist view of mothers and women as hysterical, hostile, and vengeful when they raise safety concerns or abuse claims. So the mother raises concerns that the father's abusive and he says, "She's my bitter ex. She's my vengeful ex-wife. She's crazy. She's hysterical. She's so mean and nasty." And this will just sound chillingly familiar to people because it's everywhere in our culture, this idea, this stereotype.

It applies when the perpetrator, when his manipulation results in third parties having a negative view of the mum and taking negative action against the mum, such as taking away her children or restricting her time with her children, or if it has other negative impacts like it makes her lose her employment. Perhaps he tells the people who are employing her and her coworkers, he smears her character to them and she loses her job or she loses her home or she becomes very isolated within her community and her health and her wellbeing are gravely impacted.

And so many mums in this situation report that they're in terrible health. And of course, they are because this is an awful thing to be going through. It takes a big toll on the body. And this applies when there's a clearly mapped history and evidence that there's been coercive control between the perpetrating father and the victim mother before

they split up. So this behavior won't suddenly happen post-separation. He will have been coercively controlling pre-separation. And he has an intention to undermine and sabotage and control the mother's relationship with their children.

So you mentioned the term parental alienation, and some people might be saying, "Well, isn't what you're describing just parental alienation? And why shouldn't we use this term?" And the reason why we felt it was not a good idea to use this term and it wasn't helpful to use this term... I could talk about this for a really long time, so I'm going to have to put this in a nutshell. But I could talk about the problems with parental alienation as a concept for about an hour just by itself.

So it was initially coined in the 1980s by a psychiatrist, Richard Gardner, whose work was mostly self-published and not properly evaluated by his peers. And he had some really alarming views that supported... Well, you could argue they supported pedophilia, his views. So he would say that you should almost never separate a child from a paedophilic father. And he would say that if the mother finds out that the father's a pedophile and she's hysterical about that, and that's the way he puts it, then she should be told to sober up and to remember that through most of history, pedophilia was normal. That's how he puts it. And then that probably no harm was happening here.

And so he had pro-pedophilic views, and Gardner, who coined the term parental alienation and popularized it, was often hired in cases where the fathers had been accused of child sexual abuse to defend the father, to turn the accusation around so that the courts stopped thinking about the father's potential child sexual abuse of the child, and instead started seeing the mum as the problem for bringing this up, started seeing the mum as an alienator, trying to unfairly separate the children from their dad. And so fathers would hire Gardner in order to try and get that outcome.

And shockingly, what we see is that when parental alienation is raised in courts today, that is still very often the outcome that happens. So, one of my co-authors on the piece about CAMS, Professor Joan Meier of George Washington University, she did a federally funded, comprehensive study of the situation across the United States, and she published her findings around that in 2019 and 2020.

And that found that in family court cases, of the cases where mothers claimed that fathers were abusive but fathers then counter-claimed and said, "No, I'm not abusive. She's a parental alienator," mother's abuse claims were then disbelieved 77% of the time. And there was also a 50/50 chance the court would take the children away from the mother and put them in the custody of the father. That outcome occurred in 50% of

those cases. And almost three-quarters of the mothers lost custody to the fathers when the courts were actually persuaded by the father's claims of parental alienation. So that happened in 73% of those cases where the court said, "Yep, we believe this mother is an alienator and that this father isn't abusive, but the mother is an alienator."

But even in cases where the courts didn't officially say, "Yeah, we believe the father," he just brought it up in the case and the courts never actually said they believed him, they never credited his claim, even then, the court was still quite amenable to giving him custody. They gave him custody in 43% of those cases.

So this term parental alienation just has a really alarming and often devastating impact on cases where mum's gone to family court saying, "This father's an abuser, he's abused me, he's abused the children," and some of these cases are cases where the mother said that he's a child sexual abuser.

So people who are pro the term parental alienation and think it's a good term, they like to say that it's a gender-neutral term and that a mother can be an alienator, a father can be an alienator, and that this has nothing to do with sexism. But what we actually see from Professor Joan Meier's very comprehensive study is that when fathers are bringing this up and saying that the mum's an alienator, they are winning their cases at a really disturbing rate, and remember these are cases where the mother's come to the court and said, "He's an abuser," and the fathers are winning these cases at a high rate.

When the mother tries to say to the court that the father's an alienator, she has much less success, much, much rarer, Meier found, for the courts to actually believe the mother, if the mother says the father's an alienator.

Just to kind of simplify it and to put it in a nutshell, and this is an oversimplification, but just for the purposes of summarizing what I'm saying, so if the mother says to the court that the father's an abuser and the father turns around and says, "No, it's parental alienation. I'm actually the victim, she's really the abuser. She's trying to separate me from my kids," the courts tend to say, "What an evil witch she is. Here are your kids, sir."

When the mother tries to say, "The father's taking the kids away from me. He's a parental alienator, he's made the kids hate me," it tends to be, "Well, ma'am, have you tried being nicer to him? Have you tried getting along with him better?" They're not getting that response that the fathers are getting, where the father's kind of getting everything handed to him on a plate.

NATALIE: There's a blatant gender bias.

DR. KATZ: So yeah, we're seeing a blatant gender bias, absolutely. And the research into poor outcomes... Which it's hard to find because the data into what family courts are doing is often not put into the public domain. We can't sort of easily find a website where all the data is listed about what the family court has done. It's all quite secretive. But from the research that has been able to be done when people have got access to court decisions like Professor Joan Meier did, it looks like there is blatant gender bias.

So this is why we coined the term CAMS because we know that, as I said, for about 20 or 30 years, it's been really clear through domestic violence research and practitioners' experiences of trying to help mums in these circumstances that as part of their coercive control, perpetrators do often attack mother-child relationships. But we haven't had a proper term for that to explain it, and so people have been relying on this parental alienation term to try and explain it, but that's a really unsuitable term, and a lot of people don't understand the history of that term or how it's really playing out in courts. They just hear the term and think that, "That applies to my situation," and they don't realize the very problematic history of that term.

So the CAMS term is to try and capture these situations where perpetrators of coercive control, who've been coercively controlling throughout a relationship, throughout a marriage, and they're continuing post-separation and after separation and after divorce with their coercive control, are trying to make the kids hate the mum, reject the mum, dislike the mum...

And there's a very clear reason why they do this, and it's completely in line with the wider coercive control that they're carrying out, and it's that if a mum has children who love her, that is a big source of power for her. It's going to make her feel good and happy and valued and respected and loved to have her kids love her, and that gives her strength and hope and courage and willpower and it makes everything in her life brighter.

And a perpetrator hates all of that, a perpetrator of coercive control. He wants to take all of that away from her. He wants her life to be a misery. He wants her to only exist to serve him and please him. And if he can't get her to do that anymore, he just wants to punish and punish and punish her. So he attacks those relationships with her children because it's so devastating to do that to her, and that's what he wants.

So there's a very clear link between that behavior from him and all of the other harmful, hurtful, abusive things he's doing. It's all part of the coercive control. It's all part of the domestic violence or domestic abuse or family violence, whatever term people want to use.

NATALIE: Yeah. So CAMS again, for anyone who missed it the first time, it's child and mother sabotage. So next time you think, "I can see that there's evidence of parental alienation where my ex or my husband is trying to alienate my children from me," switch that word out for child and mother sabotage, and even start using that terminology when you're talking to your attorney, when you're creating your court case.

If we use correct terms that communicate the truth about what's going on, there's no way that the other parent can co-opt that term because he's not the mother. This is child and mother sabotage. So fathers can't say, "Oh yes, there's CAMS going on" like they can with parental alienation.

DR. KATZ: Yes. Well, that was part of our hope when we coined the term, that it can't be co-opted because built into the term is an understanding that this is part of coercive control, and built into the term is an understanding that coercive control is highly gendered and that most perpetrators are male.

So for example, in England, statistics from a couple of years ago found that 97% of people convicted for the crime of coercive control in England and Wales were men—97%. So coercive control is highly gendered, CAMS is part of coercive control. And also the CAMS term recognizes that the fathers are using the sexism in society more generally against the mother. So it's very easy for the father to try and convince people that the mother's a vindictive, bitter ex because that's a stereotype about women. It's a sexist stereotype, and we still live in a world that has a lot of sexist stereotypes.

So for example, I think last year, a piece of research by the United Nations, they combined world value survey data from people in 91 countries over 13 years, and they found that nine out of every ten men and women hold biased views against women across the world.

So we're still living in a society, pretty much all of us, are still living in societies that are biased against women. Nine out of every ten men and women still hold biased views against women, seeing them as inferior to men in some way or another, or perhaps in multiple ways.

So again, the CAMS term recognizes that the father is operating in a society that is still very sexist, and therefore he's using these sexist stereotypes to try and convince people that the mother's bad, evil, irresponsible, unstable, unhinged, mad, vindictive, bitter, all of these stereotypes about women that have been around for so many hundreds of years that we're so used to them that we hardly notice them because they're so much a part of our kind of daily discourse. "Oh, he's got a crazy ex-girlfriend.



Oh, his ex is so mean and bitter." We're so used to thinking that way.

And these men are co-opting that. Because it's much harder for women to get people to think that a dad who is demanding to be part of his children's lives could be a bad father, because dads who want to be involved with their children, who want to spend time with their children, are kind of hero worshipped and lavished with praise in our society. "He wants to be involved," but the fact that he might want to be involved might be for very sinister reasons because he wants to continue his abuse. People are far less likely to think of that. So it's much harder for mothers to get anyone to understand what's happening to them. They don't have that cultural currency to draw on.

NATALIE: Yeah. Okay, I want you to give kind of a final message that you might have for survivors, but before you do that, I just want to take maybe thirty seconds and hold space for the fact that there are a small percentage of men who actually are in abusive relationships as well, and they reach out to me. I happen to know some personally.

So I know that that is real out there that, and that complicates things. Because when we're speaking about this subject, we're talking about what is most of the time the case. But it's not 100% of the time the case. So if you're a man, the good news is if you're a man, you can see that globally you have a little more of an edge than a woman in your situation would have. So that's the good news for you. But also I just want to acknowledge that.

And I do have listeners who are male are listening to this and probably feeling bad for the women, but also wondering, "What does this mean for me?" Obviously, you can't use the word CAMS to describe what's happening to you.

DR. KATZ: I think these men can say that they're male victims of coercive control. They can acknowledge that they're a minority of victims of coercive control, but that they are one of that small minority. I definitely want to hold space for those male victims. Sometimes male victims contact me and they say that they find my work really useful, that it's described their situation, it's given them a lot of insight into what was done to them and how they reacted to it.

And when men reach out to me like that in good faith, I give them as much support as I can do the way that I would any female victim. Of course, men also write to me saying that they're male victims and swearing at me and screaming at me and calling me every nasty name.

NATALIE: And that's how you know they're not a victim.

DR. KATZ: They're not the victims, they're the perpetrators. But of course, perpetrators can be sneaky and appear to be nice at first, of course—male and female ones. But yeah, when men do reach out and say they found my work helpful and validating, I'm really pleased about that. And of course, if you're a male victim of coercive control, which is more likely if you're a man in a vulnerable situation.

For example, if you have an immigration status that's unsettled, you're not in your home country and you don't know how long you're going to be able to stay in another country, that creates vulnerability. If you're a sexual minority, if you're gay or trans or bisexual, that creates a vulnerability. And if you're a religious minority in a society, if you're practicing a religion that's a tiny minority that can create a vulnerability. And if you're disabled, that can create big, big vulnerabilities as well.

So some men, as individuals, they are suffering and struggling a great deal, despite the fact that the men as a group have a sexist advantage as a group. But if you're an individual man who's perhaps disabled and has an uncertain immigration status, you're not going to feel advantaged at all, although you might still fare slightly better than a woman in that same situation, but that's not going to comfort you very much in that situation. And any victim survivor should be getting so much more help than our society currently gives them—so much more. We're just doing so poorly at this at the moment as a society.

NATALIE: Yeah. All right, so let's close. Let's close with a word to the women since that's the majority of the listeners here. Do you have any closing thoughts that you would like to share with survivors, people who are really living in these situations right now?

DR. KATZ: Yeah. So a couple of things I want to say. Firstly, everyone that says it's not the victim's fault, but then proceeds to say a whole load of victim-blaming things like, "Why didn't you see red flags?" and "You should have had stronger boundaries," I just want to take that kind of approach and throw it straight out the window.

Because I want to say that abuse victims and survivors are ordinary people. They're not codependent or weak or whatever it is people want to say. They didn't bring it upon themselves. They're ordinary people. It's just that there's a lot of abusers out there, so the chances of meeting an abuser and starting a romantic relationship with an abuser who's posing as a nice person are really, really high.

So if this has happened to you, it's not because you did anything wrong. You were just an ordinary person. Some abusers are looking for someone who they perceive as vulnerable, but not all of them. Some abusers are looking for someone who they

perceive as strong because they want the challenge of destroying a strong person.

So if you think, "This happened to me because I was vulnerable, and therefore, it was my fault that I shouldn't have been vulnerable," that's not the case, because even if you were not remotely vulnerable, even if you were brimming over with confidence and had had a fantastic childhood and a brilliant relationship with your parents and your family, this could still happen.

So it's nothing about you. It's just that the chances of meeting a perpetrator are really high for everyone, for every woman. The chances of meeting an abusive man are really high because one in four, one in five women, depending on the survey or what have you, report that they've experienced domestic violence. That's a huge number. That's not being done by 1 or 2% of men. That is a lot of abusive men creating that statistic.

So I want to say that, and I also want to say that what victims and survivors go through is very similar to what soldiers go through when they are in a war zone. The perpetrator uses techniques of psychological torture that have been used to break prisoners of war who are trained soldiers who've been captured by the enemy. And these very same tactics that abusers use in your own home in the suburbs or the city, these very same techniques have been used to break trained soldiers who are being captured by the enemy because the techniques are that that bad. And I talk about this in my Substack.

So you have been through the equivalent of a war, and yet where is the public recognition for you? And if it was up to me, I would give every victim survivor a medal and a parade and so much praise and recognition because they had to fight a war that they didn't even ask to fight. They didn't even know that they were going into a war, but yet they fought it and they fought for their survival and they fought for their safety. And even if they didn't entirely succeed and perhaps they never got away, they did keep fighting to survive and to keep existing day after day.

And if they did get away, oh my God, they achieved something incredible because it's so hard to get away. So people are like, "Oh, just leave." No, leaving is one of the most difficult things any human being can do. So there should be medals for it. I'm absolutely serious about that. And if it was up to me, I would just be handing them out right now. If I could just pass them through the computer or the phone that you're watching this on or listening to this on, I would be doing that right now.

And I think that what happens to victims and survivors usually lasts longer than most wars last. They're in the field longer than most wars. Most soldiers have a team that they're part of that give them support, but victims and survivors are alone. And they're

having to fight for their own safety and their own well-being, but also for the safety and the well-being of their children too. And I think they're just absolutely heroes.

And if anyone managed to escape, and if anyone managed to give their children lots of support through this and help their children to come through it, I think that that is just amazing. I think it's incredible. So I know I'm talking quite differently than how most people talk, but I think that's how we should all be talking, and I want to encourage other people to start talking that way because it's so amazing that survivors are even able to listen to this, they're even here listening to this, because what they've been doing is so tough. They're just incredible for surviving it.

NATALIE: That's right. In fact, I love that so much. Everyone who's listening, close your eyes and imagine a medal around your neck for what you do every day when you get up and face your situation every day. That is courage. And a lot of times when you don't know where the end is going to be, that's just an added layer of overwhelm.

Why don't you mention your Substack, and we talked about it at the beginning, but why don't you talk about that now in case people... Especially you just mentioned an article that sounded really intriguing. Tell people where they can follow your work on Substack. And tell people what Substack is too. Some people know what that is and other people might not even know what that is.

DR. KATZ: So Substack is a writing platform. So I write articles aimed at the public, taking my knowledge and expertise as a researcher in this field and writing it in a really accessible, bite-sized way that anyone can just sit there and read. And I have been told that my articles are very, very readable, which I'm glad about because I want it to be accessible to as many people as possible.

So you can find me on Substack and my platform there is called Decoding Coercive Control with Dr. Emma Katz. And if you just Google my name, you'll come across my website, which has links to my Substack, or you can Google "Emma Katz's Substack" or "Decoding Coercive Control with Emma Katz" and you'll find it. I also have a book if you're a book reader, if you like books. I have a book on this called Coercive Control in Children's and Mothers' Lives, which was published two years ago.

NATALIE: Yes, and we will have links to all of this also in the show notes. Thank you so much, Emma. This was a great interview. I really appreciate your time.

DR. KATZ: Thanks so much. Thanks for having me. I really hope it's been useful. Bye.