

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Second National Survey of Technology Abuse and Domestic Violence in Australia

WESNET in and Curtin University have published findings from [the *Second National Survey of Technology Abuse and Domestic Violence in Australia*](#). Results from the Telstra-funded survey of 442 domestic violence (DV) practitioners highlight significant increases in technology-facilitated abuse in Australia and mark a call to action for responses to keep up.

Findings and emerging trends of the Second National Survey will be discussed via an online webinar and panel on 24th November from 1pm AEDT, presented by WESNET CEO, Karen Bentley and Professor Donna Chung from Curtin University. Panelists include Dr Delanie Woodlock, and Curtin University researchers Darcee Schulze, Natasha Mahoney and Amy Pracilio.

The survey is a follow-up to a 2015 survey by DVRCV, Women's Legal Service NSW, and WESNET which was the first and largest national investigation of technology-facilitated abuse in Australia. Following the first national survey, there was a shift in practitioner awareness of the extent to which victim-survivors of domestic and family violence are also experiencing technology-facilitated abuse.

Concerning trends of the survey show the alarming and increasing ways perpetrators of DV use advances in technology to further entrap, and control victim-survivors in 2020. Since the 2015 ReCharge survey, there was a 244.8% increase in practitioners reporting perpetrators' use of GPS tracking of victim-survivors, and 183.2% increase in the use of video-cameras.

WESNET CEO, Karen Bentley said: "The increase of technology-facilitated abuse in 2020 mirrors what we are hearing from our member services and frontline agencies supporting women across the country. Abusers are weaponising technology and using it to wield additional harms in conjunction with the more traditional forms of abuse we know."

The 2020 survey included new questions about how technology-facilitated abuse co-occurs with other forms of DV. Findings show perpetrators use technology alongside broader patterns of violence and abuse, with high levels of stalking, emotional, sexual, and financial abuse co-occurring.

The survey was launched in May 2020 amid the first wave of COVID-19, and although it was not the focus of the survey, the pandemic's influence on perpetrator's use of technology-facilitated abuse was clear.

Respondents reported that perpetrators were using the pandemic's climate of isolation and reliance on technology for school, work and connection to increase their use of technology to control and monitor victim-survivors.

Findings report stories of perpetrators using children's online schooling during the pandemic to seek information about their whereabouts, as well as increases in stalking and surveillance inside and outside of the victim-survivor's home using video-cameras.

Reflecting the gendered nature of DV, men were more likely to be perpetrators, and women victim/survivors of technology-facilitated abuse.

An increase in gendered tactics of abuse was also clear. From 2015, there was a 346.6% increase in children being given a device in order to contact and control their mothers and a 254.2% increase in using children's social media to contact victim-survivors.

Professor Donna Chung from Curtin University said this reinforces the gendered nature of technologically-facilitated abuse, and seeks to undermine the mother-child relationship.

“We are seeing a continuing increase in perpetrators providing their children with smartphones with operational tracking devices. The children are told to hide the phone from their mothers as they will confiscate them. This puts the women and children under constant surveillance and therefore greater risk of harm and manipulates the child who under instruction from the father is taught to deceive and lie to their mother - effectively undermining the mother-child relationship”

The use of technology to shame and humiliate women substantially increased. There was a 112.3% increase in perpetrators sharing and distributing images to reveal victim-survivors. Practitioners also noted perpetrators often filming and photographing sexual abuse to further control.

“This huge increase in image-based sexual abuse is partly attributable to technological advances because everybody with a smartphone can video others. This abuse is intended to shame, humiliate and intimidate women, its sexist undertones are indisputable as no similar phenomenon is occurring for men ” Professor Chung said.

Feelings of fear and being trapped were some of most common words used by practitioners to describe the impact of technology-facilitated abuse on victim-survivors. Dr Delanie Woodlock said how this type of abuse creates a sense that the perpetrators are omnipresent. It is overwhelming for the victim-survivor, and robs women of their human right to connect and interact freely online.

“The findings from our survey show in alarming clarity that technology is being used by perpetrators of domestic violence with impunity, limiting women and children’s freedom in both on and offline spaces and creating a seemingly inescapable climate of fear” Dr Woodlock said.

Despite the clear increase in technology-facilitated abuse from 2015 to 2020, the practitioners experience with legal, police and service responses remained unchanged. Indicating that police and justice responses are not keeping up with the tactics of modern domestic and family violence. Practitioners noted that breaches in intervention orders made via technology were rarely enforced and not taken as seriously as physical abuse.

Such stark increases in the use of technology-facilitated abuse require a collective and coordinated response. Ms Karen Bentley stressed it is the responsibility of everyone: governments, telecommunication and technology companies, the police and the justice system to adapt and improve support for victim-survivors and to ultimately hold the abusers accountable.

“The findings of this research are a stark reminder that technology is now fully enmeshed in all aspects of our lives. Legislative and programmatic responses are constantly playing catch-up, while victim-survivors are living daily with the terrifying reality and frontline workers grapple with new and emerging abuse tactics.”

Getting help

Abuse, stalking and threatening behaviour is never okay – whether it’s offline or online. Nobody, men or women, children or adults deserves to be abused through technology. If you are in a life-threatening situation, call Triple Zero for assistance, or for confidential information, counselling and support service, contact [1800RESPECT](https://www.1800respect.org.au).

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