



Curtin University



WESNET
The Women's Services Network



WESNET

SECOND NATIONAL
SURVEY ON
TECHNOLOGY ABUSE
AND DOMESTIC
VIOLENCE IN
AUSTRALIA



WESNET acknowledgement

This research was produced with funding from Telstra. WESNET gratefully acknowledges the previous work of the National Network to End Domestic Violence in 2012, the former Domestic Violence Research Centre Victoria (now Domestic Violence Victoria) in 2013 and the ReCharge project, a joint project between the Domestic Violence Research Centre Victoria, Women's Legal Services NSW and WESNET in 2015. Without these previous research efforts, the longitudinal aspects of this research would not have been possible.



Acknowledgement of Country

The authors acknowledge the traditional owners of this land on which we live and work, and their continuing connection to land, water and community. We pay respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island elders past, present and future; and we value Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history, culture and knowledge..

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Published by

WESNET (Women's Services Network) Incorporated.
GPO Box 1579, CANBERRA CITY, ACT 2061
ABN 16 068 548 631

First published November 2020 (WESNET)

Suggested citation

Woodlock, D., Bentley, K., Schulze, D., Mahoney, N., Chung, D., and Pracilio, A., (2020). *Second National Survey of Technology Abuse and Domestic Violence in Australia*. WESNET.

Illustrations: Maria Ponomariova iStockphotos.

Second National Survey of Technology Abuse and Domestic Violence in Australia

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Acknowledgements

The research team would like to thank the many people and organisations that have made this second national survey on technology abuse and domestic violence possible. Understanding how technology is misused in the context of domestic, family and other forms of gender-based violence is more important than ever before.

We wish to acknowledge and thank Telstra for supporting and funding this research - in particular Abigail Brydon, Michael Parks and Robert Morsillo for their ongoing support of WESNET and the work that we do.

We also thank the many frontline services that took the time to complete the survey and provide their comments and shared their insights and expertise with us.

Thank you to Dr Kristin Diemer, Senior Research Fellow in the Department of Social Work at The University of Melbourne, for her guidance and feedback on the survey design. Also to Susan Swain and Sarah Biordi for emerging new technologies added to the survey for 2020. Thank you to Bonnie Pockley, Willa Whitewolf, Julie Oberin and Abby Brydon for proofreading and editing, and to Natalie Morris, Diana Hookey, Lauren Read and June Weir for their support.

Thank you to Vig Geddes, Emily Maguire and the team at the former DVRCV, and to Helen Campbell, Executive Officer of Women's Legal Services NSW who conducted the first national survey and enabled WESNET to use and expand upon the first survey instrument.

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Contents

Acknowledgements	ii	Age groups of women most affected by technology-facilitated abuse.	33
The research team	ii	Impacts on women from technology-facilitated stalking and abuse	34
Contents	iii	Legal responses	36
Table of Figures	iv	Effective police responses.	37
Table of Tables.	v	What telecommunication companies should do to keep women and children safe.	38
Abbreviations.	vi	Training and resources needed	39
Executive Summary.	1	Conclusion.	42
Introduction	6	Recommendations and future directions.	44
Definition of Terms.	9	References	46
Methodology	11	Appendix - Survey Results Tables	48
Profile of the respondents	12		
COVID-19	16		
Types and frequency of technology used	18		
How technology is being used as part of domestic violence perpetrator tactics	22		
Abusive tactics.	22		
Threatening tactics	23		
Monitoring and tracking tactics	24		
Humiliating, shaming and punishing tactics.	26		
Other tactics—impersonation, use of children and financial abuse.	28		
Co-occurring abuse.	30		
Particular risks for women from different cultural and community groups.	32		

Table of Figures

Figure E-1: The top three technologies identified by respondents as being used 'all the time' by perpetrators. 2	Figure 13: Frequency of technologies used used to verbally abuse, call women names or put women down 22
Figure E-2: Respondents report video cameras and GPS tracking apps are being used 'all the time' in 2020, a significant increase when compared to 2015 3	Figure 14: Types of threatening tactics seen and how often 23
Figure E-3: Newer forms of technology-facilitated abuse 4	Figure 15: Types of monitoring and tracking tactics . . . 25
Figure E-4: Co-occurring forms of violence 5	Figure 16: Types of humiliating, shaming and punishing tactics 27
Figure 1: Age profile of respondents 12	Figure 17: Other tactics used by perpetrators 29
Figure 2: Organisation type of respondent 12	Figure 18: Types of abuse that co-occur with technology abuse. 30
Figure 3: Remoteness of respondents 12	Figure 19: Have you noticed any particular issues with technology-facilitated abuse that are different for specific groups of women? 32
Figure 4: Length of time in role 12	Figure 20: Age groups of women most affected by technology-facilitated abuse 33
Figure 5: Respondents experience of the gender of perpetrators and of victim-survivors 13	Figure 21: In what ways do you think telecommunication companies and internet providers could do more to enhance women and children's safety? 38
Figure 6: Number of respondents by State and Territory 13	Figure 22: If you were to undertake training in this area, what topics would you like to see covered? 39
Figure 7: Whether DV is a major part of the respondents' role. 13	
Figure 8: Number of respondents and gender of respondents. 13	
Figure 9: Practitioners with clients experiencing technology-facilitated abuse 18	
Figure 10: The top three technologies identified by respondents as being used 'all the time' by perpetrators. 18	
Figure 11: Technologies being used in 2020 with increased frequency compared to 2015. 19	
Figure 12A: What technologies are you seeing being used to facilitate abuse and how often? 20	
Figure 12B: What technologies are you seeing being used to facilitate abuse and how often*?. 21	

Table of Tables

Table 1: State/Territory of respondent	50	Table 17: Have you noticed any particular issues with technology-facilitated abuse that are different for specific groups of women?	62
Table 2: Remoteness of respondents	50	Table 18: What age groups are most affected?	62
Table 3: Organisation Type	50	Table 19: Co-occurring Abuse*	62
Table 4: Age*	50	Table 20: Do police take technology-facilitated abuse seriously?	63
Table 5: Sex*	50	Table 21: What reasons do you believe that police not take technology-facilitated abuse seriously?	63
Table 6: Length in Role	51	Table 22: In your experience over the last 12 months, if clients have had their intervention order/AVO/protection order breached via technology, such as text messages or via Facebook, have police taken action?	64
Table 7: Frequency of Support	51	Table 23: Technology may be used to collect evidence of abuse, such as by taking screenshots of text messages, recordings made using a smartphone. In the course of your work, have you seen evidence obtained using technology being used*:	64
Table 8: Have you had clients who have been abused, stalked or threatened via technology?	51	Table 24: In the course of your work, have you seen examples of where courts did not accept evidence of technology-facilitated abuse as admissible evidence?	64
Table 9: In your experience, what gender are perpetrators of technology abuse mostly?*	51	Table 25: In what ways do you think telecommunication companies and internet providers could do more to enhance women and children’s safety?	65
Table 10: In your experience, what gender are victims of technology abuse mostly?*	51	Table 26: If you were to undertake training in this area, what topics would you like to see covered?	65
Table 11: What technologies are you seeing being used to facilitate abuse and how often?	52		
Table 11: What technologies are you seeing being used to facilitate abuse and how often? (continued)	54		
Table 12: What types of abusive tactics are you seeing perpetrators using via technology and how often?	56		
Table 13: What types of threatening tactics are you seeing perpetrators using via technology and how often?	57		
Table 14: What types of monitoring and tracking tactics are you seeing perpetrators using via technology and how often?	58		
Table 15: What types of humiliating, shaming and punishing tactics are you seeing perpetrators using via technology, and how often?	60		
Table 16: What other tactics are you seeing perpetrators using via technology and how often?	61		

Abbreviations

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
CALD	Culturally and Linguistically Diverse
COAG	Council of Australian Governments
DFV	Domestic and Family Violence
DV	Domestic Violence
DVRCV	Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria
IBSA	Image-based sexual abuse
ICT	Information Communication Technology
NGO	Non-Government Organisation
PTSD	Post Traumatic Stress Disorder
Safe Connections	A joint partnership between Telstra and WESNET that provides smartphones to survivors of domestic and family violence through a network of specially-trained frontline agencies that understand how smartphones can be misused by perpetrators.
WESNET	Women's Services Network

Executive Summary

Australian researchers raised concerns about the potential expansion of technology-facilitated abuse in the context of domestic violence (DV) and its impacts over a decade ago. They foreshadowed the growth of personal digital technologies (Hand et al., 2009) and were concerned that technology-facilitated abuse would leave women feeling constantly unsafe for longer periods following separation as a result of technology removing the geographic and spatial boundaries that previously afforded women the opportunity to be at a 'safe distance' from their abusers. The researchers recommended that quantitative data be collected and monitored over time, that training and resource development be prioritised for advocates and DV practitioners so that they would be prepared to support women in the future, and that legislation be reviewed so that it could better address technology-facilitated abuse. This report provides the second iteration of evidence in relation to the quantitative data.

Our reliance on technology as individuals and collectively has

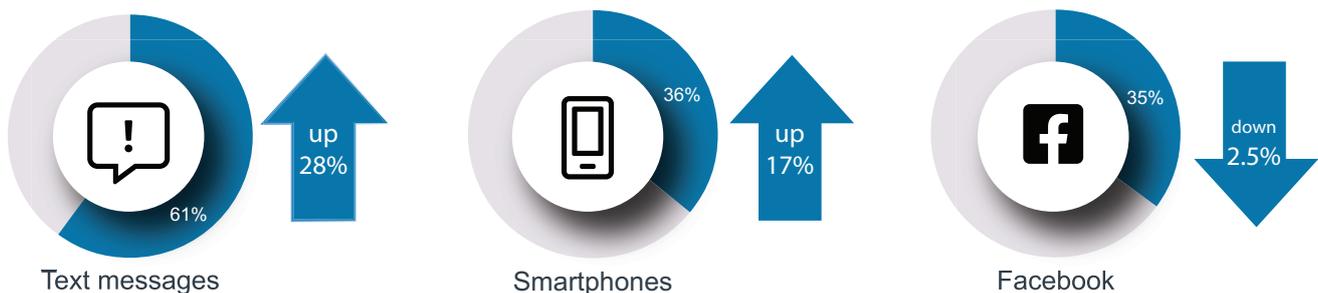
rapidly increased over the past decades in Australia, but women lag behind men in their use of technology. Young women aged 14 to 24 years old are already less digitally included than males of the same age, and the gap widens with each older age cohort (Thomas et al., 2019). This technological disadvantage, combined with the fact that Australian women are nearly three times more likely than men to experience violence from an intimate partner (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], 2017), makes the intersection of technology and domestic violence an urgent and important issue in achieving both gender equality and the elimination of violence against women.

This report explores the 2020 findings of a national Australian survey with 442 frontline DV practitioners about the use of technology by perpetrators. It is a follow-up survey to the 2015 ReCharge study, conducted by DVRCV, Women's Legal Services NSW, and WESNET to investigate technology-facilitated abuse in Australia (Woodlock, 2015).

Our 2020 findings show that practitioners and women carry a significant burden in responding to and preventing perpetrators' abuse of technology. Practitioners noted that the use of technology is increasing in magnitude and is often felt as all-encompassing for victim-survivors. In their experience, women are entrapped by the perpetrator's use of technology, with some women returning to their abuser because they felt they could not escape his control. Respondents felt this intensified during the first wave of COVID-19 in Australia (the survey was opened from 6 May to 31 August, 2020).

DV practitioners' awareness of the use of technology in DV has increased since 2015 yet they described finding it hard to keep up with the myriad of ways that women were controlled and monitored. Disappointingly, there was little shift in legal responses to this abuse compared to 2015. Respondents noted that breaches to intervention orders made via technology were rarely enforced and often taken less seriously than physical abuse.

Figure E-1: The top three technologies identified by respondents as being used 'all the time' by perpetrators.



The 2020 survey introduced several new questions, in particular, we asked about co-occurring abuse so that we could gain further insights into the context of technology-facilitated abuse. We found that like most experiences of DV, the perpetrators used other forms of abuse alongside technology-facilitated abuse and that most of these were non-physical abuses.

Major findings

Almost all survey respondents (99.3%) stated that they had clients who had experienced technology-facilitated stalking and abuse. This is slightly higher than the finding in 2015 (98.3%).

The type of technology most commonly used by perpetrators was text messaging, with two thirds (60.7%) of practitioners seeing this 'all the time'. This represents a 28.3% increase from 2015. Text messages could be used in various ways, from

constantly sending messages to victims-survivors, to carefully worded messages that perpetrators would use to cause victim-survivors fear.

Smartphones were the next most commonly used technology (36.1% seeing this 'all the time', an increase from 31% in 2015). Facebook was also reported to be used frequently by perpetrators to abuse (35.1% noting this as occurring 'all the time', a slight decrease from 36% reported in 2015).

Compared with 2015, practitioners are reporting large increases in the frequency with which they are seeing video cameras and GPS tracking apps being used. The use of video cameras increased by 183.2% between 2015 and 2020. This could be due to the growth in accessibility and affordability of video technology.

Respondents noted that perpetrators would use cameras to covertly and/or overtly monitor women and children. For example, one respondent noted

cameras being installed in roof spaces and running with power packs that were discovered by police after separation. In another case, the perpetrator let a woman know he had the property under video surveillance and she felt, therefore, she was unable to leave.

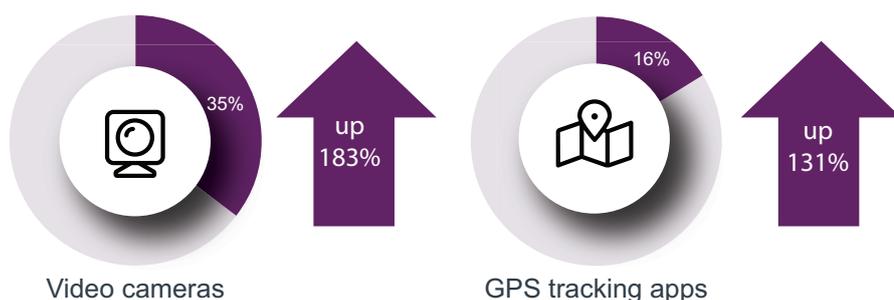
Respondents noted they were seeing GPS tracking apps used 'all the time' (16.2%) and 'often' (45.6%). This is a 131% and 75% increase respectively from 2015 (when 7% saw this 'all the time', and 26% 'often'). Participants noted that because GPS tracking apps such as "Find My" are preloaded on iPhones, that women were often obligated to turn them on, or else they were seen by the perpetrator as having something to hide.

Of the additional technologies added in the 2020 survey, FaceTime was seen as being used to perpetrate technology-facilitated abuse, with almost half seeing this 'often' (42.6%). iCloud was also noted as commonly used by perpetrators to stalk and place women under surveillance, with almost half (42.2%) observing this 'often'.

Of significance was the high proportion of respondents seeing government accounts such as myGov being misused by perpetrators to abuse women, with almost a third of respondents seeing this 'all the time' (27%) and a further fifth seeing it 'often' (37.8%).

The use of technology by perpetrators to threaten victim-

Figure E-2: Respondents report video cameras and GPS tracking apps are being used 'all the time' in 2020, a significant increase when compared to 2015



survivors increased from 2015 to 2020 across all modes. It is important to highlight that intimate partner homicide is 11.36 times more probable with any kind of threat made by perpetrators (Spencer & Stith, 2020). Verbal threats to women using the phone increased by 35.8%, with one-third of practitioners seeing this 'all the time' (32.9%) in 2015 to almost half (44.7%) in 2020. Between 2015 and 2020, there was a 74.4% increase in the reported use of text messages, email or instant messages to threaten women, increasing from one-third of practitioners observing this 'all the time' in 2015 (32.9%) to over half in 2020 (57.4%).

The use of technology to monitor and track victim-survivors showed increases across all areas between 2015 and 2020. Perpetrators checking victim-survivors' phones and text messages without consent was seen 'all the time' by over half of practitioners (57.1%), an increase of 97.5% from 2015 (which was 28.9%). Practitioners noted that this was particularly prevalent with younger women, where there was an expectation in relationships that all devices and accounts should be shared with partners.

The developments in accessible digital technologies such as GPS, enable the quick uptake by large numbers of perpetrators using the technologies to control and monitor women. Victim-survivors tracked with GPS apps or devices increased in 2020 by 244.8%, from 1 in 12 respondents (8.12%) seeing this 'all

the time' in 2015, to almost 1 in 3 (28%) in 2020.

In their experience, almost half (49.9%) of the practitioners said that perpetrators were forcing women to film and record intimate images 'often'. However, respondents felt it was likely to be underreported and that they suspected was happening much more often than women were comfortable talking about.

The use of children in technology-facilitated abuse showed significant increases over the time period. Children being given a phone or other device as a way to contact their father and monitor their mother's movements showed an increase of 346.6% from 2015.

Perpetrators' use of children's social media accounts to contact children's mothers also revealed a large increase of 254.2% in 2020.

The 2020 survey asked practitioners about court-ordered child contact and if perpetrators were using this to abuse, threaten and intimidate women, with almost half of the respondents (49.4%) seeing this 'all the time'.

Another new question for 2020 was the tracking, monitoring and restricting of women's banking and finances through technology, with over one-third of respondents seeing this 'all the time' (38.7%), and one-third seeing it 'often' (33.6%). Financial abuse was observed as co-occurring in 61.3% of responses.

The most common co-occurring abuse observed by respondents in 2020 was stalking (70.6%). Stalking is associated with a significant risk of lethal or near-lethal harm (Rai et al., 2020). A 2020 meta-analysis showed that stalking was associated with a 2.79 times risk of intimate partner homicide (Spencer & Stith, 2020). The impact of intimate partner stalking is known to have very specific and detrimental effects on victim-survivors' mental health.

The perceived risk for women with disabilities subjected to technology-facilitated abuse increased by 115.3% from 20.57% in 2015 and 44.3% in 2020.

Women from non-English speaking backgrounds were also seen to be at particular risk, at 43%, which is an increase of 76.2% from 2015. Perpetrators would call, text and use social media to contact family and friends from overseas to spread rumours and isolate women, as well as use image-based sexual abuse (IBSA) in particular ways to shame women from CALD backgrounds.

There was an increase of 113.9% in the risks for Indigenous women, from 12.9% in 2015 to 27.6% in 2020. While respondents did not provide extensive detail on these risks one participant said:

"My work is mainly with Aboriginal women and it can be really damaging in these communities to have rumours etc spread via technology."

Impact on women

In both surveys, participants were asked, “What has been the impact of technology-facilitated abuse on women you have worked with?”. The responses across the two surveys were similar, however, we noted that there was an increased perception in 2020 that women were experiencing high levels of fear and terror as a result of the technology-facilitated abuse, and that they were feeling trapped and hopeless.

The term fear was one of the most commonly used words in response to the question of how technology-facilitated abuse impacts victim-survivors. A practitioner stated that the impact was:

“Unmeasurable[sic]. More than anything else, like rape, torture, etc., that I’ve seen over the years, abuse with technology is

so invasive and psychologically destabilising.”

This ‘mental torture’ had significant impacts on victim-survivors, with exhaustion, despair and hopelessness mentioned by respondents.

“The impact is huge. Since technology is such a part of everyday life now, women often feel they have no escape from the perpetrator. This kind of constant, relentless abuse has a massive impact on women’s mental health. I have seen women become completely paranoid and jump at every sound due to the abuse.”

One of the main consequences of technology-facilitated abuse on victim-survivors was increased isolation, and a fear of using technology to keep in contact with friends, family and services. This

could have significant ramifications on women’s lives.

Police and justice responses remain the same

There was little change in practitioners’ perceptions of police responses to technology-facilitated abuse from 2015 to 2020. When asked if they felt police took technology-facilitated abuse seriously, 61.6% said this happened sometimes, but was dependent on the officer.

Practitioners noted that effective police responses entailed them taking the time to collect evidence and seeing different forms of technology-facilitated abuse as patterns of control:

Figure E-3: Newer forms of technology-facilitated abuse

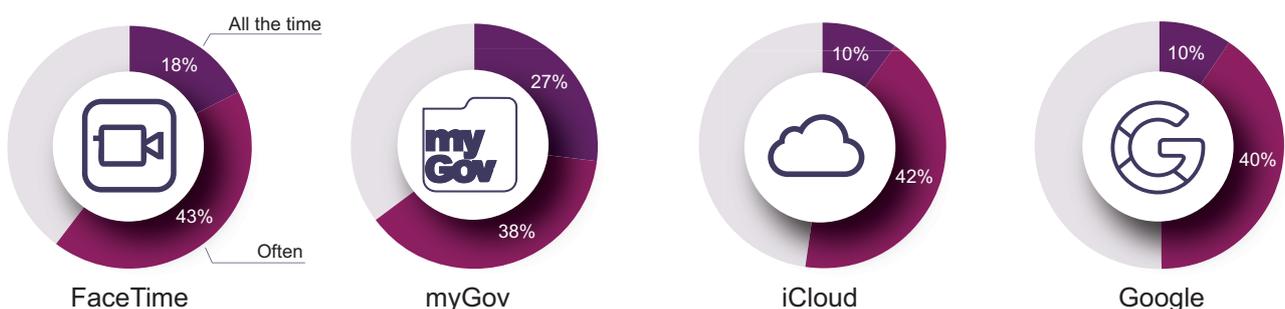
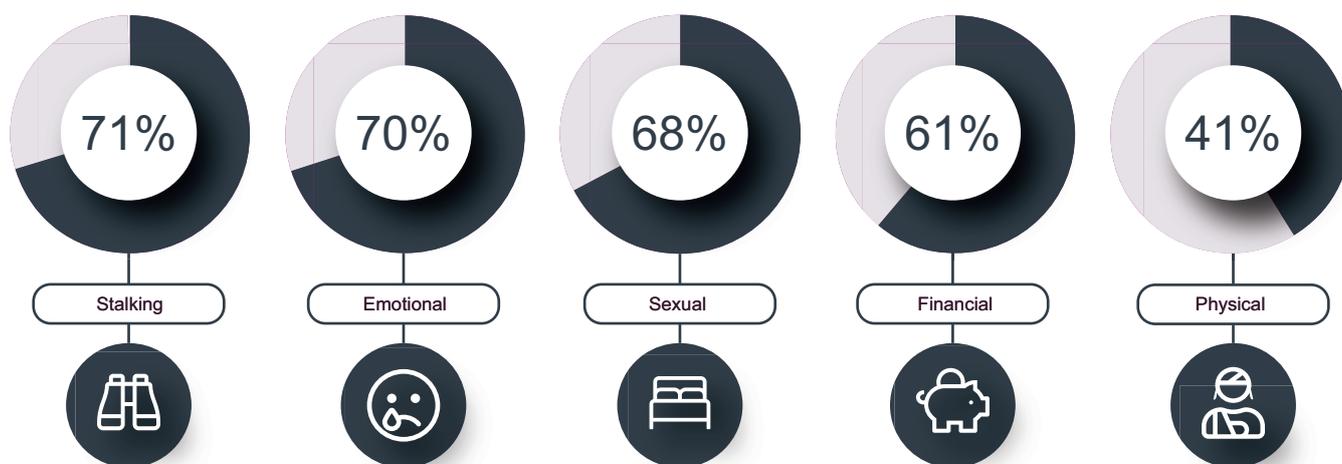


Figure E-4: Co-occurring forms of violence



“Victim-survivor provided screenshots of recent breaches, disclosed receiving & answering a lot of calls from private numbers where the caller would remain silent then hang up. Police processed charges for breach and also seek to obtain perpetrator’s call log for charges of stalking.”

Even so, respondents also felt that even when police took the abuse seriously, it was actually difficult for further action to be taken through the courts.

Conclusion

In conclusion, our second national survey highlights how the rapid changes in technology are

shifting the various ways in which technology-facilitated abuse is perpetrated against women and how women and practitioners are responding to these changing and growing abuses. Since the 2015 survey the extent of technology-facilitated abuse has increased, yet it would seem that responses to perpetrators of such abuse are not expanding and changing to keep pace with what is happening. States and territories have criminalised IBSA and there have been some prosecutions, however, the more commonly described text harassment and threats or breaching of privacy through surveillance have been less amenable to intervention, despite the considerable fear and severity of the effects it has on victim-survivors.

The findings of the *Second National Survey on Technology Abuse and Domestic Violence* are an urgent call to action to governments, telecommunication and technology companies, police, and the justice system for the tactics of technology-facilitated abuse to be taken seriously. We need to collectively work to support women and children subjected to this abuse and ultimately prevent this abuse from happening in the first place through effective technology design, legislation, awareness, training, resource development and primary prevention education.

Introduction

Australian researchers raised concerns about the potential expansion of technology-facilitated abuse and its impacts over a decade ago. They foreshadowed the growth of personal digital technologies (Hand et al., 2009) and were concerned that technology-facilitated abuse would leave women feeling constantly unsafe for longer periods following separation as a result of technology removing the geographic and spatial boundaries that previously afforded women the opportunity to be at a 'safe distance' from their abusers. Back in 2009, prevalence data about technology-facilitated abuse were not available due to its recent emergence. The researchers recommended that such quantitative data be collected and monitored over time, that training and resource development be prioritised for advocates and DV practitioners so that they are prepared to support women in the future, and that legislation be reviewed so that it could better address technology-facilitated abuse. Much of this work has evolved as predicted, and this second Australian survey of DV practitioners represents an essential addition to the evidence development in Australia and more widely.

Our reliance on technology as individuals and collectively has rapidly increased over the past decades. Anything that limits someone's safe access to technology restricts access to essential services, such as banking, education and social services and can impair social and economic participation. Safe and open access to the internet and

online spaces has been framed as a human rights issue, and an indicator of gender equality (Plan International, 2020).

Women already lag behind men in their use of technology. The Australian Digital-Inclusion index (Thomas et al., 2019) shows that young women 14-24 are less digitally included than males of the same age, and the gap widens with each older age cohort. This technological disadvantage, combined with the fact that Australian women are nearly three times more likely than men to experience violence from an intimate partner (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], 2017), makes the intersection of technology and DV an urgent and important issue in achieving both gender equality and the elimination of violence against women.

In 2016, the United Nation's Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences, Dubravka Šimonović, analysed online violence and violence facilitated by information and communications technology (ICT) against women and girls from a human rights perspective and stated:

"...the Internet is being used in a broader environment of widespread and systemic structural discrimination and gender based violence against women and girls, which frame their access to and use of the Internet and other ICT. Emerging forms of ICT have facilitated new types of gender-based violence and





gender inequality in access to technologies, which hinder women's and girls' full enjoyment of their human rights and their ability to achieve gender equality (Šimonović, 2016)."

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals¹ (SDGs) also list gender and technology as key elements to achieving a sustainable future world through achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls. SDG Target 5.8 identifies the use of enabling technology to promote the empowerment of women. This is an important context to frame our understanding around technology-facilitated abuse—both the impacts as well as the suggested solutions to this abuse—to ensure that the use of technology is not further curtailed in our attempts to keep women and children safer from men's violence.

This report explores the 2020 findings of a national Australian survey with 442 frontline domestic violence practitioners about the use of technology by perpetrators. It is a follow-up survey to the 2015 ReCharge study, conducted by DVRCV, Women's Legal Services NSW, and WESNET to investigate technology-facilitated abuse in Australia (Woodlock, 2015).

Since the release of our findings in 2015 there has been a growing interest and investment

¹ Available at : <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/>

in technology-facilitated abuse. Academics, technologists and frontline practitioners have attended three national Technology Safety Summits held by WESNET in Australia (held in 2016, 2017 and 2018). There has also been government focus on the issue including the COAG Advisory Panel on Reducing Violence against Women and their Children (2016), and the announcement of the \$100m Women's Safety Package by the Australian Government in late 2016. This Safety Package funded measures such as the eSafety Women program, technology trials, Keeping Women Safe in the Home initiatives, and the highly successful NGO-Corporate-Government tripartite initiative to provide smartphones, prepaid credit to survivors and training for DV practitioners through the Safe Connections program².

There is now starting to be more published research on the impacts of technology-facilitated abuse, particularly in the area of IBSA. IBSA has received the most attention from policy and law-makers over recent years. Legislation has now been introduced in every state and territory in Australia except Tasmania to make the non-consensual sharing or the threat to share intimate images illegal. The eSafety Commissioner

² The Safer Technology for Women initiative is a three-way partnership between WESNET, Telstra and the Australian Government between May 2016 and March 2021 and by November 2020 had provided over 24,000 smartphones and prepaid credit to women impacted by DV, through a network of 276 frontline agencies that WESNET has trained in smartphone safety. See <https://phones.wesnet.org.au>

has increased powers and there has been a civil penalties scheme introduced the Enhancing Online Safety (Sharing of Intimate Images) Act 2018.

Our 2020 findings show that in spite of this growing interest and investment, this is still a developing area, one where practitioners and women carry a significant burden in responding to and preventing perpetrators' abuse of technology. Practitioners noted that the use of technology is increasing in magnitude and is often felt as all-encompassing for victim-survivors. In their experience, women are entrapped by the perpetrator's use of technology, with some women returning to the abuser because they felt they could not escape his control. This intensified during the first waves of COVID-19 in Australia. While not an intended focus of our study, practitioners note how the enforced isolation of the pandemic has provided opportunities for perpetrators to further entrap women and children using technology.

Respondents felt that their awareness of the use of technology in DV had increased yet they described finding it hard to keep up with the myriad of ways that women

were controlled and monitored. Disappointingly, there was little shift from 2015 to 2020 in legal responses to this abuse. Respondents noted that breaches to intervention orders made via technology were rarely enforced and often taken less seriously than physical abuse.

The 2020 survey introduced several new questions, in particular, we asked about co-occurring abuse so that we could gain further insights into the context of technology-facilitated abuse. We found that like most experiences of DV, the perpetrators used other forms of abuse alongside technology-facilitated abuse and that most of these were non-physical abuses. We also asked if men or women were most likely to be the perpetrator or victim, with an overwhelming majority stating that men were most likely to be perpetrators and women most likely to be victims. This gendered pattern was seen throughout the findings, with perpetrators often targeting women's mothering and impacting their relationship with their children, as well as using technology in their sexual abuse of women.

Respondents to our survey identified the resources most needed for their work and how they felt

telecommunication companies should be supporting victim-survivors of technology-facilitated abuse. The responses showed that as understanding of this type of abuse is increasing in DV organisations, so are the support needs of women and practitioners, with a requirement for advanced training around technology-facilitated abuse and risk assessment. Respondents also felt that telecommunication companies needed to provide more specialised and advanced assistance.

Overall, the 2020 findings reveal significant increases in technology-facilitated abuse, which indicates the challenge of responding to, and preventing its occurrence. It also highlights the importance of longitudinal research in this area, so that we can track the range of ways in which technology-facilitated abuse is increasing as well as the progress of system response in addressing this issue.



Definition of Terms

Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD)

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2014), the term 'culturally and linguistically diverse' (CALD) is associated with various characteristics, such as a person's country of birth, languages other than English spoken at home, and whether a person is Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander. We recognise that this term does not highlight the differences of people within this group or capture the complexities they experience (State of Victoria, 2019). However, CALD is a general term used by service providers to refer to people who have diverse language and backgrounds, including diverse traditions, religion and societal structures (Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria, 2014).

Domestic Violence (DV)

Domestic violence is defined as a pattern of behaviour used to have power and control over a current or former intimate partner. The behaviours may be "actions or threats of actions" that can intimidate, humiliate, manipulate, create fear and terror and cause hurt and injury (United Nations, n.d.).

The term 'domestic and family violence' can be defined as "the repeated use of violent, threatening, coercive or controlling behaviours by an individual against a family member(s), or someone with whom they have, or have had an intimate relationship with, including carers" (MacDonald, 2012, p. 3).

For this report, we use the term 'domestic violence' rather than 'domestic and family violence' because it most accurately reflects the violence discussed. The domestic and family violence practitioners who participated in this survey refer to the abuse as domestic violence and report that the abuse is most commonly perpetrated by men against their current or former intimate female partner.

There is considerable overlap between the two terms and both can include the following behaviours:

- **Physical abuse:** This includes physical violence that can cause pain, injury and/or fear. Examples: slapping, punching, choking, shaking, smashing things, sleep and food deprivation, denying medical support or medications.
- **Verbal abuse:** This may occur in private or in public (including through electronic means), designed to humiliate, degrade, demean, intimidate or subjugate

and may include threats of physical violence. Examples: threats, put-downs, name-calling, insults, shouting.

- **Emotional/psychological abuse:** This involves manipulative behaviour to coerce, control or harm. This can include verbal or non-verbal behaviours. Examples: undermining confidence, blaming for their behaviours, humiliation, intimidation, twisting reality.
- **Economic abuse:** This involves using finances and economic resources to gain power and control in the relationship. Examples: monitoring spending, restricting access to financial resources, hindering employment, accruing debt.
- **Social abuse:** This includes isolation from family, friends or supports. Examples: restricting contact with family or friends, stopping attendance at social activities, monitoring location, reading messages on phones, smashing phones, using family and friends to intimidate.
- **Spiritual abuse:** This involves not letting you follow your spirituality or religion. Examples: preventing from practising personal beliefs, disrespecting individual values and beliefs, forcing a faith or spirituality, misusing religious or spiritual traditions to justify abuse.

- **Sexual abuse:** This may include sexual assault and the sexual abuse of children. This may be a single incident or a series of incidents. Examples: rape, forcing unwanted sexual acts, forcing pornography to be viewed.

Image-Based Sexual Abuse (IBSA)

The terminology 'image-based sexual abuse' (ISBA) includes all forms of the nonconsensual creating or sharing of nude or sexual images (or videos), including threats to share images and altered images.

Intervention Order

Under legislation pertaining to domestic violence, survivors affected by domestic violence, persons authorised by survivors or police officers can apply for an intervention order (an ADVO: Apprehended Domestic Violence Order, in New South Wales; a DVO: Domestic Violence Order: Northern Territory and Tasmania; DVIO: Domestic Violence Intervention Order, in Queensland; FVIO: Family Violence Intervention Order in Victoria; FVO: Family Violence Order in Australian Capital Territory; FVRO: Family Violence Restraining Order, in

Western Australia; Intervention Order in South Australia).

Technology-Facilitated Abuse

Technology-facilitated abuse can involve perpetrators misuse of devices (such as phones, devices and computers), accounts (such as email) and software or platforms (such as social media) to control, abuse, track and intimidate victim-survivors. This abuse can be individualised, such as the perpetrator using threats that have specific meaning for the victim-survivors, but may seem innocuous to others. It can also involve the use of technology by perpetrators to:

- post or send harassing or abusive messages
- stalk (tracking someone's activities, movements, communications)
- dox (publish identifying, private information)
- engage in IBSA (producing or distributing intimate images or video without consent)
- make or share clandestine or conspicuous audio or visual recordings of another person
- impersonate or steal another person's identity

- gain authorised access to a person's digital accounts or profiles or devices
- change functions, impair authorised functions or, cause an unauthorised function on a digital account, profile or device (Harris & Woodlock, forthcoming)

It is important to note that technology doesn't cause technology-facilitated abuse, abusers do.

The same kinds of abusive behaviours we have seen abusers use in DV and other forms of gender-based violence against women are still being used by abusers, however advances in technology, and particularly mobile phone technology, mean that it is now much easier and cheaper for abusers to mis-use technology to perpetrate harms and abuse. Perpetrators now have unprecedented, easy access to simple and user-friendly technology, and the effect is that abuse and monitoring behaviours have become instantaneous, omnipresent, unrelenting and harder to detect.

Methodology

The research involved releasing an online survey to practitioners in the domestic violence sector to ask them about their experiences working with clients experiencing domestic violence.

National practitioner survey

This online survey was a follow up to the 2015 ReCharge study, conducted by DVRCV, Women's Legal Services NSW, and WESNET to investigate technology-facilitated abuse in Australia (Woodlock, 2015). The purpose of the follow up survey is to document the types of technology-facilitated abuse being perpetrated, the frequency and the changes over time.

There were several additions made to the survey in 2020 to reflect developments in technology and the increasing knowledge on how it is used by perpetrators of domestic violence. A new question or option will have an asterisk next to it to indicate it is a 2020 addition.

Alongside the closed questions in the survey, participants had opportunities to add further comments, including an open-ended question regarding the impacts of the abuse on women. These responses were coded using NVivo (QSR International, 2015) and thematic analysis was applied. They are provided in this report to bring depth to the statistics used, as well as to add context to the findings.

Respondents were able to skip questions in both the 2015 and 2020

surveys, therefore it will be noted throughout the findings where the sample size differed from the total of 442. We have also indicated where there is a comparative finding to 2015, along with the number of respondents.

Ethics

An ethics application was submitted to Curtin Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) and approval was received on 24 April 2020 (HRE2020-0178).

Recruitment

WESNET shared the survey through its network of members, mostly specialist women's DV services, and through its large network of agencies that provide Safe Connections phones to women and children. The survey was also advertised through emails, training events, webinars, newsletters as well as social media channels.

The survey was hosted on Qualtrics online survey software and open for 118 days (6 May 2020 - 31 August 2020). In this time, 527 DV practitioners undertook the survey.

Quantitative data analysis

Responses were extracted from Qualtrics into IBM SPSS Statistics software (IBM, 2019). Incomplete responses were removed, with a final sample size of 442 practitioners.

Data was analysed using descriptive statistics, frequencies and cross-tabulations.

Qualitative data analysis

Responses to the open-ended questions were coded thematically, first descriptively, then interpretively, using NVivo (King & Horrocks, 2010). The coding was undertaken by authors one, two and three, with the themes discussed with authors four, five and six to validate the findings.

Limitations

Domestic violence practitioners were sought as participants for this research because of their "practice-based knowledge" that provides "a depth of knowledge and expertise which is often inaccessible to even the most skilled researchers" (Coy & Garner, 2012, p. 296). However, there are certain limitations to this approach. Practitioners' recollection of events could be affected by observer bias, resulting in an overestimation or an underestimation of the technology-facilitated abuse their clients experienced.

Profile of the respondents

Overall, 442 domestic, family and sexual violence practitioners completed the 2020 survey.

The majority of practitioners (81.7%) specified they had worked directly in DV organisations, with others working in sexual assault services (10.6%), legal organisations (9.7%), housing and homelessness services (8.8%), health services (5.7%), Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander services (4.3%) and multicultural services (2.5%). Other respondents specified workplaces such as child protection, health, women’s services or community services.

Respondents were mainly aged 45 to 54 (29.7%) and had been working in their role in DV for one to five years (39.1%).

Figure 2: Organisation type of respondent

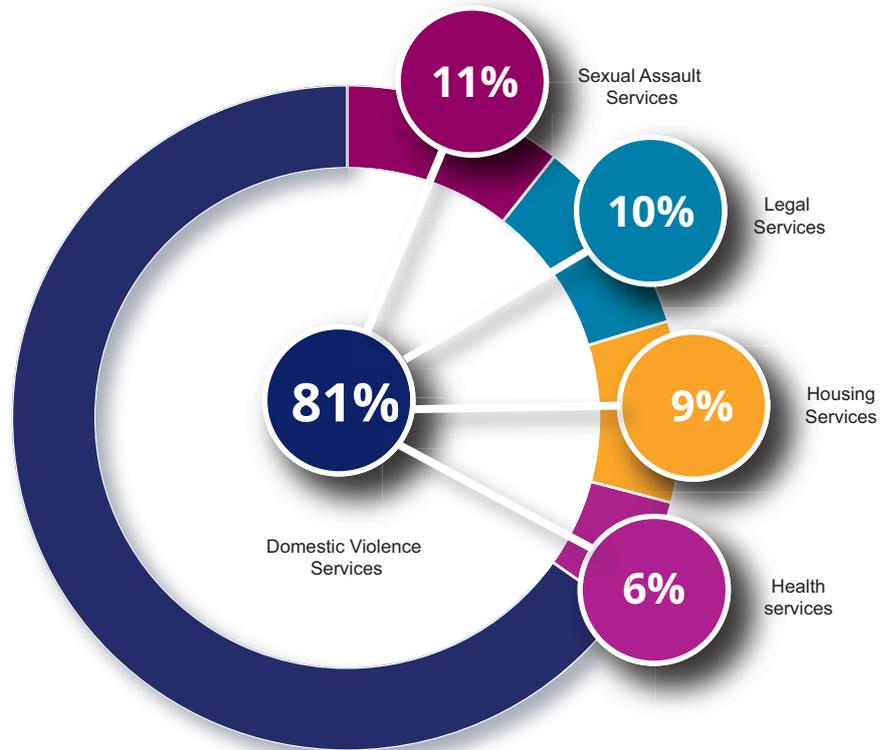


Figure 1: Age profile of respondents

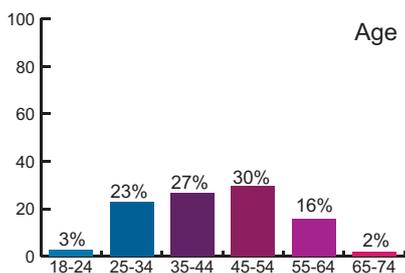


Figure 3: Remoteness of respondents

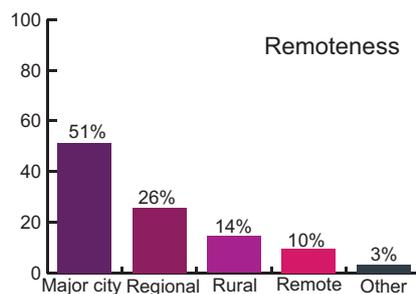
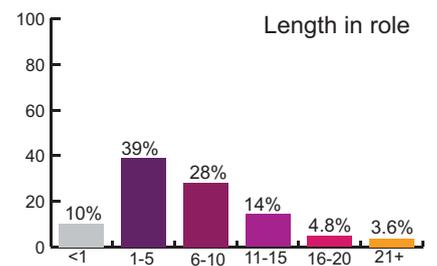


Figure 4: Length of time in role



The majority of the respondents indicated that supporting women and children experiencing DV was their main role (87.9%). Of the 442 respondents to the question about their location, the majority were from Victoria (29.5%), New South Wales (23.2%), and Queensland (18.2%), with most working in major cities (51.4%).

The majority of respondents were female (96.4%).

Figure 5: Respondents experience of the gender of perpetrators and of victim-survivors

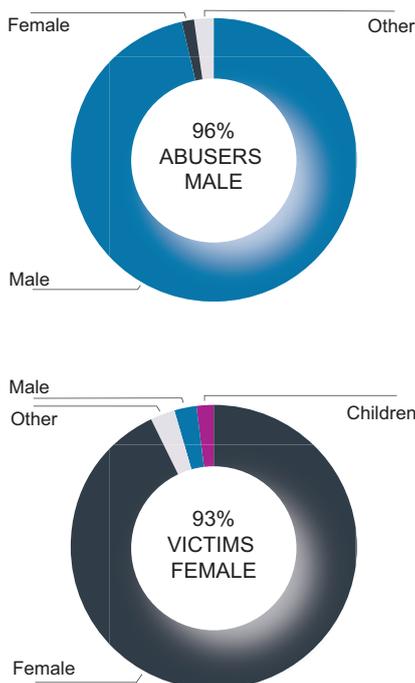
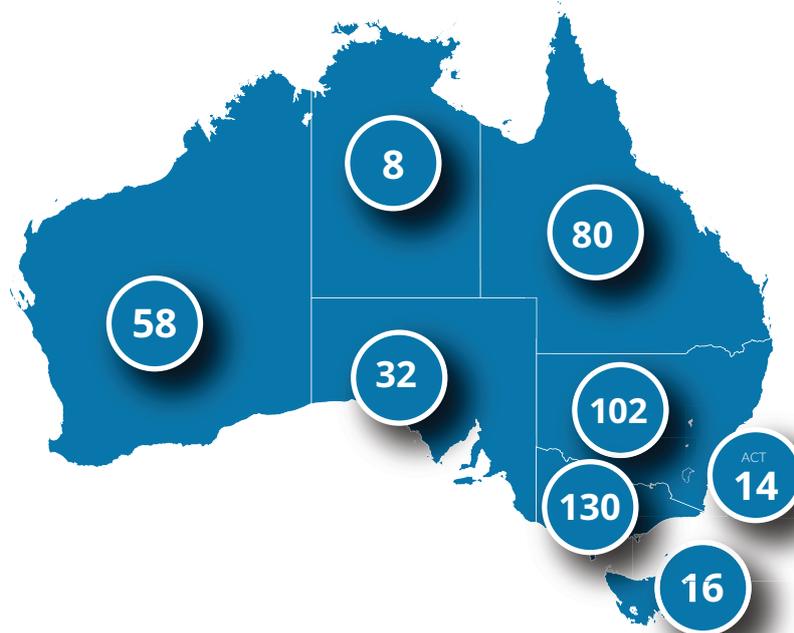


Figure 6: Number of respondents by State and Territory



In the practitioners' experience, the majority of perpetrators of technology-facilitated abuse are male (96.4%). Other practitioners said that perpetrators were both parents or they didn't know. Victims were most likely to be female (92.8%).

Figure 7: Whether DV is a major part of the respondents' role

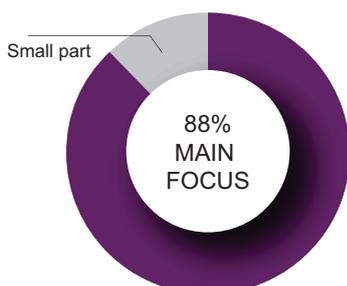
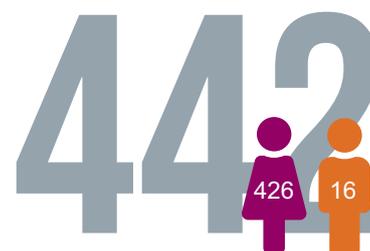


Figure 8: Number of respondents and gender of respondents



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Findings



COVID-19

Our survey was launched in May 2020 during the first wave of COVID-19 in Australia. While the survey did not specifically ask questions about the impact of the pandemic on DV, practitioners noted the way that technology-facilitated abuse had been influenced by COVID-19.

One of the main ways practitioners observed this impact was through children's schooling. Children were widely required to use technology to access their schooling and perpetrators were exploiting this, using the opportunity to seek information about their whereabouts. A practitioner shared:

"With the current climate of COVID-19 children are being given greater access to technology to complete school work- this provides greater opportunity for the perpetrator to manipulate children into giving location information and to provide monitoring of victim whereabouts/company/ daily activities. It also allows for perpetrators to have private conversations with children that are often malicious in nature and damaging to the relationship between child and mother."

Practitioners felt that the schools did not take these increased risks seriously:

"Smartphone applications that were newly implemented by primary schools to enable more communication with parents at home, in response to COVID-19

[allowed for] unsupervised communication directly with children occurred by the offending parent. Accessibility was overlooked by the school admin."

Several practitioners noted that stalking and surveillance had also increased, with tracking inside the home through the use of cameras, and outside the home with GPS. A practitioner explained:

"During COVID 19 I have seen an increase in the use of surveillance. I have seen an increase in the number of perpetrators installing cameras to observe and watch women while at home and using listening devices to listen to everything she says."

This surveillance led to some perpetrators to verbally abuse women when they felt they were in locations they should not be due to COVID-19:

"Most recently I have had a perpetrator who has tracked a client's whereabouts and they used this information to verbally abuse her later and make accusations about her putting children in unsafe situations by leaving the house during COVID-19- causing panic, fear, etc. The client went to the supermarket."

Practitioners observed that there was an increase in pornography use, IBSA and the sexual abuse of children during COVID-19. A practitioner wrote:



“There’s been a huge increase in pornography use during COVID-19. Women [are] being forced to participate and [there is] also [an] increase reports in children being abused in this way also.”

Another worker shared that they had largely seen an increase of threats to share images, but also noted they had seen charges laid for IBSA on social media:

“We have had a few cases recently since COVID-19 of image abuse. Some charges have been laid for posting on Facebook and other social media sites.”

These findings are in line with the eSafety Commissioner (Curtis, 2020) reporting an increase of 245% of complaints about IBSA. She also reported an increase of 120% in child sexual abuse material. The increased use of technology due to COVID-19, as well as women and children being isolated with the perpetrator, are argued as contributing to this increase.

The impact of the abuse of technology during COVID-19 was seen as increased isolation, with women feeling fear about using social media to keep in contact with their friends and family. A practitioner wrote that this impact resulted in:

“Women feeling isolated from friends and family (especially during COVID 19) due to feeling unsafe to use social media without being tracked or slandered.”

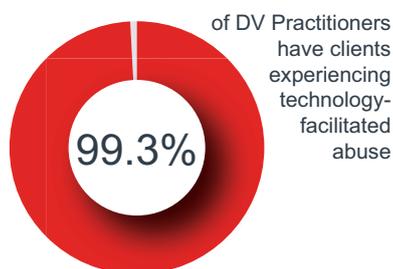
Increased reliance on technology for school, work and contacting friends and family due to COVID-19 opened up opportunities for perpetrators to control, monitor and isolate women. While the ways that technology was used during COVID-19 is not novel, lockdown provided perpetrators with legitimate avenues, such as using schooling apps, that enabled them to abuse in ways that were often overlooked. Perpetrators capitalised on being locked down in isolation with women and children, resulting in an increase in sexual abuse of both women and children.



Types and frequency of technology used

Almost all survey respondents (99.3%) stated that they had clients who had experienced technology-facilitated stalking and abuse. This is slightly higher than the findings in 2015 (98.3%). It is important to emphasise that this number indicates that 99.3% of participants in our survey have worked with clients subjected to technology-facilitated abuse.

Figure 9: Practitioners with clients experiencing technology-facilitated abuse



In the practitioners' experience, the type of technology most commonly used by perpetrators was text messaging, with two thirds (60.7%) of practitioners seeing this 'all the time'. This represents a 28.3%

increase from 2015 when only half of practitioners were seeing this 'all the time'. Text messages could be used in various ways, from constantly sending messages to victims-survivors, to carefully worded messages that perpetrators would use to cause victim-survivor fear. Participants noted:

"Women are bombarded with abusive messages, particularly via text message. They end up hating their phones and feel like there is nothing they can do to stop the messages, especially when they need to share that number for child contact."

"Perps [sic] can be quite covert in their abusive messages. They have meaning for the victim, but it is hard to show that they are abusive."

According to practitioners, smartphones were the next most commonly used technology (36.1% seeing this 'all the time', an increase from 31% in 2015). Facebook was also reported to be used frequently by perpetrators to abuse (35.1%

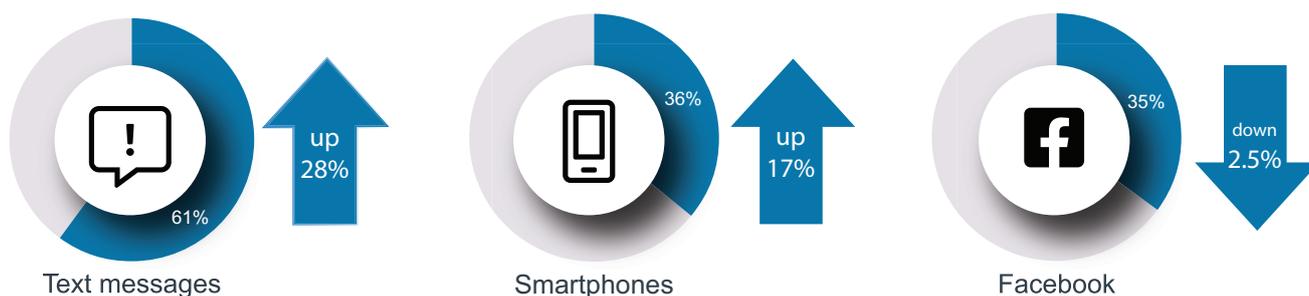
noting this as occurring 'all the time', a slight decrease from 36% reported in 2015). The abuse on Facebook happened both privately and publicly, with practitioners stating:

"Facebook 'secret' Messenger. The messages instantly disappear within seconds of opening them. You cannot prove you have received them, or their content unless you screenshot them as soon as you open them."

"Perpetrators make posts on their Facebook wall for friends and family to see about the women which get shared or sent to the women who have them blocked and attempting to live free from violence."

Compared with 2015, practitioners are reporting large increases in the frequency with which they are seeing video cameras and GPS tracking apps being used in technology-facilitated abuse. The use of video cameras increased by 183.2% from 2015 (12.5% seeing this 'often') to 2020 (35.4%). This could be due

Figure 10: The top three technologies identified by respondents as being used 'all the time' by perpetrators.





to the growth in accessibility and affordability of video technology.

Respondents noted that perpetrators would use cameras to covertly and/or overtly monitor women and children. For example, one respondent noted cameras being installed in roof spaces and running with power packs that were discovered by police after separation. In another case, the perpetrator let a woman know he had the property under video surveillance and she felt, therefore, she was unable to leave.

Respondents noted they were seeing GPS tracking apps used 'all the time' (16.2%) and 'often' (45.6%). This is a 131% and 75% increase respectively from 2015 (7% saw this 'all the time', and 26% 'often'). Participants noted that because GPS tracking apps such as "Find My" are preloaded on iPhones, that women were often obligated to turn them on, or else they were seen by the perpetrator as having something to hide.

"I don't see a lot of GPS devices being used but definitely apps on phones. Women have to allow this or they are seen as having something to hide. Makes it increasingly difficult for women to safely escape."

Of the additional technologies added in the 2020 survey, FaceTime was seen as being used to perpetrate technology-facilitated abuse, with almost half seeing this 'often' (42.6%). iCloud was also noted as commonly used by perpetrators to stalk and place women under surveillance, with almost half (42.2%) observing this 'often'.

Of significance, was the high proportion of respondents seeing government accounts such as myGov being misused by perpetrators to abuse women, with almost a third of respondents seeing this 'all the time' (27%) and a further fifth seeing it 'often' (37.8%).

Figure 11: Technologies being used in 2020 with increased frequency compared to 2015.

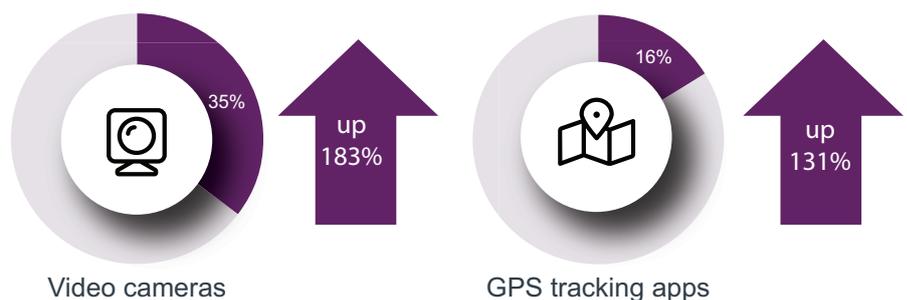


Figure 12A: What technologies are you seeing being used to facilitate abuse and how often?

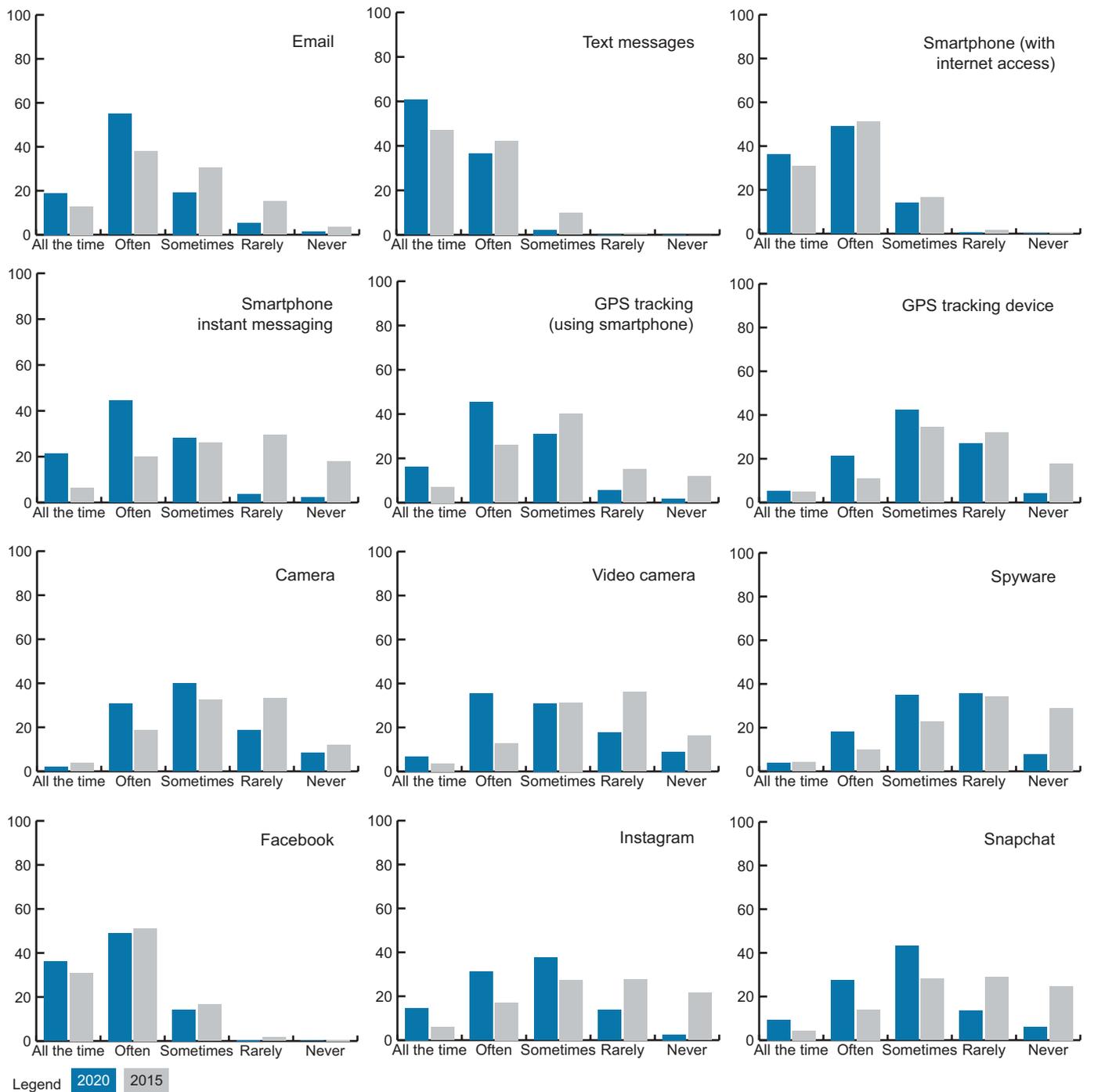
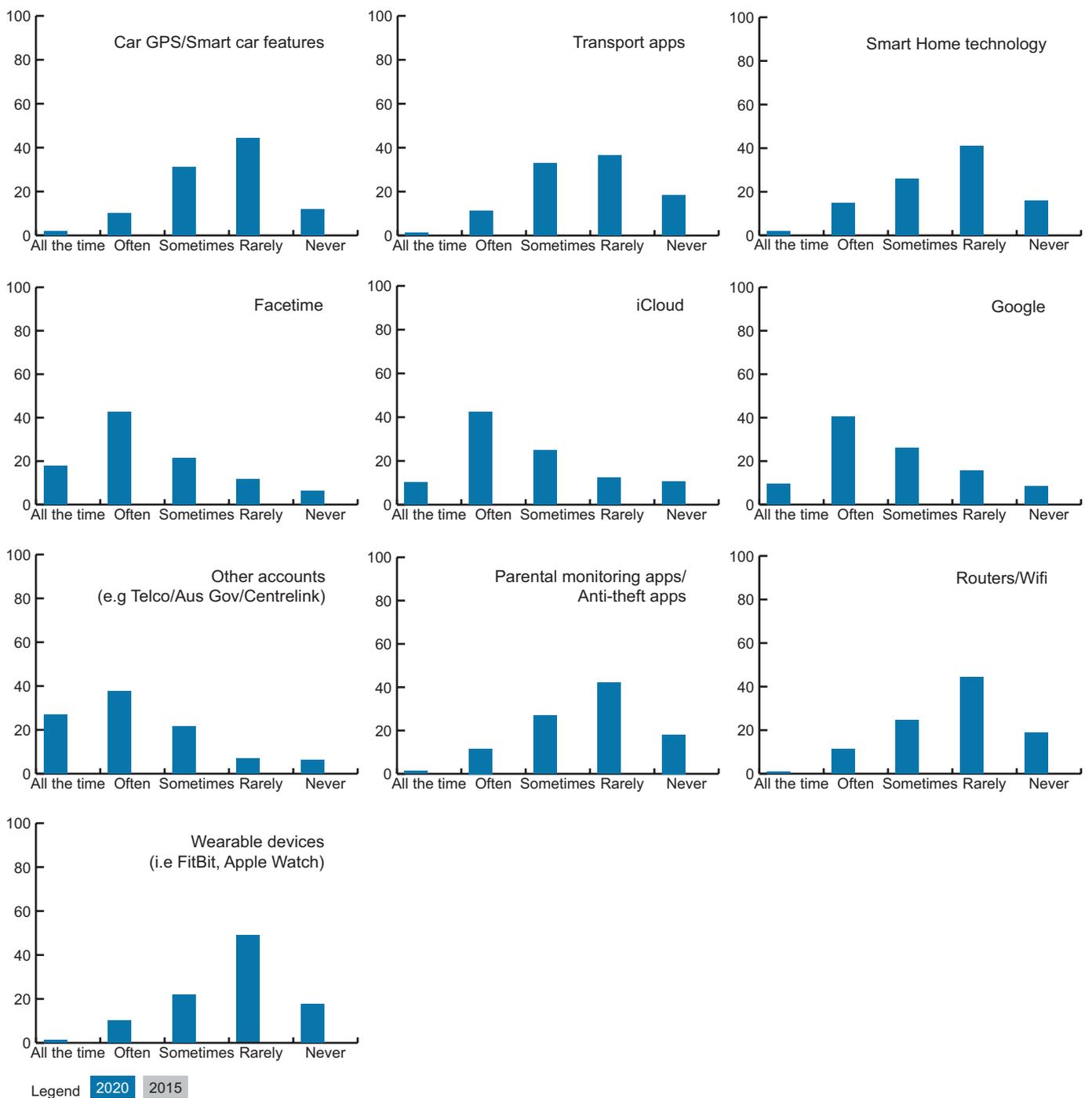


Figure 12B: What technologies are you seeing being used to facilitate abuse and how often*?



How technology is being used as part of domestic violence perpetrator tactics

Abusive tactics

There was little change in how phone calls are used to abuse women from 2015 to 2020. Misuse of social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram showed a slight easing with fewer respondents selecting 'often' in 2020 compared to 2015. The use of text messages, emails or instant messages 'all the time' increased from almost half seeing it in 2015 (46.7%) to over two-thirds (71.4%) in 2020, demonstrating a 52.9% increase. This is consistent with the most commonly used type of technology also being text messages. Practitioners noted that many perpetrators were aware that text messages could be used as evidence, therefore would borrow phones from friends and family, as well as use anonymous messaging apps, to conduct their

abuse. The recruitment of friends and family by perpetrators could have a devastating impact on victim-survivors, often further isolating them and creating the sense they could not trust anyone to help them. A practitioner wrote:

“Perpetrators frequently use extended family members and friends to further this abuse when women have blocked them or taken measures to prevent the perpetrator from being able to contact them directly. This can be extremely distressing for women particularly if the perpetrator has a large number of family and friends engaging in the abuse.”

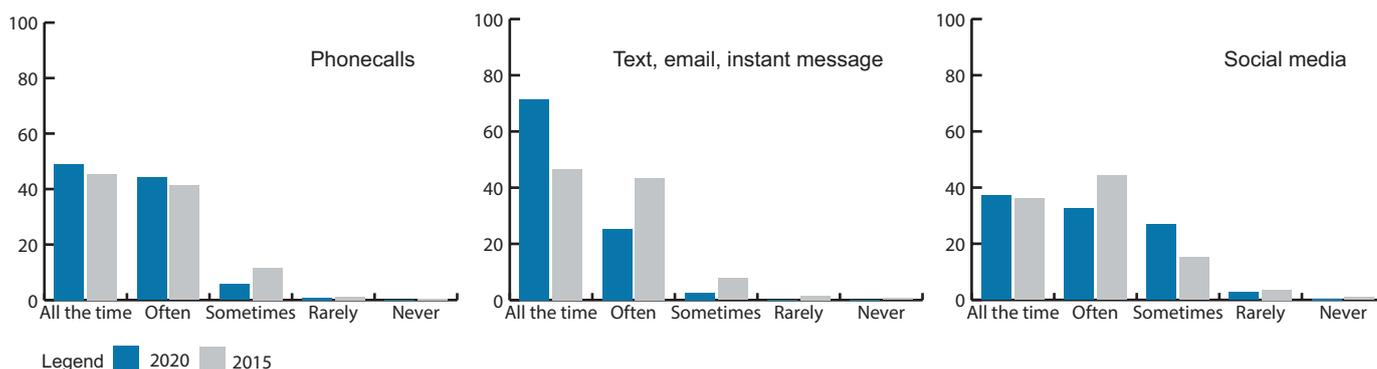
It was also noted that perpetrators would send large numbers of messages to women so that their day was constantly interrupted. One respondent noted:

“The sheer volume of messages and calls constitutes harassment charges- it is not uncommon to speak to women who are getting 300 plus messages from perps per day.”

For some victim-survivors, this constant abuse had considerable consequences, with one practitioner describing the impact as:

“Feelings of hopelessness. Returning to the perpetrator due to wanting the constant text messaging to cease.”

Figure 13: Frequency of technologies used used to verbally abuse, call women names or put women down



Threatening tactics

The use of technology by perpetrators to threaten victim-survivors increased from 2015 to 2020 across all modes. It is important to highlight that intimate partner homicide is 11.36 times more probable with any kind of threat made by perpetrators (Spencer & Stith, 2020). Verbal threats to women using the phone increased by 35.8%, with one-third (32.9%) of practitioners seeing this 'all the time' in 2015 to almost half (44.7%) in 2020. Between 2015 and 2020, there was a 74.4% increase in the reported use of text messages, email or instant messages to threaten women, increasing from one-third (32.9%) of practitioners observing this 'all the time' in 2015 to over half (57.4%) in 2020.

Practitioners noted that threats were often covert and had specific meanings only for the victim-survivors, therefore it was difficult to demonstrate the severity of the threat posed. A practitioner explained:

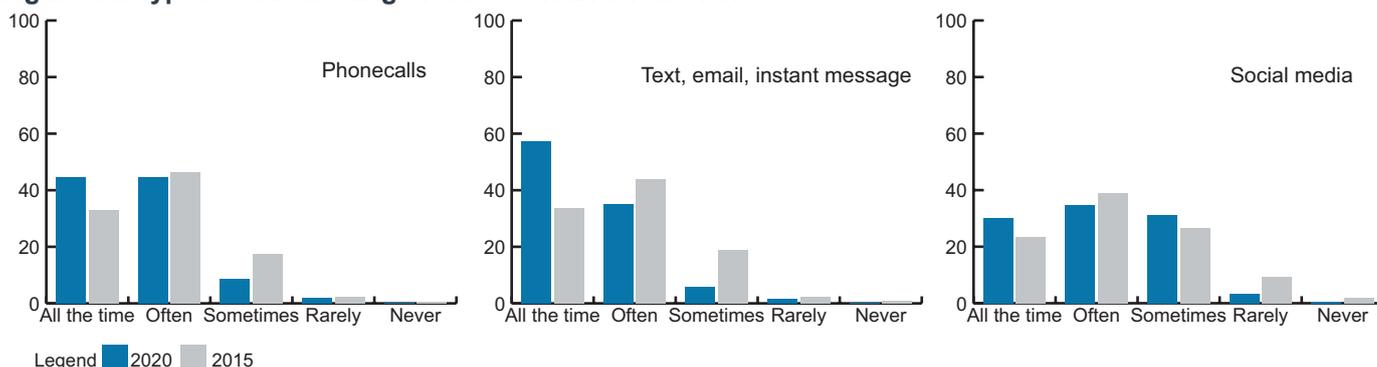
“Often the threats in text form are veiled or general enough to avoid breaching an [Intervention order] or not enough for Police to follow up with.”

The use of social media by perpetrators to threaten victim-survivors was similar between 2015 and 2020, with just over one-third (37.2%) of practitioners observing this as happening 'all the time'. Respondents described threats on social media as also being covert:

“Some will post obscure threats to social media, recently we had a perpetrator posting links to missing children after threatening to take away the children from the mother. This terrified her.”



Figure 14: Types of threatening tactics seen and how often



Monitoring and tracking tactics

The use of technology to monitor and track victim-survivors showed increases across all areas between 2015 and 2020. Perpetrators checking victim-survivors' phones and text messages without consent was seen 'all the time' by over half of practitioners (57.1%), an increase of 97.5% from 2015 (which was 28.9%). Practitioners noted that this was particularly prevalent with younger women, where there was an expectation in relationships that all devices and accounts should be shared with partners. A participant wrote:

"Especially for younger women, there seems to be an expectation to share all of their tech-related activity and accounts with their partners. Even things like a young woman looking at YouTube or TikTok where young men are featured can cause their partners to be jealous."

Women having to share their passwords and account access also significantly increased by 91.7% from just over one quarter (26.6%) seeing this happening 'all the time' in 2015, to over half (51%) in 2020. Practitioners noted how much more easily tracking could happen:

"Over the past year we have seen less spyware etc. and more tracking using simple things like google login and iPhone login. Once they have the password to your email perpetrators can access almost everything, therefore spyware is not as necessary anymore."

The use of text messages, emails and instant messaging to surveil women increased in 2020 by 114.9% from being seen 'all the time' by around one-third (23.4%) in 2015, to half the respondents (50.3%) in 2020. Practitioners explained that this could happen in a variety of ways when victim-survivors were not with the perpetrator, including having to check in via messaging as well as taking photos to demonstrate their location and who they were with. A practitioner explained:

"Perpetrators use phones to track women constantly. They have to check-in when they are not with them, and let them know what they are doing. It is like they are never able to take a step without him tracking them. It makes it very hard for women to leave."

And another:

"Many perpetrators force women to take photos of where they are to prove they are not with other men."

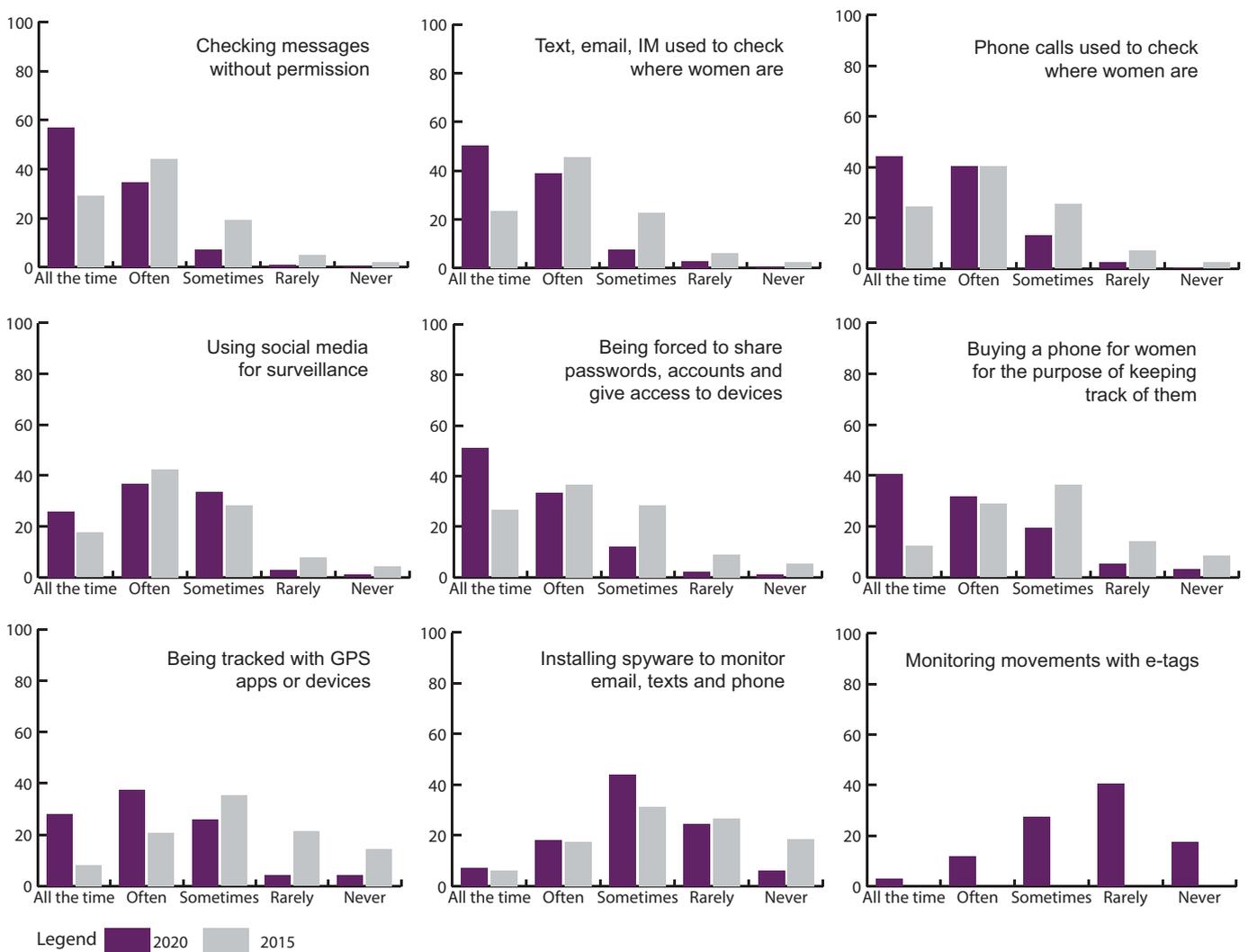
The developments in accessible digital technologies such as GPS, enable the quick uptake by large numbers of perpetrators using the technologies to control and monitor women victim-survivors. Victim-survivors tracked with GPS apps or devices increased in 2020 by 244.8%, from one in 12 respondents (8.12%) seeing this 'all the time' in 2015, to almost one in three (28%) in 2020. A practitioner said:

"I have had women who have had their location in a shelter found

because the abuser looked up the eTag account but it isn't common. Most [abusers] usually...have women on a GPS leash."



Figure 15: Types of monitoring and tracking tactics



Humiliating, shaming and punishing tactics

In their experience, almost half (49.9%) of the respondents said that perpetrators were forcing women to film and record intimate images 'often'. However, respondents felt it was likely to be underreported and that they suspected it was happening much more often than women were comfortable talking about. A practitioner wrote:

"The numbers we have around this information is not accurate as either workers or women don't feel comfortable talking about sexual abuse or recognising it. I think it would be a lot higher than the figures show."

Whilst there may be under-reporting by victim-survivors of intimate images, threats to share intimate images increased from 2015 to 2020 by 49.7%, with over one-third (35.2%) stating this was something that was seen 'often' in 2015, to over half (52.7%) in 2020. Therefore, unsurprisingly, respondents reported that the threats were often effective in controlling women and making them afraid, even though women were not always certain that perpetrators had images. Concerningly, the number of perpetrators publicly sharing and distributing images increased in 2020 by 112.3%, increasing from it being seen 'often' by just over one-fifth (21.8%) in 2015 to almost half (46.3%) in 2020. A practitioner wrote:

"Perpetrators' tactics with photos are a very powerful tool to keep women under control. Some photos

are taken while women are asleep or have been drugged."

Similarly, another respondent explained:

"I have seen perpetrators set up fake Facebook accounts to publish intimate images of women engaging in intercourse to shame. I have seen perpetrators send electronically and physically deliver intimate images of women engaging in intercourse to get them fired (in one case she was)."

Several respondents linked this increase in IBSA to the use of pornography:

"Pornography needs to be recognised as having a huge impact on the way that perps abuse women using technology".

And another wrote:

"It's shocking how much of an increase we have seen in image-based abuse in domestic violence. Perpetrators are heavily influenced by pornography; both in the way they sexually abuse their partners and then by sharing that abuse by videoing it."

Similarly, a practitioner noted:

"It is increasingly common for technology to be used in the sexual abuse of partners - while before this was a private shame now technology has enabled this to be

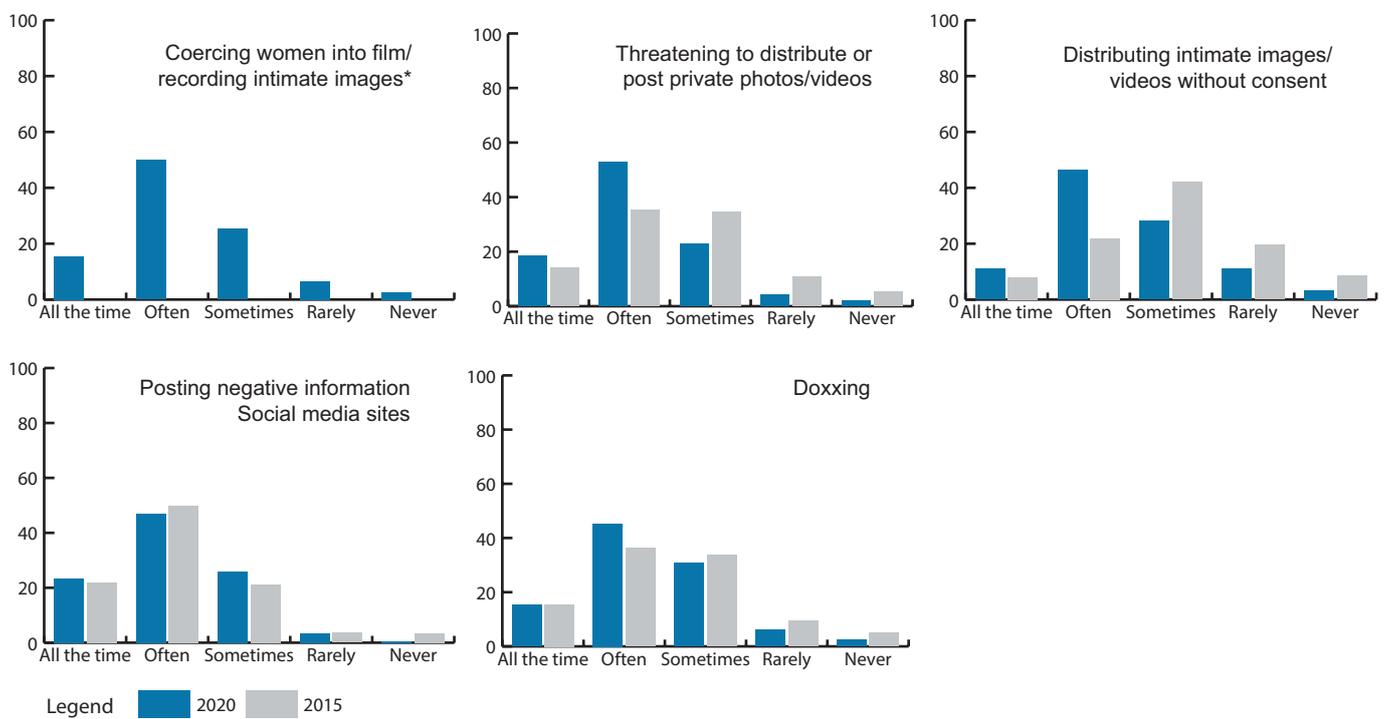
done so publicly. I think so much of pornography online now is actually part of domestic violence."

Pornography was also used to shame women from CALD backgrounds:

"I have seen cases where perpetrators from CALD backgrounds have photoshopped their partners' faces onto pornographic images to shame her in front of her family."



Figure 16: Types of humiliating, shaming and punishing tactics



Other tactics—impersonation, use of children and financial abuse

The use of children in technology-facilitated abuse showed significant increases over the time period. Children being given a phone or other device as a way to contact their father and monitor their mother's movements showed an increase of 346.6% from 2015, where 7.5% reported seeing this 'all the time', to over one-third (33.5%) in 2020.

Perpetrators' use of children's social media accounts to contact children's mothers also revealed a large increase of 254.2% in 2020, from 8.3% seeing this 'all the time' in 2015, to almost one-third (29.4%) in 2020.

An additional question in the 2020 survey asked practitioners about court-ordered child contact and if perpetrators were using this to abuse, threaten and intimidate women, with almost half of the respondents (49.4%) seeing this 'all the time'. A practitioner explained the myriad of ways that children were being used:

"Using children's mandatory visitation either in person or virtually to have them "show him around" the house then use what he finds out in court to dispute her lower-income so that he has to pay less child support. Using the children's devices (like a watch) to set off alarms at various times that she cannot figure out how to turn off. Giving children old phones and telling them to hide them from their mum."

As noted in the most commonly used technologies, FaceTime was seen as a frequently abused technology. Respondents explained that this was often used in child contact, with perpetrators asking children to show them around women's homes. One respondent wrote:

"Perpetrators are frequently insisting on having contact with children by FaceTime (in court orders) then use that time to question the child about their whereabouts, what their mother is doing and where their mother is or coerces the child into showing the mother on video."

This use of children could be covert and include threats that were very specific to the history of abuse. A practitioner noted:

"AVOs between parties with children where the incident has been serious enough to mean there would normally be a no-contact order apart from via a lawyer may include an exception that condition that contact may be made by SMS (or phone or email) for the purposes of the other party spending time with the children. This contact is so commonly used to abuse our client, often covertly so that the court would not see this as abuse. E.g. a text asking her to pack the Medicare card in their son's bag for handover 'in case he gets injured' while with him. Or an SMS telling her not to forget to pack sunscreen because he knows she wouldn't like them to get burnt (when he has previously



threatened to douse her and the children in petrol and set them on fire)."

Another new question for 2020 was the tracking, monitoring and restricting of women's banking and finances through technology, with over one-third of respondents seeing this 'all the time' (38.7%), and one-third seeing it 'often' (33.6%). Respondents noted that this could happen in a variety of ways, such as monitoring locations through details given in banking apps, to restricting women's banking. Respondents wrote:

"Banking and shared accounts to track women's movements, purchases made come up on statements as the location."

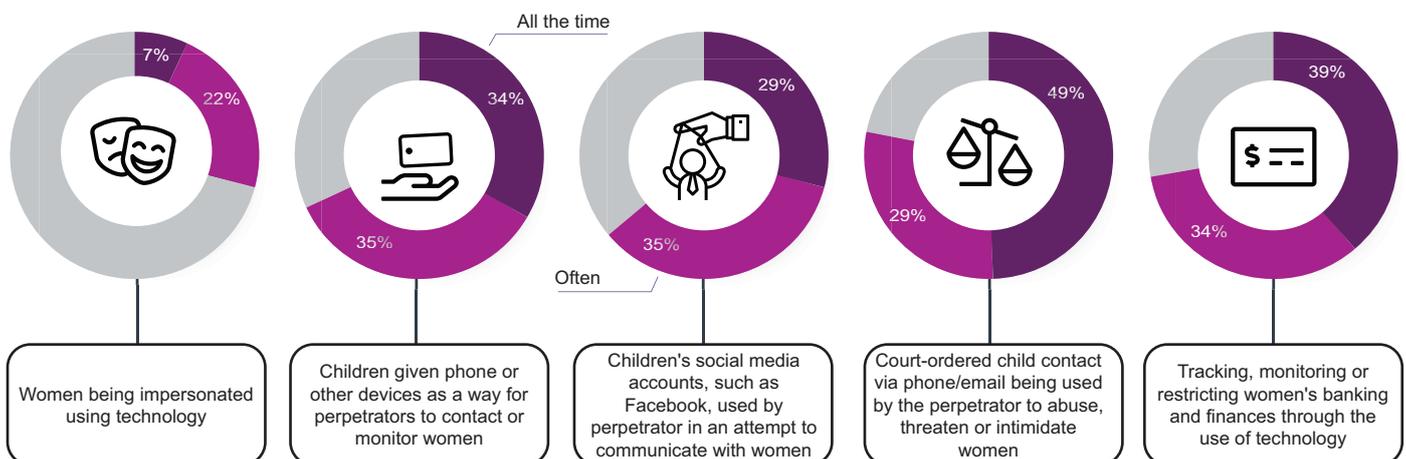
"Abusers can track women's banking almost in live time through alerts etc. on banking apps."

The restriction of women's finances could be easily done through technology and could restrict women's options when trying to leave the perpetrator. A practitioner explained:

"Restricting women's banking and finances is a common occurrence once the woman attempts to leave as this forces women to return to the abuser. Men remove money from joint accounts, so they can not survive. Men leave every client I have ever worked with in debt due to coercion of loans and restricting women the ability to pay rent/bills/loans during the relationship then will take all the items the women has purchased via loans."



Figure 17: Other tactics used by perpetrators



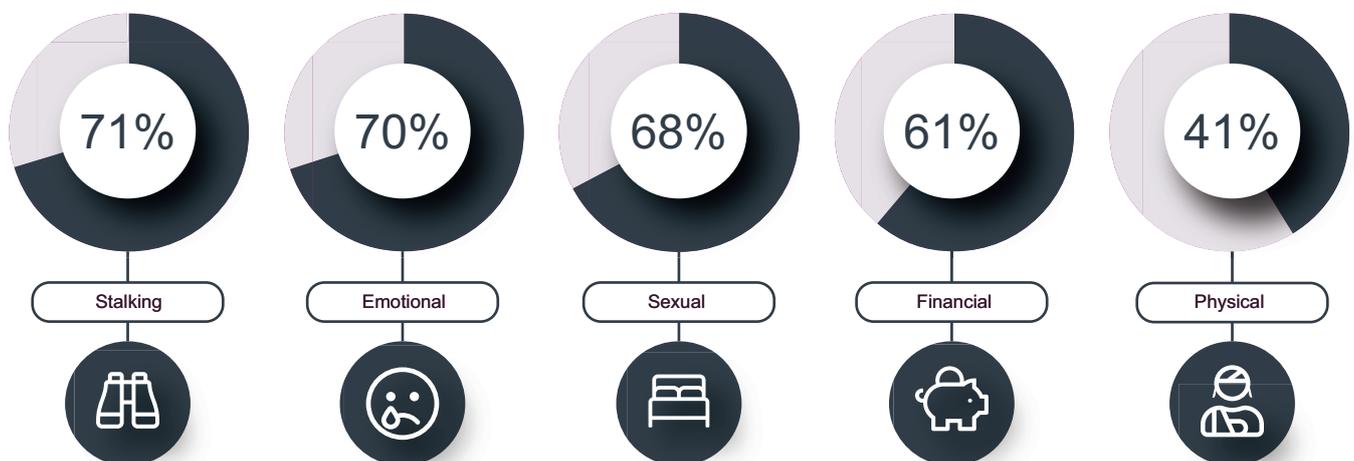
Co-occurring abuse

The use of technology in DV is intertwined with many interconnected forms of abuse such as stalking and financial abuse but it also co-occurs alongside other forms of abuse. The usefulness of separating DV into types of abuse has been questioned by those researching DV and supporting survivors. Much DV includes elements of violence that are specific and individualised to the survivor, and cross a wide range of behaviours that may or may not be widely viewed as criminal or abusive (Westmarland, 2015). For this reason, many scholars and advocates use terminology such as 'coercive control', that focuses on the patterns, intent and outcome of the abuse as well as the context the abuse occurs within (Stark, 2007). However, with the emerging use of technology in DV it is essential that insights are made into what other sorts of abuse are co-occurring as

this can provide information about specific risks and indicators of future violence that may be lethal for women and children (Todd et al., 2020).

The most common co-occurring abuse observed by respondents was stalking at 70.6%. Stalking is associated with a significant risk of lethal or near-lethal harm (Rai et al., 2020). A 2020 meta-analysis showed that stalking was associated with a 2.79 times risk of intimate partner homicide (Spencer & Stith, 2020). The impact of intimate partner stalking is known to have very specific and detrimental effects on victim-survivors' mental health, including prolonged fear, stress, and use of medications or illegal drugs or alcohol use to reduce the stress and anxiety from the abuse (Logan & Walker, 2010).

Figure 18: Types of abuse that co-occur with technology abuse



Emotional abuse was also common at 70.1% as well as sexual abuse at 68.1%. Sexual violence within DV is often termed 'intimate partner sexual violence' (IPSV) (Cox, 2015). It is a high-risk indicator for further violence as well as homicide, but victim-survivors can be reluctant to disclose this form of violence and seek help (State of Victoria, 2018). When victim-survivors do report IPSV the response is often inadequate (Cox, 2015). The findings of the large World Health Organisation multi-country study involving over 21,000 participants revealed that DV that involves sexual abuse has particularly devastating impacts, including victims being 10 times more likely to attempt suicide (Potter et al., 2020).

Financial abuse was observed as co-occurring at 61.3% which, alongside the high levels of stalking, emotional and sexual abuse, form a picture of how the use of technology is embedded within patterns of control and intimidation. These forms of abuse are less visible and

recognised than physical violence but as the evidence shows (Spencer & Stith, 2020), are indicators of high levels of risk and are linked to intimate partner homicides.

Perpetrators using technology are often physically violent, with 41.4% of respondents noted this as co-occurring. Child abuse was also common at 30%, with participants detailing throughout the survey that this may include sexual abuse as well as control and manipulation. A quarter of the sample (25.1%), reported strangulation as co-occurring. Non-fatal strangulation is a high-risk indicator for lethality, with the probability of intimate partner homicide increasing 6.7 times as likely with a strangulation attempt (Spencer & Stith, 2020). Animal abuse was reported as co-occurring with 16.5%. Abuse of animals by perpetrators in DV shows that men will use family pets to frighten and terrorise women and children and to control them (Hardesty et al., 2013).



Particular risks for women from different cultural and community groups

The perceived risk for women with disabilities subjected to technology-facilitated abuse increased by 115.3% from 20.57% in 2015 and 44.3% in 2020. Women with disabilities are one of the most marginalised groups of women and experience violence at significantly higher rates, for greater duration, and with more severe impacts than that of their female peers (ABS, 2017). While there is limited evidence about technology-facilitated abuse against women with disabilities, available research shows that people with a disability are at a high risk of cyberbullying, with young women seen to be more likely to be victims (Heiman & Olenik-Shemesh, 2015).

Women from non-English speaking backgrounds were also seen to be at particular risk, at 43%, which is an increase of 76.2% from 2015.

Perpetrators would call, text and use social media to contact family and friends from overseas to spread rumours and isolate women, as well as use IBSA in particular ways to shame women from CALD backgrounds.

The perceived risks for Aboriginal &/or Torres Strait Islander women increase by 113.9%, from 12.9% in 2015 to 27.6% in 2020. While respondents did not provide extensive detail on these risks one participant said:

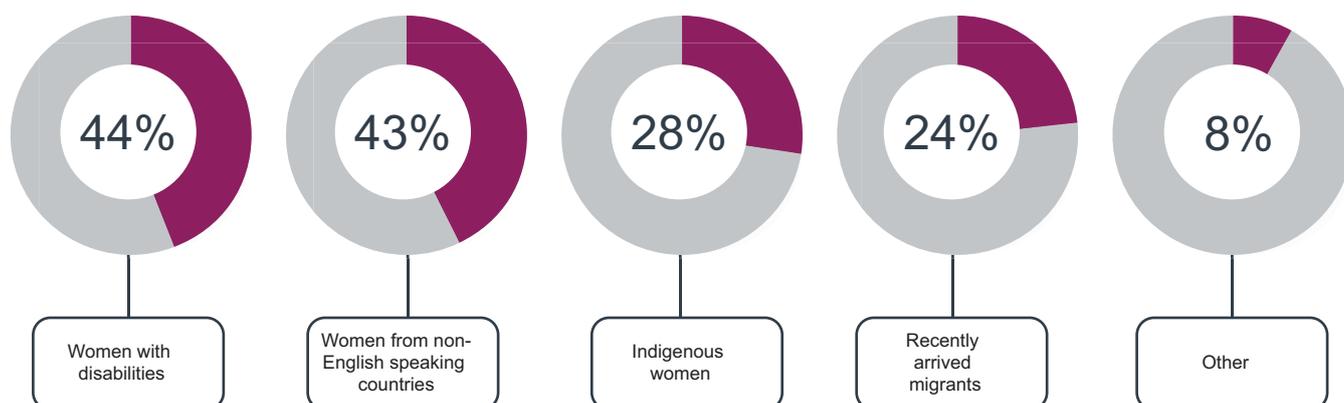
“My work is mainly with Aboriginal women and it can be really damaging in these communities to have rumours etc spread via technology.”

This is consistent with our previous survey findings where it was noted

that technology could be used in specific ways to abuse Aboriginal &/or Torres Strait Islander women due to the importance placed on community and connection (Woodlock, 2015). When discussing the impacts of technology-facilitated abuse, a practitioner who works in a rural location said that Aboriginal &/or Torres Strait Islander women were at particular risk of isolation, with limited adequate support available. They wrote:

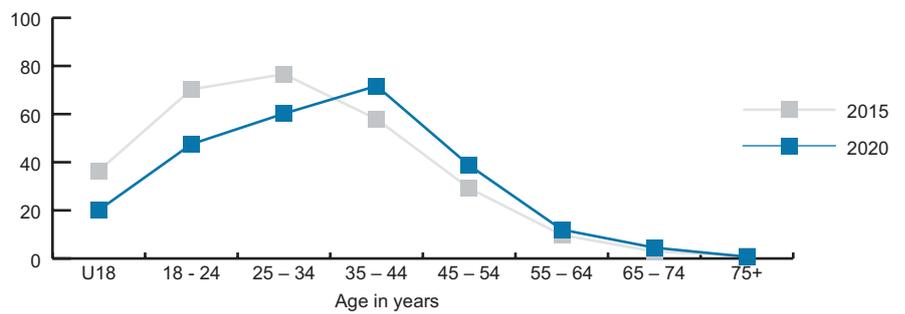
“The further remote you are there is less service offered to the individual, isolation with minimal options available and 1800 Respect does not work for Indigenous mainly (Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander) women who speak more than 2-3 languages other than English.”

Figure 19: Have you noticed any particular issues with technology-facilitated abuse that are different for specific groups of women?



Age groups of women most affected by technology-facilitated abuse

Figure 20: Age groups of women most affected by technology-facilitated abuse



The age groups that respondents reported were most affected by technology-facilitated abuse shifted from 25 to 30-year-olds in 2015 at 76.5% to 35 to 44-year-olds in 2020 at 71.7%. This may reflect younger women being more able to manage their privacy and technology settings, therefore being less affected by the use of technology. It could also be that younger women are less likely to seek support through formal

agencies (Tarzia et al., 2017), despite women aged 18 to 34 being 2.7 times as likely as those aged 35 and over to be subjected to DV (ABS, 2018). The high number of women aged 35 to 44 years old that are seeking support for technology-facilitated abuse challenges the misconception that this is an issue amongst young people.



Impacts on women from technology-facilitated stalking and abuse

In both surveys participants were asked, “What has been the impact of technology-facilitated abuse on women you have worked with?”. The responses across the two surveys were similar, however, we noted that there was an increased perception in 2020 that women were experiencing high levels of fear and terror as a result of the technology-facilitated abuse, and that they were feeling trapped and hopeless.

Respondents also identified mental health issues directly to abuse via technology, with hypervigilance and prolonged feelings of fear leading to mental health issues such as anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). The abuse had wider impacts on women’s lives including isolation, loss of freedom and safety, as well as restricting their use of technology.

Fear and terror

The term fear was one of the most commonly used words in response to the question of how technology-facilitated abuse impacts victim-survivors. Respondents wrote that women were fearful as a result of the surveillance and abuse and that it felt all-encompassing and overwhelming. A practitioner stated that the impact was:

“Unmeasurable [sic]. More than anything else, like rape, torture, etc., that I’ve seen over the years, abuse with technology is so invasive and psychologically destabilising.”

Similarly, another respondent said:

“It is absolutely devastating. They live in fear. They are being controlled and there is very little support for them. Often it is difficult for law enforcement to take action on tech-facilitated abuse.”

As noted, respondents felt that the lack of assistance for women subjected to this abuse increased their levels of fear. A practitioner explained that the impact was:

“Devastating and terrifying. They have nowhere to hide and the impact of the abuse has been exacerbated in many of these cases by the dismissive behaviour of police.”

Trapped

Respondents felt that victim-survivors were often trapped by the use of technology and that the perpetrator was omnipresent, they could not get away from him. A practitioner wrote:

“They feel like he is everywhere and they can’t get away from him.”

Similarly, another responded:

“Enormous impact. Feeling that they can’t get away. That there’s nothing they can do to escape. That kind of abuse is almost like mental torture.”

This mental torture had significant impacts on victim-survivors, with exhaustion, despair and

hopelessness mentioned by respondents. A practitioner explained:

“It has exhausted clients. Some have adapted to the fact of the harassment and surveillance, but most have had to work out how to live with it. It creates a further sense of the person using violence’s omnipotence. It contributes to feelings of isolation and being trapped for clients, as though they can never escape. It makes the abuser present in the client’s life, even when they aren’t anywhere near.”

The consequences of the perpetrator being omnipresent make the victim-survivor feel constantly unsafe, and her freedoms are limited to such an extent that she can feel there is little option but to return to the perpetrator. One practitioner said:

“Women feel a sense of despair and hopelessness as the abuser really does appear to be all-knowing and to be able to block all attempts to escape abuse. We have several recent examples of women returning to abusive relationships because there doesn’t seem to be a point to leaving when the abuse for her and her children seems so much worse post-separation.”

Mental health and wellbeing

The persistent and all-encompassing use of technology by perpetrators could result in mental health issues for victim-survivors. Practitioners

noted anxiety, paranoia, PTSD, as well as wider impacts on women's wellbeing such as the abuse impacted their sleep and eating. A practitioner wrote that the impact of the abuse was:

"Lots of anxiety. Mental health issues. Fear of leaving their house."

Similarly, another noted that there was

"...continued anxiety post-separation; hopelessness that they will be forever trapped; fear."

Another respondent explained how the ubiquitousness of technology and the sense of no-escape had a large impact on women's mental health. They wrote:

"The impact is huge. Since technology is such a part of everyday life now, women often feel they have no escape from the perpetrator. This kind of constant, relentless abuse has a massive impact on women's mental health. I have seen women become completely paranoid and jump at every sound due to the abuse."

The wider impacts of this are described by a practitioner:

"It heightens their sense of threat and danger even more - they feel constantly under threat, which impacts on their well-being, e.g. stress, sleep, eating."

Isolation and fear of technology

One of the main consequences of technology-facilitated abuse on victim-survivors was increased isolation, and a fear of using technology to keep in contact with friends, family and services. This could have significant ramifications on women's lives. A practitioner explained:

"Allows abuse to continue in all areas of the victim's life. Women are unable to trust their friends or family because of the perpetrator's tactics. This also restricts the ability of women to seek support or leave."

Similarly, another respondent wrote:

"Women become more isolated as they become increasingly wary and afraid of using technology i.e. some women have chosen to forgo the use of a phone completely. Many other women have been supplied with safe phones to replace previous phones which have been systematically destroyed by the perpetrator."

The decision to not use a phone out of justifiable fear of the perpetrator could result in women not being able to be contacted by services, and limited options when they were in danger. A practitioner noted:

"They feel they cannot even have a phone for fear of being located. They then resort to turning their phone off which leads to ...

concerns for the safety (unsure where they are sometimes and they do not have easy access to their phone to call 000 if they have to)."

Likewise, another respondent explained:

"The impact of technology-facilitated abuse can be very far-reaching. It can make it very difficult for women to reach out and get the help they require as they fear that the perpetrator will somehow find out (if they are tracking them and checking emails/eTags etc). This isolates women even further."



Legal responses

There was little change in respondents' perceptions of police responses to technology-facilitated abuse from 2015 to 2020. When asked if they felt police took technology-facilitated abuse seriously, 61.6% said this happened sometimes, but was dependent on the officer. Slightly more said in 2020 that police rarely take it seriously (23.7%) as compared to 2015 (17.3%). When asked as to the reasons why police do not take it seriously, over half of the respondents (52.5%) felt it was due to a lack of understanding about technology and the role it plays in DV. Nearly half (49.1%) respondents also felt that it was a lack of understanding about DV in general. Respondents' comments reflected this with several responses explaining that police did not take technology-facilitated abuse seriously. A practitioner said:

"Unfortunately police often underestimate perpetrators' abilities to stalk women and doubt the veracity of their reports. Police often don't understand the technology themselves and don't believe perpetrators are capable of doing these things. They also appear to not have the will to fully investigate these matters and lack resources and knowledge of how to gather evidence such as ISP addresses which could prove it was a perpetrator engaging in the behaviour."

When asked if they had a client whose breaches via technology were taken seriously by police, 60% said

that this occurred sometimes, and largely depended on the officer. This was an increase of 22.9% from 2015 (48.8%). There was also a 30.3% increase in those who said that police rarely take breaches seriously which rose from 20.4% in 2015 to 26.6% in 2020. One respondent explained:

"It is also almost impossible to get the police to investigate technology-facilitated abuse as a breach, unless police count the victim as high risk (usually only if recent strangulation or high levels of physical violence), adding to the sense of hopelessness women experience."

Similarly, another practitioner noted:

"I have a client whose husband is only allowed to contact her twice per week to organise access, he can breach up to 30 times per day with no response from police, he is now being spoken to after 8 months. He should have been charged after one persistent breach, still hasn't been charged."

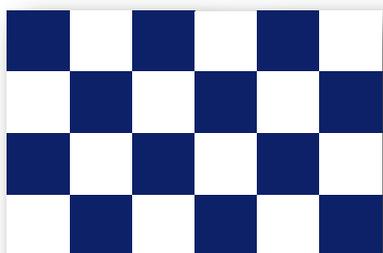
Amongst respondents there was a wider issue of police not understanding how technology was part of patterns of coercive control, instead, it was trivialised and women seen as overreacting:

"This is part of a bigger problem of police not understanding coercion and control, and that high levels of coercion and control are actually the best indicator of risk to the victim rather than physical violence. Victims attempting to get

police support to increase their safety are often treated as though they are overreacting, hysterical (my personal favourite due to the history of trivialising women's concerns with this word). Women have reported to me that they were accused of trying to use police resources for trivial purposes, or to control their abuser."



Effective police responses



Practitioners were asked for any examples of effective police responses. This mainly included police seeing technology-facilitated abuse as a form of DV. One respondent described a positive police response she had observed:

“Police not minimising the abuse because it’s not a physical threat, but instead recognising it as a method of control and understanding the impacts on victim-survivors emotionally as well as safety. Believing women and prioritising their distress. Understanding the humiliation of having nudes shared and not blaming her for taking the pictures in the first place.”

Respondents noted that effective police responses entailed them taking the time to collect evidence and seeing different forms of technology abuse as patterns of control:

“Victim-survivor provided screenshots of recent breaches, disclosed receiving and answering a lot of calls from private numbers where the caller would remain silent then hang up. Police

processed charges for breach and also seek to obtain perpetrator’s call log for charges of stalking.”

Respondents also felt that even when police took the abuse seriously, it was actually difficult for further action to be taken through the courts. One practitioner explained:

“Our service is based within a major court and mostly I find police responses excellent. We have a lot of prosecutions for image-based abuse, sharing images without consent, threatening to share without consent etc. Results at court are mixed and convictions not always obtained but generally I feel police in our area are responding very well to this. We see lots of charges for use of carriage service, stalk/intimidate, breaches of AVOs for social media threats etc. I feel that the police response to this has improved hugely over recent years. What needs work is the prosecution of these offences: we need specialist domestic violence prosecutors.”

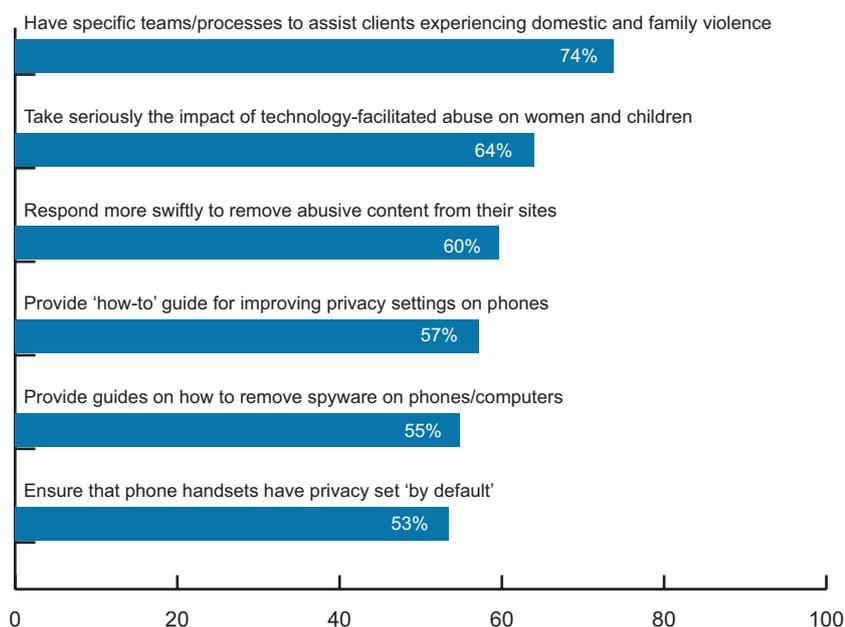
What telecommunication companies should do to keep women and children safe

There was a consistent view across both surveys about what practitioners felt telecommunication companies should be doing to keep women and children safe. Telecommunication companies having specific teams to assist clients who are subjected to technology-facilitated abuse was the most frequently requested requirement at 73.8%.

These findings confirm what the WESNET staff and technology safety experts are hearing anecdotally from both victim-survivors and DV practitioners. There are increasing

efforts by some larger technology and other corporations to have specific teams designed to assist customers or clients who are experiencing DV, for example, the Telstra SAFE Team which assists recipients of the Safe Connections program phones to activate their new phones safely, as well as all Telstra customers impacted by DV; and the Commonwealth Bank's Vulnerable Customer Team.

Figure 21: In what ways do you think telecommunication companies and internet providers could do more to enhance women and children's safety?

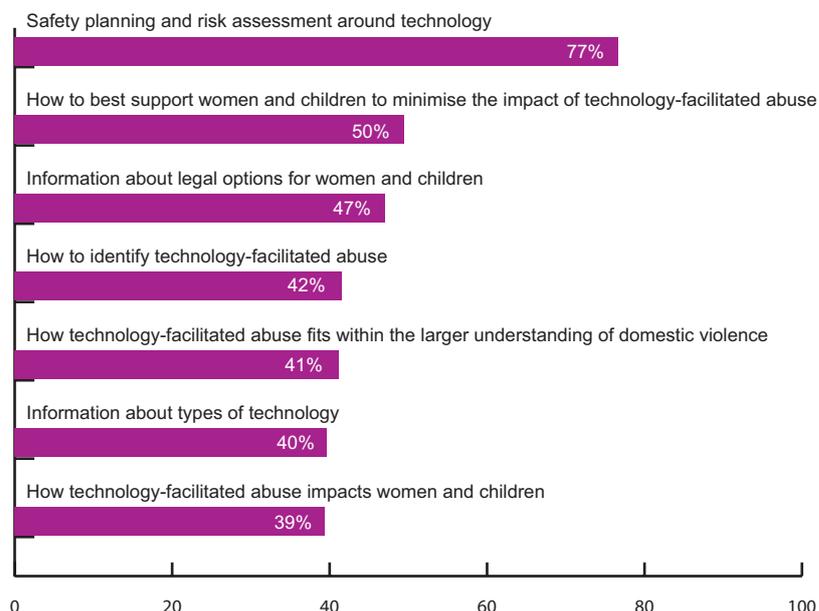


Training and resources needed

The training and resources needs of practitioners have remained relatively the same from 2015 to 2020. In the most recent survey, there seemed to be less request for basic training on how to identify technology-facilitated abuse and the types of technologies used, to a requirement for more advanced training. In 2020, there was the additional option of training in relation to safety planning and

risk assessment around technology, which over three quarters (76.7%) of participants thought would be helpful. This clearly indicates that the training needs to be conducted either by or with the guidance of specialised DV services who have experience in safety planning and risk assessment and technology abuse.

Figure 22: If you were to undertake training in this area, what topics would you like to see covered?



Conclusions, recommendations & future directions



Conclusion

The findings of our second national survey into the use of technology by perpetrators of DV show that this is an issue that impacts victim-survivors in a multitude of ways, yet the response to this abuse is often inadequate. Since our 2015 survey, there are several areas where abuse is increasing, and in fact, there were no areas where there was any significant decrease in abuse. As reflected in the insights provided by respondents, the use of technology in DV is often all-encompassing and amplifies other aspects of violence.

The survey reveals concerning trends emerging in the use of technology by perpetrators of DV. The 244.8% increase in respondents seeing perpetrators use GPS for tracking of victim-survivors, the 114.9% increase in the use of text messages, emails and instant messaging to surveil women, and the 183.2% increase of the use of video cameras, create a climate of intense monitoring and surveillance. Perpetrators are misusing technology to extend their tactics in ways that entrap women, compromise their safety and narrow their avenues for escape.

There were also concerning increases in the targeting of children and women's capacity to mother without interference from the perpetrator, with a 346.6% increase in children given a phone or other device as a way to contact and control their mothers, as well as a 254.2% increase in the use of children's social media accounts by perpetrators to contact children's mothers. As respondents noted, this

use of children often resulted in an impact on the mother-child bond, with victim-survivors having to restrict and monitor their children's technology use due to the perpetrators' abuse. This specific targeting of children also highlights how children are harmed alongside their mothers by perpetrators' use of technology in their regimes of control.

The use of technology to shame and humiliate women also increased. Perpetrators' sexual abuse of women (and as respondents mentioned, also their children) was often filmed, photographed, and used to further their control over women. The 112.3% increase in respondents seeing perpetrators publicly sharing and distributing images reveal that victim-survivors of DV are a significant cohort that is harmed by the use of IBSA. It also shows the gendered and sex-specific ways that technology is used by perpetrators of DV, drawing attention to the sexual politics of technology-facilitated abuse, and DV more broadly (for further discussion see Franzway et al., 2019, drawing on Millet, 1971). Our findings indicate that men are the main perpetrators of technology-facilitated abuse, and women the main victims, adding weight to the gendered nature of technology-facilitated abuse. This highlights the need for any broader cyberbullying programs to recognise the gendered nature of technology-facilitated abuse, and that the biggest threat to cyber safety is often women's intimate partners and ex-partners.

It also suggests that it would be useful for respectful relationship programs targeting young people to include respecting the privacy of partners in intimate relationships do that constantly monitoring another person's activities and whereabouts, or expecting access to another's devices and/or accounts is not normalised.

It is important to note that the increase of 115.3% of respondents who, in their experience, felt that women with disabilities were at particular risk of technology-facilitated abuse. The limited research in this area points to an evidence gap where more knowledge is needed to ensure that women with disabilities—who often rely on technology for communication, assistance and social connection—are able to use technology safely.

Other significant increases included women from non-English speaking backgrounds being seen to be at particular risk, which increased by 76.2% from 2015. Respondents noted throughout the survey the very specific ways that perpetrators would capitalise on cultural norms to abuse and shame women from non-English speaking backgrounds, as well as the lack of support available. There was also an increase of 113.9% in the risks for Aboriginal &/or Torres Strait Islander women, with respondents again highlighting the particular ways that culture could shape how technology is used by perpetrators, as well as the dearth of specialised supports.

The additional question in 2020 about co-occurring abuse provides insights into the broader context of technology-facilitated abuse, which the findings show are situated within patterns of mostly non-physical abuse. This adds weight to the conceptualisation by scholars and advocates that technology-facilitated abuse is often a form of coercive control (Hand et al., 2009; Harris & Woodlock, 2019). The lack of adequate legal responses also highlights the difficulty of current legal remedies to recognise these forms of abuse. The seriousness of technology-facilitated abuse is highlighted by the known lethality risks associated with much of the co-occurring abuse noted, such as stalking and sexual abuse, with further research needed into the connection of technology and intimate partner homicide.

The developments in digital technologies have surpassed previous expectations and this has meant that the accessibility of digital devices is within the reach of many Australians. Consequently, perpetrators have been able to abuse and coerce victim-survivors by unwanted communication, harassment, tracking their movements and contacts and transmitting or threatening to transmit images without consent. The accessibility of such technologies, such as smartphones, has also seen perpetrators increasingly use children to gather data through providing phones with tracking enabled and social media accounts to which they also have access.

Our survey results reveal the increasing frequency these forms of technology-facilitated abuse are being used by perpetrators since 2015. At the same time, people are more and more reliant on such technologies for everyday life activities such as banking, contacting government services (e.g. myGov) and maintaining communication with family, friends and other supports. This has been a dilemma for many victim-survivors as they need their devices for these everyday activities but do not want perpetrators to have the opportunity to harass and track their movements. WESNET's work with frontline practitioners has gone some way to ensuring women accessing those services can safely access and use technologies whilst also preventing perpetrator abuse through the safe use of technology. However, as respondents in this survey note at various points, the forms of technology-facilitated abuse are increasing and expanding which pose a constant challenge to practitioners trying to stay abreast of the many forms of technology-facilitated abuse and how to keep women and children safe from these types of abuses.

The findings of the *Second National Survey on Technology Abuse and Domestic Violence in Australia* are a benchmark on which we can map our progress in responding to, and ultimately preventing, technology-facilitated abuse. They clearly show that we have much to do in order to protect women and children from men's misuse of technology as a tool to extend their power and control

through DV. The onus should not be on women to keep themselves safe from technology-facilitated abuse, nor should the burden be placed on practitioners. Instead, we need to ensure that technology is developed in ways that cannot be exploited by perpetrators. We need to continue to keep in focus the wider work required to ultimately free women and children from men's violence; the social and political transformation that educates boys and men that violence against women is unacceptable.



Recommendations and future directions

This second national survey has demonstrated the expanding use of technology-facilitated abuse by perpetrators of DV. There is greater awareness in the DV sector of these types of abuses. The respondents participating in this survey highlight the pervasiveness of these forms of abuse and the challenges confronting both practitioners and victim-survivors to identify and respond to these forms of abuse, coercion and surveillance.

The findings highlight how victim-survivors are required to be vigilant in identifying technology-facilitated abuse and making themselves safe from such threats. In contrast, there are limited responses to the perpetrators of technology-facilitated abuse reported in this survey leaving them to continue such abuse and are ultimately unaccountable for their actions and their impacts.

Our recommendations are directed to a wide range of groups who all need to better respond to technology-facilitated abuse. Unless they are all involved, those left out will unwittingly support the continuation of technology-facilitated abuse.

The recommendations address the following areas to stem the use of technology-facilitated abuses: future research and evidence development; training and awareness raising with the justice and law enforcement sectors; continued training and awareness with frontline practitioners, future policy and legislation development; responsible and consultative approaches

from technology developers, and prevention approaches.

Future research and evidence development

- The findings of this follow-up survey indicate the importance of repeating this study at least every five years, and therefore we recommend that there is another survey funded and conducted in 2025 if not earlier given the speed of the development of new technologies.
- An area requiring future collection of evidence to inform practice could be a consideration in perpetrators' risk assessments which should include assessing perpetrators' existing misuse of technology as part of their abuse tactics, and obtaining information on their technological skills, their access to digital data and the sectors in which they are employed. For example, a perpetrator who works in real estate may be able to access online databases that could reveal the location of victim-survivors. This needs to be taken into account during assessment and appropriate measures taken to monitor and assess perpetrators in these sectors.

Training and awareness raising, future policy and legislative development

- Since the 2015 survey, laws concerned with IBSA have been progressively introduced across

Australian jurisdictions and have raised awareness of the criminal nature of these acts. However, the survey still showed large increases in the non-consensual sharing of images by perpetrators, and a reluctance by some victim-survivors to disclose this form of abuse because of the personal nature of the images. It is therefore likely to be a considerable under-estimation of the numbers of victim-survivors subjected to image sharing which may also act as a barrier to victim-survivors pursuing criminal charges in this area. Evaluating the impact of the legislation into the future is important in order to identify if this is a valuable strategy to reduce IBSA.

- More broadly, there was a lack of significant change between 2015 to 2020 in legal responses to other forms of technology facilitated abuse. This indicates that priority needs to be given to training police, magistrates and other legal professionals about non-physical forms of violence such as technology-facilitated abuse within a broader understanding of coercive control. This training should be developed and conducted with DV specialist organisations in order to convey the consequences and impacts for victim-survivors.
- In the past five years since the first survey, we have seen an increase in practitioner knowledge, understanding and awareness of technology-facilitated abuse. This is due in part, to the investment in training

and skill development of the DV sector by organisations such as WESNET. Specialist training and development of the DV sector continuing is necessary to keep pace with technological developments and responses in this area and this training must have a gender lens.

- In relation to education of legal and judicial professionals about technology-facilitated abuse, there must be greater recognition of the ways that contact orders are being misused by perpetrators. The large increase in child contact being used by perpetrators as further opportunities to abuse, threaten and harass women is a clear sign that there is a lack of understanding of the seriousness of technology-facilitated abuse within the Family Court system.
- Policy makers in partnership with the justice sector and women's specialist DV services should consider how technology-facilitated abuse could be more consistently and effectively responded to by police and courts, including the collection of evidence about the various patterns of technology-facilitated abuse that are being used by perpetrators alongside other tactics of coercive control. An understanding of these patterns would increase understanding of their interlocking nature and awareness of the significant and sometimes long lasting impacts on victim-survivors.

Responsible partnerships between technology developers and the DV sector

- As technology changes, perpetrators also adapt and adjust their behaviour as rapidly as technology develops. It is imperative that technology is designed with this at the forefront of developers concerns, and that specialised DV services be consulted about changes and developments.
- Technology companies and those that use technology must: (1) build systems that include safety by design with a correct threat assessment, i.e. broader than cybersecurity and privacy aimed at prevention of fraud; and (2) recognise that their customers/clients are very likely to be experiencing technology-facilitated abuse on their platform and need to have dedicated customer service pathways for victims of technology-facilitated abuse.

Prevention strategies and approaches

- Prevention strategies focused on technology-facilitated abuse need to be situated within the larger framework of preventing men's violence against women and children. Framing technology-facilitated abuse as a form of cyberbullying ignores the gendered nature of this abuse, the intentions of perpetrators, and the impacts on the victims.

- These prevention strategies must include a program of promoting technology literacy and digital inclusion for women and girls. Perpetrators often capitalise on the gendered bias in technology literacy, conveying the sense that they are omnipotent simply because women are unsure about the limits of their technological capabilities. This does not mean that women's fears are not real and that for many women the perpetrator is an all-encompassing presence in their lives. However, with more knowledge and confidence in their digital skills, women may be able to manage and control their digital devices and accounts without interference from partners and ex-partners.
- Alongside this skill development in digital literacy for women and girls there must also be prevention training and education for boys and men. This must include the responsible and ethical use of technology. No amount of safe technology design, nor work with women and girls will prevent technology-facilitated abuse until men and boys take responsibility for their abusive actions and decisions to misuse digital tools and devices.

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Appendix - Survey Results Tables

Table 1: State/Territory of respondent

State	2020 (N=440)		2015 (N=546)	
	N	%	N	%
VIC	130	29.5	248	45.4
NSW	102	23.2	102	22.0
QLD	80	18.2	66	12.1
WA	58	13.2	38	7.0
SA	32	7.2	30	5.5
TAS	16	3.6	26	4.8
ACT	14	3.2	12	2.2
NT	8	1.8	6	1.1

Table 2: Remoteness of respondents

	2020 (N=461)		2015 (N=741)	
	N	%	N	%
Major City	227	51.4	269	49.3
Regional centre	113	25.6	174	31.9
Rural	64	14.5	64	11.7
Remote	42	9.5	14	2.6
Other	15	3.4	25	4.6

Table 3: Organisation Type

	2020 (N=545)		2015 (N=546)	
	N	%	N	%
DV service	361	81.7	291	53.3
Sexual assault service	47	10.6	79	14.5
Legal service	43	9.7	83	15.2
Housing service	39	8.8	70	12.8
Health service	25	5.7	68	12.5
Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander service	19	4.3	*	*
Multicultural service	11	2.5	*	*
Other	*	*	150	24.5

Table 4: Age*

Age (years)	2020 (N=441)	
	N	%
18 - 24	13	2.9
25 - 34	102	23.1
35 - 44	118	26.8
45 - 54	131	29.7
55 - 64	69	15.6
65 - 74	8	1.8
75+	0	0

Table 5: Sex*

Sex	2020 (N=441)	
	N	%
Female	426	96.4
Male	16	3.6
Intersex	0	0

Table 6: Length in Role

	2020 (N=440)		2015 (N=519)	
	N	%	N	%
Less than one year	45	10.2	62	12.0
1 – 5 years	173	39.1	235	45.3
6 – 10 years	124	28.1	127	24.5
11 – 15 years	63	14.3	37	7.1
16 – 20 years	21	4.8	29	5.6
21 + years	16	3.6	29	5.6

Table 7: Frequency of Support

	2020 (N=442)		2015 (N=522)	
	N	%	N	%
It is the main focus of my role	388	87.8	329	60.3
It is a small part of my role	54	12.2	193	35.4

Table 8: Have you had clients who have been abused, stalked or threatened via technology?

	2020 (N=442)		2015 (N=419)	
	N	%	N	%
Yes	439	99.3	411	98.3
No	1	0.2	7	1.7
Not sure	2	0.5	0	0.0

Table 9: In your experience, what gender are perpetrators of technology abuse mostly?*

	2020 (N=441)	
	N	%
Male	426	96.4
Female	6	1.4
Other	9	2

Table 10: In your experience, what gender are victims of technology abuse mostly?*

	2020 (N=441)	
	N	%
Female	410	92.8
Other	12	2.7
Male	11	2.5
Children	8	1.8

Table 11: What technologies are you seeing being used to facilitate abuse and how often?

Technology	2020		2015	
	N	%	N	%
E-mail	420		383	
All the time	80	19.0	49	12.8
Often	231	55.0	145	37.9
Sometimes	81	19.3	117	30.6
Rarely	22	5.2	58	15.1
Never	6	1.4	14	3.7
Text messages	438		410	
All the time	266	60.7	194	47.3
Often	160	36.5	173	42.2
Sometimes	10	2.3	40	9.8
Rarely	1	0.2	3	0.7
Never	1	0.2	0	0.0
Smartphone (with internet access)	438		410	
All the time	158	36.1	127	31.0
Often	215	49.1	210	51.2
Sometimes	62	14.2	64	16.6
Rarely	2	0.5	7	1.7
Never	1	0.2	2	0.5
Smartphone instant messaging	431		375	
All the time	92	21.3	24	6.4
Often	192	44.5	75	20.0
Sometimes	121	28.1	98	26.1
Rarely	16	3.7	111	29.6
Never	10	2.3	67	17.9
GPS tracking (using smartphone apps)	439		383	
All the time	71	16.2	27	7.1
Often	200	45.6	100	26.1
Sometimes	135	30.8	153	40.0
Rarely	25	5.7	58	15.1
Never	8	1.8	45	11.8

Technology	2020		2015	
	N	%	N	%
GPS tracking device	435		376	
All the time	22	5.1	18	4.8
Often	93	21.4	41	10.9
Sometimes	185	42.5	130	34.6
Rarely	117	26.9	120	31.9
Never	18	4.1	67	17.8
Landline phones	434		375	
All the time	4	0.9	34	9.1
Often	51	11.8	85	22.7
Sometimes	153	35.3	124	33.1
Rarely	149	34.3	107	28.5
Never	77	17.7	25	6.7
Camera	434		377	
All the time	9	2.1	14	3.7
Often	133	30.6	71	18.8
Sometimes	174	40.1	122	32.4
Rarely	81	18.7	125	33.2
Never	37	8.5	45	11.9
Video cameras	429		374	
All the time	29	6.8	14	3.7
Often	152	35.4	47	12.6
Sometimes	133	31.0	117	31.3
Rarely	77	17.9	135	36.1
Never	38	8.9	61	16.3
Facebook	439		412	
All the time	154	35.1	152	36.9
Often	223	50.8	193	46.8
Sometimes	55	12.5	49	11.9
Rarely	5	1.1	12	2.9
Never	2	0.5	6	1.5
Instagram	435		374	
All the time	64	14.7	22	5.9
Often	136	31.3	64	17.1
Sometimes	164	37.7	103	27.5
Rarely	60	13.8	104	27.8
Never	11	2.5	81	21.7

Table 11: What technologies are you seeing being used to facilitate abuse and how often? (continued)

Technology	2020		2015	
	N	%	N	%
Twitter	431		377	
All the time	23	5.3	17	4.5
Often	86	20.0	61	16.2
Sometimes	172	39.9	96	25.5
Rarely	103	23.9	114	30.2
Never	47	10.6	89	23.6
Snapchat	434		372	
All the time	41	9.4	16	4.3
Often	120	27.6	52	14.0
Sometimes	188	43.3	105	28.2
Rarely	59	13.6	107	28.8
Never	26	6.0	92	24.7
Spyware	434		364	
All the time	17	3.9	15	4.1
Often	78	18.0	36	9.9
Sometimes	151	34.8	83	22.8
Rarely	154	35.5	125	34.3
Never	34	7.8	105	28.9
Car GPS/Smart car features*	428			
All the time	9	2.1		
Often	44	10.3		
Sometimes	133	31.1		
Rarely	190	44.4		
Never	52	12.1		
FaceTime*	430			
All the time	76	17.7		
Often	183	42.6		
Sometimes	94	21.3		
Rarely	50	11.6		
Never	27	6.3		
Smart Home technology*	434			
All the time	9	2.1		
Often	64	14.7		
Sometimes	113	26.0		
Rarely	178	41.0		
Never	70	16.1		

Technology	2020		2015	
	N	%	N	%
Wearable devices* (i.e., FitBit, Apple Watch)	432			
All the time	5	1.2		
Often	44	10.2		
Sometimes	95	22.0		
Rarely	212	49.1		
Never	76	17.6		
iCloud*	434			
All the time	44	10.1		
Often	183	42.2		
Sometimes	108	24.9		
Rarely	53	12.2		
Never	46	10.6		
Google*	433			
All the time	41	9.5		
Often	175	40.4		
Sometimes	113	26.1		
Rarely	67	15.5		
Never	37	8.5		
Other accounts* (e.g., Telco/Aus Gov/Centrelink)	437			
All the time	118	27.0		
Often	165	37.8		
Sometimes	95	21.7		
Rarely	31	7.1		
Never	28	6.4		
Transport apps*	433			
All the time	5	1.2		
Often	49	11.3		
Sometimes	142	32.8		
Rarely	158	36.5		
Never	79	18.2		
Parental monitoring apps/Anti-theft apps*	432			
All the time	6	1.4		
Often	50	11.6		
Sometimes	116	26.9		
Rarely	182	42.1		
Never	78	18.1		
Routers/Wi-Fi*	430			
All the time	4	0.9		
Often	49	11.4		
Sometimes	106	24.7		
Rarely	190	44.2		
Never	81	18.8		

Table 12: What types of abusive tactics are you seeing perpetrators using via technology and how often?

Tactics	2020		2015	
	N	%	N	%
Phone calls (to mobiles or landline) used to verbally abuse, call women names or put women down	441		414	
All the time	216	49	188	45.4
Often	195	44.2	171	41.3
Sometimes	25	5.7	48	11.6
Rarely	4	0.9	5	1.2
Never	1	0.2	2	0.5
Text, email or instant messages used to abuse, call women names or put women down	441		413	
All the time	315	71.4	193	46.7
Often	112	25.4	179	43.3
Sometimes	12	2.7	32	7.8
Rarely	1	0.2	6	1.5
Never	1	0.2	3	0.7
Using social media (i.e. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc.) used to abuse, call women names or put women down	438		412	
All the time	163	37.2	149	36.2
Often	143	32.6	182	44.2
Sometimes	118	26.9	62	15.1
Rarely	12	2.7	15	3.6
Never	2	0.5	4	1.0

Table 13: What types of **threatening tactics are you seeing perpetrators using via technology and how often?**

Tactics	2020		2015	
	N	%	N	%
Phone calls (to mobiles or landline phones) used to make verbal threats or threats or harm	434		414	
All the time	194	44.7	136	32.9
Often	193	44.5	192	46.4
Sometimes	37	8.5	73	17.6
Rarely	9	2.1	10	2.4
Never	1	0.2	3	0.7
Text, email or instant messages used to makes threats to harm	434		412	
All the time	249	57.4	139	33.7
Often	152	35	181	43.9
Sometimes	25	5.8	78	18.9
Rarely	7	1.6	10	2.4
Never	1	0.2	4	1.0
Using social media (i.e. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc.)	434		410	
All the time	131	30.2	96	23.4
Often	150	34.6	158	38.9
Sometimes	136	31.3	110	26.8
Rarely	15	3.5	38	9.3
Never	2	0.5	8	2.0

Table 14: What types of monitoring and tracking tactics are you seeing perpetrators using via technology and how often?

Tactics	2020		2015	
	N	%	N	%
Perpetrators checking women's text messages and phone without permission	441		407	
All the time	252	57.1	118	29.0
Often	153	34.7	182	44.2
Sometimes	31	7	79	19.4
Rarely	4	0.9	20	4.9
Never	1	0.2	8	2.0
Text, email or instant messages used for surveillance and to check where women are	439		411	
All the time	221	50.3	96	23.4
Often	171	39	187	45.5
Sometimes	34	7.7	93	22.6
Rarely	12	2.7	25	6.1
Never	1	0.2	10	2.4
Phone call (to mobiles or landlines) used for surveillance and to check where women are	440		415	
All the time	194	44.1	101	24.3
Often	177	40.2	168	40.5
Sometimes	58	13.2	106	25.5
Rarely	10	2.3	30	7.2
Never	1	0.2	10	2.4
Using social media (i.e. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc.) for surveillance and to check where women are	436		392	
All the time	114	25.9	72	17.6
Often	162	36.8	174	42.4
Sometimes	148	33.6	115	28.1
Rarely	12	2.7	31	7.6
Never	4	0.9	18	4.4
Women having to share electronic passwords/account access/device access with the perpetrator	436		382	
All the time	225	51	83	26.6
Often	147	33.3	148	36.7
Sometimes	54	12.2	115	28.5
Rarely	10	2.3	36	8.9
Never	5	1.1	21	5.2

Tactics	2020		2015	
	N	%	N	%
Perpetrators buying phones for women for the purposes of keeping track of them	440		398	
All the time	178	40.5	49	12.3
Often	139	31.6	115	28.9
Sometimes	86	19.5	145	36.4
Rarely	23	5.2	56	14.1
Never	14	3.2	33	8.3
Women being tracked with GPS such as using phone apps like "Find My' or by GPS devices)	422		337	
All the time	123	28	32	8.1
Often	165	37.5	82	20.8
Sometimes	115	26.1	139	35.3
Rarely	19	4.3	84	21.3
Never	18	4.1	57	14.5
Perpetrators installing spyware on phones to monitor women's email, text messages and phone	413		323	
All the time	32	7.3	24	6.1
Often	80	18.2	69	17.4
Sometimes	193	43.9	124	31.3
Rarely	108	24.5	106	26.8
Never	27	6.1	73	18.4
Perpetrators tracking/monitoring movements using e-tags	436			
All the time	13	3		
Often	51	11.7		
Sometimes	119	27.3		
Rarely	177	40.6		
Never	76	17.4		

Table 15: What types of humiliating, shaming and punishing tactics are you seeing perpetrators using via technology, and how often?

Tactics	2020		2015	
	N	%	N	%
Perpetrators coercing women to film/record intimate images*	439			
All the time	68	15.5		
Often	219	49.9		
Sometimes	111	25.3		
Rarely	29	6.6		
Never	12	2.7		
Perpetrators threatening to distribute or post private photos/videos of women	438		370	
All the time	80	18.3	58	14.1
Often	231	52.7	145	35.2
Sometimes	100	22.8	100	34.5
Rarely	18	4.1	45	10.9
Never	9	2.1	22	5.3
Perpetrators actually distributing or posting private photos/videos of women without the woman's permission	421		378	
All the time	48	11	33	8.0
Often	202	46.3	90	21.8
Sometimes	123	28.2	174	42.1
Rarely	48	11	81	19.6
Never	15	3.4	35	8.5
Negative information posted by the perpetrator on social media sites such as Facebook	436		401	
All the time	102	23.3	91	21.9
Often	206	47	207	49.9
Sometimes	113	25.8	88	21.2
Rarely	15	3.4	15	3.6
Never	2	0.5	14	3.4
Personal information about women sent to others and/or posted online	437		412	
All the time	67	15.3	64	15.5
Often	198	45.3	149	36.2
Sometimes	135	30.9	139	33.7
Rarely	27	6.2	39	9.5
Never	10	2.3	21	5.1

Table 16: What other tactics are you seeing perpetrators using via technology and how often?

Tactics	2020		2015	
	N	%	N	%
Women being impersonated using technology (i.e. sending email from women's accounts, pretending to be the woman on Facebook)	437		414	
All the time	31	7.1	16	3.9
Often	97	22.2	87	21.0
Sometimes	189	43.2	170	41.1
Rarely	98	22.4	91	22.0
Never	22	5	50	12.1
Children given phone or other devices as a way for perpetrators to contact or monitor women	436		414	
All the time	146	33.5	31	7.5
Often	151	34.6	106	25.6
Sometimes	95	21.8	161	38.9
Rarely	32	7.3	72	17.4
Never	12	2.8	44	10.6
Children's social media accounts, such as Facebook, used by perpetrator in an attempt to communicate with women	436		411	
All the time	128	29.4	34	8.3
Often	151	34.6	90	21.9
Sometimes	83	19	143	34.8
Rarely	52	11.9	89	21.7
Never	22	5	55	13.4
Court-ordered child contact via phone/email being used by the perpetrator to abuse, threaten or intimidate women*	435			
All the time	215	49.4		
Often	125	28.7		
Sometimes	65	14.9		
Rarely	20	4.6		
Never	10	2.3		
Tracking, monitoring or restricting women's banking and finances through the use of technology*	437			
All the time	169	38.7		
Often	147	33.6		
Sometimes	85	19.5		
Rarely	26	5.9		
Never	10	2.3		

Table 17: Have you noticed any particular issues with technology-facilitated abuse that are different for specific groups of women?

Group	2020		2015	
	N	%	N	%
Women with disabilities	196	44.3	86	20.6
Women from non-English speaking countries	190	43	102	24.4
Indigenous women	122	27.6	54	12.9
Recently arrived migrants	104	23.5	78	18.7
Other	36	8.1	248	59.3

Table 18: What age groups are most affected?

Age group	2020		2015	
	N	%	N	%
Under 18	89	20.1	152	36.4
18 - 24 years	210	47.5	294	70.3
25 – 34 years	266	60.2	320	76.6
35 – 44 years	317	71.7	242	57.9
45 – 54 years	171	38.7	171	29.2
55 – 64 years	53	12	41	9.8
65 – 74 years	20	4.5	12	2.9
75+ years	3	0.7	5	1.2

Table 19: Co-occurring Abuse*

Type of co-occurring abuse	2020	
	N	%
Stalking	312	70.6
Emotional abuse	310	70.1
Sexual abuse	301	68.1
Financial abuse	271	61.3
Physical abuse	183	41.4
Child abuse	132	29.9
Strangulation	111	25.1
Animal abuse	73	16.5
Other	19	4.3

Table 20: Do police take technology-facilitated abuse seriously?

Response	2020 (N=440)		2015 (N=519)	
	N	%	N	%
	427		397	
Yes always	37	12.7	52	12.5
Sometimes, it depends on the officer	263	61.6	257	61.8
Rarely take it seriously	101	23.7	72	17.3
Never take it seriously	13	3.0	8	1.9
Other	13	3.0	8	1.9

Table 21: What reasons do you believe that police not take technology-facilitated abuse seriously?

Response	2020 (N=442)		2015 (N=522)	
	N	%	N	%
Lack of understanding about technology and the role it plays in domestic violence	232	52.5	223	63.0
Lack of understanding about domestic violence in general	217	49.1	207	58.5
Lack of resources to investigate technology-facilitated abuse	208	47.1	222	62.7
Police do not ask women about whether technology is being used as part of the abuse	166	37.6	172	48.6
Police do not see abuse via technology as a criminal offence	149	33.7	108	30.5
Police do not believe the victim	122	27.6		
Police do not believe what the victim is describing is possible	121	27.4		
Other	39	8.8	39	8.8

Table 22: In your experience over the last 12 months, if clients have had their intervention order/AVO/protection order breached via technology, such as text messages or via Facebook, have police taken action?

Response	2020		2015	
	N	%	N	%
	414		373	
Yes always	32	7.7	51	12.4
Sometimes, it depends on the officer	248	59.9	201	48.8
Rarely take action	110	26.6	84	20.4
Never	17	4.1	19	4.6
Other	7	1.7	18	4.4

Table 23: Technology may be used to collect evidence of abuse, such as by taking screenshots of text messages, recordings made using a smartphone. In the course of your work, have you seen evidence obtained using technology being used*:

Response	2020	
	N	%
As evidence of a breach of an order	352	79.6
For granting an intervention order/AVO/Protection order	226	51.1
In family court proceedings	150	33.9
In a criminal court	92	20.8

Table 24: In the course of your work, have you seen examples of where courts did not accept evidence of technology-facilitated abuse as admissible evidence?

Response	2020		2015	
	N	%	N	%
	387		319	
Yes	188	48.6	87	21.3
No	81	20.9	113	27.7
Unsure	118	30.5	119	29.2

Table 25: In what ways do you think telecommunication companies and internet providers could do more to enhance women and children’s safety?

Response	2020		2015	
	N	%	N	%
Have specific teams/processes to assist clients experiencing domestic and family violence*	326	73.8	*	*
Take seriously the impact of technology-facilitated abuse on women and children	283	64.0	352	86.3
Respond more swiftly to remove abusive content from their sites	264	59.7	323	79.2
Provide ‘how-to’ guide for improving privacy settings on phones	253	57.2	339	83.1
Provide guides on how to remove spyware on phones/computers	242	54.8	242	82.6
Ensure that phone handsets have privacy set ‘by default’	236	53.4	299	73.3
Other	25	5.7	6	1.5

Table 26: If you were to undertake training in this area, what topics would you like to see covered?

Response	2020		2015	
	N	%	N	%
Safety planning and risk assessment around technology	339	76.7		
How to best support women and children to minimise the impact of technology-facilitated abuse	219	49.5	329	81.0
Information about legal options for women and children	208	47.1	288	70.9
How to identify technology-facilitated abuse	184	41.6	240	59.1
How technology-facilitated abuse fits within the larger understanding of domestic violence	182	41.2	211	52.0
Information about types of technology	175	39.6	231	56.9
How technology-facilitated abuse impacts women and children	174	39.4	191	47.0
Other	17	3.8	10	2.5



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