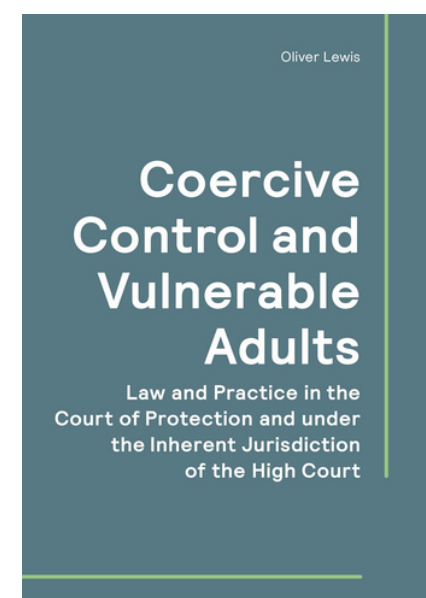


## Book Review: **Emma Sutton KC, Serjeants' Inn Chambers**

23 April 2026

**Oliver Lewis**, *Coercive Control and Vulnerable Adults: Law and Practice in the Court of Protection and the Inherent Jurisdiction of the High Court*



This book offers a rigorous and timely examination of the legal challenges posed by coercive control in relation to persons aged 16 and over who fall outside the traditional boundaries of decision making capacity. Positioned at the intersection of the Mental Capacity Act 2005, the jurisdiction of the Court of Protection, and the High Court's inherent jurisdiction, this book addresses a thorny issue for practitioners - where coercive control has become increasingly visible in safeguarding practice, but routinely difficult to evidence due to its (often) insidious nature.

Lewis makes a significant contribution by interrogating the adequacy of the binary "capacity" "incapacity" framework - the central argument being that autonomy may be formally intact yet substantively undermined by coercion. The work is particularly valuable in articulating how the courts have responded through the use of its inherent jurisdiction; providing "relief" where external pressures such as undue influence, dependency, and psychological control are at play. He raises important questions, however, about the legitimacy and limits of such intervention, especially where it risks encroaching on the principle of personal autonomy.

This is an authoritative text providing a serious contribution to a developing area of law. A noticeable benefit is that it is drafted by an experienced barrister who practices at the "coal face" in complex cases, but who also has a strong academic background - and he succeeds in tackling the delicate balance of providing practical tips, without the text becoming theoretically obscure.

It will be of particular interest to legal practitioners, academics, and policymakers grappling with the limitations of existing capacity based frameworks in the face of coercive control. It undoubtedly provides a valuable analytical framework for approaching complex cases and clarifies when reliance on the inherent jurisdiction may be appropriate and how evidence of coercion might be framed and assessed. Chapters 11-13, which provide guidance on how to represent victims/ survivors, the local authority, and the "controlling person", were particularly helpful and thought provoking (including the use of trauma-aware approaches), and will undoubtedly strengthen the skillset of even the most seasoned legal professional.

Lewis succeeds in reframing the conversation: the key issue is no longer simply whether an individual has or lacks capacity to make certain decisions in their lives, but whether their autonomy is meaningfully exercisable. In doing so, the book both reflects and advances an important shift in contemporary legal thought.

In summary, this is a highly valuable resource for professionals engaged in mental capacity and safeguarding law, and a book that will definitely be front and centre on my book shelf.