

## Coercive control and its impact on mental health

### CASE STUDY

Vanessa is 47 years old and has been married to Vince (electrician) for 20 years. Holding old-fashioned values for their marriage, the house and cars are only in Vince's name.

They have three children, William (18), Sarah (16) and Tom (14). Vanessa has been a stay-at-home mum for all of her children's primary school years. Prior to her marriage she worked in administration for insurance claims. When Tom was settled into high school she thought it would be a good time for her to go back to work, thinking it would help the family's finances and give her more independence. Vince agreed it would be good for her, but often made comments that it was not necessary as he brings in enough money. He also insisted that she come home straight after work and not attend any work social events.

Vince made it quite clear that if Vanessa goes to work, he won't be able to help her with housework. He recently said, "If you go back to work, you will still have to do all of the housework because you know I'm useless at that stuff". Vanessa agreed but in the back of her mind hoped he would assist. Vince was often full of hot air and Vanessa knew not to take any notice of him, so as to not make him angry.

Vanessa looked for work for over 12 months and was successful in securing a part-time role at a supermarket. She began work at the

supermarket, packing shelves and working at the check-out, six months ago. It's not quite what she hoped for, but the people are nice and she enjoys feeling more independent and helping with the family's finances.

She was recently asked if she would consider a role in management. When she told Vince, he was not supportive and said, "Why would you want more responsibility? It will only mean harder work and more stress managing people. If you do it, remember I won't help with housework".

Vince insisted it would be easier to have Vanessa's pay go into their joint account. Recently he questioned why she spent \$200 at Kmart. She explained to him that Tom and Sarah needed some new clothes and she had to buy a 50<sup>th</sup> birthday present for her best friend. It's common for Vince to question Vanessa on her spending. She finds it exhausting at times but understands that Vince needs to know what they spend their money on because he takes responsibility for running their finances. Vince tells her, "You're no good with numbers anyway".

When Vanessa went to her best friend's 50<sup>th</sup> birthday dinner, Vince was constantly texting her asking when she would be home and who she was talking to. Her friend asked her what was going on with her phone and Vanessa said, "Oh don't worry it's Vince, he couldn't find

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something, you know what he's like. Aren't all men like that You should have seen how much he annoyed me last week when I was getting my hair coloured at the hairdresser. I swear he rang me three times, then interrogated me when I got home about how long it took. He's a pain in the neck sometimes. He just doesn't understand that colouring hair takes so long." Her girlfriend responded by saying, "Yes, I know what you mean".

After her friend's 50<sup>th</sup> party, Vanessa was feeling a little under the weather and asked Vince if he could take the washing off the line and vacuum the house. He replied by saying, "I told you if you wanted to work I couldn't help and you shouldn't have had so much to drink". "The house looks clean to me. I've got bookwork to do, so ask Sarah or Tom to help with the washing".