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Spaceless violence: Women's experiences of technology-facilitated domestic violence in regional, rural and remote areas

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We thank the survivors who were generous and courageous in sharing their time, stories and visions as to how responses to domestic violence more broadly, and the abuse and stalking enacted through technology in particular, could be enhanced. Your voices in this report and the recommendations you make can contribute to changes in regulation, the prevention of harm and the protection and empowerment of other survivors. We urge criminal justice agencies to review their policies and practices in light of these survivors' experiences and advice.

Domestic violence and community services aided in the recruitment of survivors for this project and helped support them before and after their participation. These agencies provide vital assistance to those experiencing domestic violence and are overburdened and under-resourced. While we cannot acknowledge specific organisations here, so as to protect the identity of participants, we would like to recognise their role in this research and daily, in the field.

Acronyms and abbreviations

AIHW	Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
GPS	Global positioning systems
IBSA	Image-based sexual abuse
ICT	Information communication technology
IPV	Intimate partner violence
RRR	Regional, rural, remote
WESNET	Women's Services Network

Abstract

This project explored the impact of technology on victim–survivors of intimate partner violence in regional, rural or remote areas who are socially or geographically isolated. Specifically, it considered the ways that perpetrators use technology to abuse and stalk women, and how technology is used by victim–survivors to seek information, support and safety. Interviews and focus groups with 13 women were conducted in regional, rural and remote Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland. The findings showed that perpetrators used technology to control and intimidate women and their children. While this impacted women and children's lives in significant ways, causing fear and isolation, the use of technology was often not viewed as a serious form of abuse by justice agents.

Executive summary

This project used in-depth interviews and focus groups with 13 women to explore how digital technology affects the domestic violence women are subjected to in regional, rural and remote Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland.

Perpetrators use technology for control and intimidation

Women reported that technology is used by perpetrators to monitor and track them, to abuse and threaten them and their families, and to shame and humiliate them. This abuse occurred both during relationships and post separation. The abuse not only continued post separation but often increased once women made attempts to exit the relationship. Our findings challenge the myth that women can escape violence by separating from an abuser.

Perpetrators would obtain access to women's passwords, email and social media accounts and used this access to monitor and track them. Perpetrators used harassment as a way to place women under surveillance and pressure them to report on their activities and movements.

The abusive messages that women received, during relationships and post separation, were often gendered and sexual. These would include messages related to their body, their past sexual history, sexually violent threats, and attacks on their mothering. The number of messages women received could be high—several hundred messages sent in a short time period, such as a few hours or days—even where any contact violated an existing intervention order.

Women reported that perpetrators were using technology in the context of domestic violence as a way to humiliate and punish them. This tactic is not new; however, technology now enables perpetrators to do this with greater ease, reach and immediacy. The main way in which women were humiliated and punished was through the use of image-based sexual abuse (IBSA). Almost half the women in our research reported experiencing IBSA, with one woman experiencing this in two different relationships. IBSA was used during the relationship, as a way to control victim–survivors, but most often to threaten and punish women after separation. Three of the women in our study were aware that images or video of them had been publicly distributed by the perpetrator.

Perpetrators also used technology to humiliate women in front of their friends and families. Often perpetrators would access women's phones to gain contact details. They would then call or text the survivor's friends and family. This could occur if abusers alleged that women did not respond quickly enough to their calls, were outside the house longer than 'allowed', or made attempts to leave the perpetrator. This was an effective way to control women, as victim–survivors reported feeling embarrassed and humiliated by the perpetrator's actions.

Perpetrators involved others in technology-facilitated domestic violence

Persons within an abuser's familial or social network were coopted or elected to engage in technology-facilitated domestic violence. These 'proxy perpetrators' could be an abuser's friend, family member or new partner. Proxy perpetrators were found to send abusive messages and exhibit support for perpetrators on social media posts or online campaigns that critiqued women's accounts of violence or their character. They might also track a woman's movements using technology or, after seeing her in person, share information about her location with her abuser, through technology. Abuser networks (both real-world and online) were also used to distribute image-based sexual abuse.

Technology-facilitated domestic violence affects children

Women talked about the labour involved with reviewing how abusers used technology in regard to their children. It was not uncommon for abusers to gift technology to children, under the pretence that it would facilitate contact, entertainment, leisure activities or because of safety concerns. These behaviours were typically said to show care and foster parental connection, but in practice they facilitated coercion and control.

Technology-facilitated domestic violence sometimes targeted children directly, such as when perpetrators sent abusive or harassing messages and threats to them via digital media. Some perpetrators impersonated real people or created fake profiles to engage the children on social media for the purposes of opening up contact when this was restricted by courts or children themselves. Perpetrators also used technology to record, observe and stalk children, and these practices could be overt or covert. Women worried that devices could be hidden in children's belongings or clothes during visitation.

Children (the women's children, children shared with the perpetrator, or the perpetrator's children) could be coopted or pressured to perpetrate harm against women and their families. Women also reported that perpetrators sought to destabilise their relationships with their children. Through messaging and social media, abusers challenged the actions of mothers, their response to and narrative of abuse, and tried to elicit information about their former partner's movements and activities.

The use of technology by perpetrators was often not taken seriously as a form of abuse

Victim–survivors repeatedly told us that perpetrators' use of technology had a significant impact on their lives and wellbeing, and on their children. Yet they also found that the abuse was dismissed and minimised by those they went to for help—in particular, the police. Specialist police were most highly regarded; interactions with generalist police were mixed, but more negative than positive overall.

Women's wellbeing, safety and sense of security was undermined by the abuse, harassment and stalking to which they were subjected. Frequent exposure to abuse, harassment, harm and stalking via technology—post separation and after police had been engaged and intervention orders obtained—took a toll on women. Technology-facilitated domestic violence seemed inescapable. Fear was articulated by many participants and the 'spacelessness' of technology-facilitated domestic violence both exacerbated this and made women feel as though it was overwhelming and everywhere. The need to enhance detection, investigation, evidence collection and risk assessment of technology-facilitated domestic violence is clear.

Technology-facilitated abuse is spaceless, yet place matters

The unique impacts of spaceless violence need to be highlighted but so too do the ways that place and space can shape perpetration and experiences of technology-facilitated domestic violence. The omnipresence of technology-facilitated abuse created a sense for victim–survivors that they could never 'escape' the perpetrator. Many women reported that the technological aspect of the abuse transcended boundaries and invaded their private spaces in ways that other abuse did not. Women felt they could remove themselves physically from the perpetrator, but technology enabled him to keep tormenting them and ultimately show he still had control. Technology can be used to extend (and potentially overcome) geographic and social isolation. All survivors face barriers when seeking help and responding to violence, and these are exacerbated in regional, rural and remote places. In smaller communities, where abusers may be well known and well liked, women often feel they will not be believed or aided when disclosing violence. This is especially true where women encounter the involvement of proxy perpetrators and peer support networks that foster and facilitate harm.

Survivors use technology to respond to violence and seek information and support

Survivors used technology to seek information and assistance, collect evidence, connect with advocates, and maintain or establish informal networks of support. Given the important role technology has in this process, as well as enabling civic engagement and the pursuit of employment and education opportunities, it is imperative that women's right to use technology is protected.

Women invest time and energy in 'safety work'

To protect themselves and their children, women continually invest time, effort and finances to reduce or prevent incidents of violence and to safely use technology. Friends, family members and criminal justice agents may encourage women to change their use of technology, or women may decide to disengage from technology in an attempt to avoid harm and protect themselves.

Introduction

This project explores the impact of technology on victim–survivors of intimate partner violence who are socially or geographically isolated. It builds on two previous studies undertaken by members of the research team.

The SmartSafe project conducted by Dr Delanie Woodlock (then based at the Domestic Violence Research Centre) was one of the first studies internationally to survey victim–survivors and service providers about technology-facilitated abuse. Consultations with and surveys of 152 domestic violence workers and 46 victim–survivors in Victoria, Australia, showed the use of technology by perpetrators to control and intimidate women was a significant concern. The research found that technology was used to socially isolate women from their support systems, friends and families. Perpetrators harassed women's networks, directly and indirectly. Additionally, perpetrators sought to embarrass and shame women online.

Research conducted by Dr Bridget Harris (with Amanda George, at Deakin University's Centre for Rural, Regional Law and Justice, as part of the Landscapes of Violence: Women Surviving Family Violence in Regional and Rural Victoria project) explored women's experiences of and response to violence. It found that perpetrators used technology to increase a victim's social and geographic isolation (see George & Harris 2014; Harris 2016). This had dangerous implications for women in regional, rural and remote (RRR) areas, who face increased risks to their safety as they are more 'visible' to their abuser and often under greater surveillance, have fewer transport options, and may feel threatened by a perpetrator on a rural property owning a gun. This research has also found that technology could be used by women to seek support and assistance, offering a possible means of overcoming barriers associated with geographic and social isolation.

The cental research question guiding this project was: how is technology used by perpetrators, survivors and advocates in the context of domestic violence in RRR New South Wales, Victoria and Queensland?

Terminology

Abusers/perpetrators

We use both 'abusers' and 'perpetrators' to refer to persons who have enacted violence against female participants (as is common both in the literature and in the domestic violence sector). While we understand that both men and women can engage in domestic violence, we emphasise that existing research and evidence indicate that the vast majority of cases in Australia involve female (and child) victim–survivors and male perpetrators. Our study focused on women's experiences of technology-facilitated domestic violence and, in line with existing data, all participants identified their abusers as male. As we discuss further in the report, proxy perpetrators of both genders were observed.

Coercive control

Coercive control, a concept not invented but developed by Stark in his landmark 2007 text, refers to the 'spatially diffuse' (2007: 208) techniques, strategies and mediums used by abusers—for example, isolation, intimidation, threats, shaming, gaslighting, surveillance, stalking and degradation. As a concept, coercive control is not without limitations (Douglas, Harris & Dragiewicz 2019b). However, it is useful in capturing the dynamics of and behaviours enacted in abusive relationships, including tactics not commonly regarded as 'serious' forms of violence, as well as patterns of behaviour and the frequency of harm (Dragiewicz et al. 2018; Harris & Woodlock 2019). This is a gendered theory, underscored by an assumption that there is intersectional structural inequality and men engage in coercive control violence to maintain and reinforce their power and status (Stark 2007).

Culturally and linguistically diverse

This term can potentially capture plurality but can be criticised as homogenising extensive diversity among culturally and linguistically diverse persons. In this report, 'culturally and linguistically diverse' is used to refer to ethnic groups other than Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and white people.

Domestic violence

A range of terms are used to identify and refer to domestic violence, and there are benefits and limitations to each (Dragiewicz et al. 2018; George & Harris 2014). In some contexts, 'family violence' can be used as an alternative to 'domestic violence'. While both provide scope to refer to violence in family structures, the focus of our study is on violence by a current or former intimate partner. We elected to use 'domestic violence' due to the widespread use and recognition of the word in the broader community. We understand domestic violence to represent patterns of violent, coercive, controlling behaviours. Manipulation and harms are often accompanied by actual violence or the threat of violence. Numerous forms of abuse may be enacted by a perpetrator: physical, sexual, psychological, emotional or financial abuse, technology-facilitated abuse, and stalking (Dragiewicz et al. 2019). Some scholars and advocates (see DeKeseredy, Dragiewicz & Schwartz 2017) caution against using 'domestic violence' when referring to that enacted against women, because it is gender neutral. However, we adopt a feminist framework in this research, considering violence to be gendered, with women primarily identified as survivors and men as perpetrators (see, for example, victimisation and homicide statistics in Australian Bureau of Statistics 2017; Bryant & Bricknell 2017).

Information communication technology

Information communication technology (ICT) includes computers, the internet, mobile phones and other communication and information dissemination devices, including global positioning systems (GPS), and digital audio and video recording devices. Social media platforms such as Facebook, 'micro-blogs' like Twitter, Tumblr and Instagram, and video and podcast sharing services such as Vimeo, Snapchat, Vine and YouTube can also be classified as ICTs.

Proxy perpetrators

Here we refer to persons who have been either overtly or covertly engaged to enact domestic violence. In the case of the former, perpetrators may ask others to, for instance, send abusive text messages to or use technology to track or stalk the survivor. In the latter case, others may not be directly asked but may elect to engage in harm, such as by joining the abuser in humiliating or harassing the victim–survivor on social media. We also include, in this category, persons who unwillingly facilitate perpetration of domestic violence, such as when a child is given a toy that appears benign but serves the dual purpose of monitoring a survivor.

Survivors

We use the word survivor (as well as woman/women and participant) in this report. Throughout the field, 'victim' and 'victim–survivor' can serve as alternative words, according to the preference of the individual who has experienced violence. Pseudonyms are used throughout this report. Some information has been changed to protect survivors' identities.

Literature review

Domestic violence across Australian landscapes

It is difficult to measure domestic violence not only within but across nations (Ferrante et al. 1996; Harris 2016). Hogg and Carrington (2006: 148) warn that place and privacy limit data availability as in much of RRR Australia 'privacy is compounded by geographic isolation from police and health services and other informal and formal networks' (see also Alston 1997; Wendt 2009). Survivors in RRR locations can also experience social isolation, which can restrict help-seeking and result in the under-reporting and under-recording of incidents (Mackenzie & Mackay 2019; National Rural Crime Network 2019; Neilson & Renou 2016). As Carrington et al. (2013: 11) note, while domestic violence is hidden in urban locations, 'the architecture of rural life heightens the invisibility of interpersonal violence in rural contexts'. Thus, the reported rates of violence in non-urban locations could be even higher than available data suggest (Harris 2016). However, Wendt (2009) and Carrington and Scott (2008) warn there are challenges in comparing rates of family violence in different geographic contexts and certainly there is limited available data. Moreover, measurements are difficult to collate as regionality, rurality and remoteness are not uniformly identified, and these sites are of course not homogeneous; we cannot state that violence is higher in *all* non-urban locations (Carrington 2007; DeKeseredy & Schwartz 2009; O'Connor & Gray 1989; Owen & Carrington 2015).

Nonetheless, internationally, a growing body of American literature (Logan et al. 2003; Rennison, DeKeseredy & Dragiewicz 2013) has affirmed what is seen in Australian research (Dillon 2015; Dillon, Hussain & Loxton 2015; Dillon et al. 2016; Grech & Burgess 2011; Harris 2016; Jordan & Phillips 2013; WESNET 2000; Women's Health Grampians 2012): rates of domestic violence are higher in *some* RRR locations. The Crime Research Centre in 1998, like Ferrante et al. (1996), found that women living in areas of Western Australia identified as rural and remote reported higher levels of domestic violence than those in urban areas. Reviewing incidents reported to New South Wales Police between 2001 and 2010, Grech and Burgess (2011) found that the five areas with the highest rates of domestic assault were remote and 19 of 20 were regional or rural. Drawing on a range of data (police and court statistics, child protection substantiations, community safety perception studies, Supported Accommodation and Assistance Program records and emergency data from public hospitals), Women's Health Grampians (2021) found that rates of family violence were higher in the rural Grampians region of Western Victoria than in metropolitan Melbourne.

Several studies have provided insight into in the varying levels of violence across Australia. In 2000, using data from the Supported Accommodation and Assistance Program, the Women's Services Network (WESNET) concluded that, where comparable figures were available, reported rates of domestic violence were higher in rural than metropolitan locations—and even higher in remote areas. Dillon's landmark study, her 2015 thesis, also compared rates of violence across Australia using quantitative data from the Australian Longitudinal Study on Women's Health. With associates, she then used an extensive sample of young women across Australia and found that 'Lifetime IPV prevalence was lower for women living in major cities compared to either inner regional or other rural areas' (Dillon, Hussain & Loxton 2015: 19, 24). In fact, recent reported experiences of IPV were found to be lowest in major cities and highest in remote/very remote locations. Rates of IPV in the 12 months preceding the survey were highest in inner and then outer regional areas. The lowest proportion of women who had not experienced IPV occurred among women in remote and very remote areas (Dillon et al. 2016). Importantly, we emphasise that a raft of social, economic and political values and factors result in victim–survivors in RRR locations encountering more barriers than those in urban locations when seeking assistance and responding to violence. This likely affects reporting and recording, so levels of violence could well be higher in non-metropolitan zones than the rates captured in studies.

There is limited data available on the rates of violence experienced by refugee and culturally and linguistically diverse women, particularly in RRR locations (see inTouch 2010), although it is evident that victim–survivors who identify as culturally and linguistically diverse encounter additional barriers but have limited access to appropriate services when responding to family violence. Indigenous women experience family violence at much higher rates than non-Indigenous women (Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention & Legal Service 2010; Jordan & Phillips 2013) and are less likely than non-Indigenous women to disclose their experiences of violence (Taylor & Putt 2007).

Barriers facing RRR victim–survivors

Beyond the cityscape, women who are geographically isolated can be located great distances from channels of assistance (police, medical services and informal and formal supports), which exacerbates risk (George & Harris 2014; Hornosty & Doherty 2002; National Committee on Violence Against Women 1992; Wendt 2009). Public transport networks—where they exist—are limited and fragmented, and private transport is expensive (Coorey 1988; Hogg & Carrington 2006). Moreover, it is not unusual for abusers to control access to vehicles, telephones or other technology, in efforts to restrict women's movements (Bosch & Bergen 2006; Carrington et al. 2013; George & Harris 2014; National Rural Crime Network 2019; Pitt, Maidment & Crichton-Hill 2019; Wendt & Hornosty 2010).

Social isolation is another impediment and can arise because of constructs of gender in some non-urban places (Alston 1997; Bagshaw et al. 2000; Dempsey 1992; Hogg & Carrington 2006; Loxton, Hussain & Schofield 2003; Neilson & Renou 2015). Victim–survivors in George and Harris' (2014) study described their communities as 'conservative', a concept they linked to constructs of tradition, masculinity and unequal power relations that could support the subjugation of women and violence against women (for comparable American research and findings, see DeKeseredy & Schwartz 2009; Navin, Stockum & Campbell-Ruggard 1993; Pruitt 2009; Van Hightower & Gorton 2002; Websdale 1998). Such attitudes and ideologies are by no means unique but can assume unique features and meanings in non-metropolitan landscapes, because of labour and leisure histories in these communities (Carrington et al. 2013; Carrington & Scott 2008; Hogg & Carrington 2006).

Additional challenges that RRR women can encounter include: values of self-reliance as espoused in these communities (Hogg & Carrington 2006); large-scale trauma associated with natural disasters (such as fires, floods and droughts; see Zara, Weiss & Parkinson 2013); a lack of privacy in smaller communities (Bosch & Bergen 2006; Coorey 1988; Harris, Jordan & Phillips 2014; Loxton, Hussain & Schofield 2003; Neilson & Renou 2015; Ragusa 2013); limited finances, resources and accommodation (Allimant & Ostapiej-Piatkowski 2011; George & Harris 2014; Pitt, Maidment & Crichton-Hill 2019; Trainor 2015); and the greater prevalence of firearms and homemade weapons than in metropolitan communities (George & Harris 2014; Maume et al. 2014; Shuman et al. 2008; WESNET 2000).

The problems associated with finding suitable housing could conceivably be far greater for rural victims of IPV than for women in metropolitan areas of Australia, due to reduced resources, greater distances, less public transport, and less anonymity in smaller communities. All these factors make it harder for women to separate themselves physically and emotionally from an abusive partner (Hornosty & Doherty 2002; Martz & Saraurer 2000; Wendt 2009). The combined negative effects of raised levels of domestic violence and the lack of suitable accommodation for women experiencing domestic violence are highlighted by elevated levels of domestic violence related homelessness in remote areas compared with metropolitan areas of Australia (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) 2012). This is evidenced by figures from the Specialist Homelessness Services branch of the AIHW, which signal that domestic violence was the main reason for seeking assistance from homelessness services for 24 percent of clients in major cities, a figure that rises to 38 percent in remote areas and 54 percent in very remote areas of Australia (AIHW 2012). The connection between domestic violence and the use of homelessness services in Australia highlights the current lack of suitable housing options available to women escaping from IPV, especially in regional and remote areas.

Spaceless and invasive: Technology-facilitated domestic violence

Most studies that have considered the spacelessness of technology-facilitated violence have not considered how socio-spatial factors can impact on experiences of and responses to this violence. This is a significant oversight in regard to both rates of violence and barriers encountered by women in RRR locations. Examining regional and rural women's experiences of technology-facilitated abuse and stalking, George and Harris (2014) found particular implications for women residing in non-metropolitan areas, in the form of increased danger. The role that technology plays in the lives of women in different locations affects the potential impacts that technology-facilitated abuse and stalking can have on their lives and the potential for advocacy offered by technology (Harris 2016). Indeed, studies conducted in Queensland have indicated that farming women use technology in business and personal capacities to greater extents than men (Hay & Pearce 2014). In this vein, research has demonstrated that women and young people in Indigenous communities in rural and remote Australia are high adaptors of technology, when it is available (Zander, Carson & Taylor 2012). Indigenous women, who experience violence at higher levels and suffer more serious violence than non-Indigenous women, are especially made vulnerable by their social and geographic isolation (Willis 2011).

There has been scant research exploring technology-facilitated abuse and stalking in the context of domestic violence. Key work has been produced by advocates and academics in the United States (such as by Dimond, Fiesler & Bruckman 2011; Fraser et al. 2010; Mason & Magnet 2012; Southworth et al. 2005, 2007) and in Australia (such as by George & Harris 2014; Harris & Woodlock 2019; Woodlock 2013, 2017). This knowledge deficiency is concerning; research indicates that such violence is rapidly increasing as the use of technology becomes more widespread (George & Harris 2014; Woodlock 2013). Sector knowledge is also limited: a survey of domestic violence professionals conducted by Women's Legal Service NSW, WESNET and the Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria indicated that 'Almost all survey respondents (98 per cent) stated they had clients who had experienced technology-facilitated stalking and abuse' (Woodlock 2017: 37). However, most noted that they needed more training and assistance in identifying technology-facilitated abuse and stalking (Woodlock 2017).

The impact of technology-facilitated violence on women's wellbeing and safety is extensive (Dimond, Fiesler, & Bruckman 2011; Woodlock 2013). Victim–survivors in George and Harris' 2014 study, for instance, described psychological effects (including anxiety) and symptoms of trauma in the aftermath of technology-facilitated violence. A further consequence is the extension of geographic and social isolation, which can contribute to depression and suicidal behaviour in victim–survivors (Lanier & Maume 2009; World Health Organization 2013). Research undertaken by Woodlock, in association with Women's Legal Service NSW and Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria, emphasised the extensive legacies of technology-facilitated violence such as victim–survivors 'Forever looking over their shoulder', always being 'on high alert' and unable to escape their abuser, with 'life-changing' impacts on women's self-esteem and interaction with social networks (Woodlock 2013: 40). In their guide for the Victorian Department of Health and Human Services, Dwyer and Miller (2014) noted that threats issued to women and children and 'Severe and persistent stalking', whether by traditional or technological channels, indicated a risk of lethal violence. In the context of filicide, they highlighted the dangers of 'not identifying the seriousness of stalking behaviours, including technology-based stalking' (Dwyer & Miller 2014: 86).

Abusive and obsessive contact and stalking via technology has been identified as an emerging trend across domestic and family violence partner homicide cases (Death and Family Violence Review and Advisory Board 2017). Mason and Magnet (2012: 107) maintain that 'women stalked by former boyfriends, husbands or cohabitating partners are very likely to be physically, emotionally, and/or sexually assaulted by the same person'. There is a clear connection between stalking, IPV and femicide. McFarlane et al. (1999: 302) found that 76 percent of femicide victims and 85 percent of attempted femicide victims were stalked within a year of their actual or attempted murder. The NSW Domestic Violence Death Review Team (2017: 134) found abusers stalked victims in 39 percent of cases prior to the fatal assault, noting that over 50 percent of cases:

> …included the abuser using technology to stalk the victim, such as persistent text messaging, checking the domestic violence victim's phone, and engaging with the victim on social media/dating sites under a false identity.

Technology-facilitated violence is inextricably intertwined with women's broader experiences of violence (such as physical, sexual, emotional, psychological or financial violence; George & Harris 2014; see also Dimond, Fiesler and Bruckman 2011). Woodlock's (2013) *SmartSafe* study found that women who experience technology-facilitated violence are also likely to experience other forms of violence in their relationship; 82 percent of participants experienced emotional abuse, 58 percent experienced sexual abuse, 39 percent experienced physical violence and 37 percent experienced financial abuse. All of these forms of violence—and technology-facilitated violence—are underscored by notions of control, coercion and intimidation (George & Harris 2014; Southworth et al. 2005; Woodlock 2013).

While it is vital to recognise that technology-facilitated violence frequently occurs in conjunction with other forms of violence, it must be acknowledged that its spacelessness is a unique feature. Transcending physical borders, technology-facilitated violence has transformed the way that victim–survivors both experience and respond to IPV (George & Harris 2014; Harris 2016; Mason & Magnet 2012; Woodlock 2013). Technology offers abusers 'almost constant access' to women anywhere they access their mobile phone, tablet or computer (Woodlock 2013: 16). This places survivors who experience technology-facilitated violence in greater danger and can deter women from exiting relationships or formally responding to violence (Dimond, Fiesler & Bruckman 2011; Fraser et al. 2010; George & Harris 2014). Indeed, as Hand, Chung and Peters (2009: 3) surmise, the 'concept of "feeling safe" from an abuser no longer has the same geographic and spatial boundaries as it once did'.

Women who experience technology-facilitated abuse receive very high numbers of messages (via voice calls, text messages or social media networks). As Woodlock (2013) documents, there is frequently a sexual dimension to this abuse. It is not uncommon for perpetrators to organise or commission family members or friends to engage in technology-facilitated abuse (George & Harris 2014; Woodlock 2013). This has included individuals impersonating police officers (in some cases federal police officers) in attempts to intimidate victim–survivors and dissuade them from formally responding to violence (George & Harris 2014).

In regard to technology-facilitated stalking, women have described abusers who monitored and restricted their use of technology by reviewing their email, call and messaging histories and social media activities. Additionally, some perpetrators not only logged into survivors' accounts and profiles but changed account information and passwords and threatened to release personal communication and images. There are clear links between technology-facilitated and traditional stalking: for example, perpetrators visited or illegally entered survivors' homes and workplaces and sent electronic messages indicating that women had been 'under surveillance' (George & Harris 2014). Location-based technology has also been used to trace women's movements and in efforts to harm them and their associates (George & Harris 2014; Woodlock 2015).

Survivors have reported experiencing technology-facilitated violence during abusive relationships and post separation, and that indeed this abuse is likely to increase post separation (Harris 2016; see also Fraser et al. 2010). Such findings align with other studies which indicate that 'the most dangerous point in an abusive relationship is when she [a victim–survivor] tries to extricate herself from it' (Dimond, Fiesler & Bruckman 2011: 413). In Australia, survivors and support workers have expressed dissatisfaction with criminal justice responses to technology-facilitated violence. In addition to claims that police and magistrates have a tendency to be dismissive of technology-facilitated violence, there is confusion as to what evidence is recognised by police and admissible in court and what constitutes a breach of intervention orders.

Thus far, literature on using technology to advocate for and provide assistance to domestic violence victim–survivors in Australia is limited (Harris, Dragiewicz & Woodlock 2020). As van Moorsel et al. (2011: i) outline, technology provides alternative channels of advocacy, and such channels can be safer than accessing traditional advocacy because victims can gain 'access to domestic violence support that services at a time that is convenient' and that 'arouses less suspicion from their [abusive] partner'. The potential and pitfalls of technology in the context of family violence require greater attention, particularly in RRR contexts. There are numerous challenges with using ICT in advocacy work, including resources, catchment zones and the 'digital divide'—a term referring to the difference between RRR citizens and metropolitan residents in internet access and affordability (Harris, Dragiewicz & Woodlock 2020).

Methodology

Research approach

We approached all aspects of this research project from a feminist perspective on domestic violence. This perspective has historically been excluded from mainstream understandings of domestic violence (Hunter 2006), but in recent years, particularly in Australia, it has become central to understanding domestic violence and how to prevent this violence from occurring (State of Victoria 2016). While we acknowledge there are many different feminist theories, feminist domestic violence activists and researchers have mainly drawn from a radical feminist understanding of domestic violence (Theobald, Murray & Smart 2017).

Feminist domestic violence theory has been built through decades of research (Dobash & Dobash 1980; Pizzey 1979), the input of survivors' voices and experiences (Laing, Humphreys & Cavanagh 2013) and expert contributions from domestic violence practitioners (Woodlock 2017). This framework positions domestic violence as follows:

- Domestic violence is a gendered and sexed phenomenon. There is substantial evidence that domestic violence is mostly perpetrated by men against women and children (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2018, 2017). Women are more physically harmed by domestic violence and seek medical treatment in greater numbers than do men (AIHW 2019, 2018). Women are also more likely than men to be killed by an intimate partner (Australian Domestic and Family Violence Death Review Network 2018; Death and Family Violence Review and Advisory Board 2017; NSW Domestic Violence Death Review Team 2017). Women more frequently experience sexual assault from an intimate partner than men, with one in 11 women in Australia reporting sexual assault from their male intimate partner (Cox 2015).
- Domestic violence is not just physical violence but also about the exercise of power and control. These elements are usually enacted through a pattern of controlling and coercive behaviours such as emotional abuse, isolation, economic abuse, threats and intimidation (Stark 2007). This power and control can also manifest in controlling women's reproductive autonomy (Park et al. 2016) and attacking the mother–child relationship (Thiara & Humphreys 2017).

- Domestic violence is supported and sustained by cultural and societal discrimination against women. The underlying drivers of domestic violence are rooted in the unequal distribution of resources, opportunities and power between women and men (Our Watch et al. 2015). Communities with attitudes reflecting greater levels of gender and sex equality generally have lower rates of domestic, family and sexual violence (UNIFEM 2010), and sex inequality correlates with the prevalence of domestic violence across 44 countries (Heise & Kotsadam 2015).

This feminist framework impacted how we developed our research, methodology and analytical approach.

Feminist ethics and methods

Rationale for selecting and adopting feminist research methods

Feminist research methods are used to provide insight into women's experiences as they understand them, and perceptions of their experience in relation to 'feminist conceptions of gendered relationships, and a critical understanding of the research process' (Ramazanoglu 1989: 435). We were concerned not only with the methods that we used and how appropriate they were for researching domestic violence but also with how the research was conducted and the ethics of our research practice (Burman, Batchelor & Brown 2001).

The outcome of our research practice is also important to feminist researchers, as is the principle that our research is for, not about, the participants. As previous research with domestic violence survivors has indicated, many women get involved in research because they want to help other women and children, increase understanding and awareness of domestic violence, and create change (Buchanan & Wendt 2017). It is thus ethical feminist practice to ensure that our research 'will get to places and audiences where it might help further the social good' (Sprague 2005: 224). We designed our research project with an aim that the outcomes would be shared with community organisations that work directly with victim–survivors. We planned to present findings and conduct training for support practitioners so that our work would have a direct impact on their understandings of the use of technology in domestic violence, and in turn on their work with victim–survivors.

We used semi-structured interviews as our main research method. Interviews have been central to feminist research methods because they allow an in-depth exploration of women's experiences that have historically been marginalised. Feminist interviewing usually works with small sample sizes, and the purpose is to gain in-depth insights, not necessarily to make generalisations about particular topics (Hesse-Biber 2007). In this research project our aim was to understand the meaning that women made of the use of technology in domestic violence, and whether where they lived shaped these experiences. Therefore, we cannot draw from these findings overall generalisations about how many women are experiencing the use of technology in domestic violence in RRR locations, but we can further our understanding of how perpetrators are using technology in domestic violence and how women experience this form of abuse.

Recruitment and communication process

Participants for the research were located and selected based on their connection to domestic violence support services. This ensured that women were existing or former clients of support services and were able to discuss the project, risks and procedures with the service prior to the interview taking place. This method has previously been used by one of the researchers (see George & Harris 2014) and meant that the participants had time to consider the project, their consent and participation before the interviews began. There are limitations to this approach, as many women experiencing domestic violence do not use formal support services. Thus, the research only includes women who recognised that they were experiencing domestic violence and reached out for support, or who were prompted to seek support by a family member, friend or another person.

This recruitment process also meant that we relied on support services to assist. As we particularly wanted to speak with women from RRR locations, there were only a small number of services we could contact, and these services were already under considerable pressure as they were the only services in those locations. For these reasons, we found it extremely difficult to recruit participants and felt uncomfortable about reminding services about our project as we were sympathetic to the strain that they were already under.

Safe communication protocols were developed with participants and support workers to minimise any potential risks of participating in this research. These protocols included the safest methods of contacting participants and what to say when leaving messages for them. This was of particular importance to women who had experienced technology-facilitated abuse, and we first ensured that the women felt safe using their phones and that any email addresses provided were safe to send information about the research to.

However, it is important to highlight that using technology in the research process, such as when sending transcripts to the women after the interviews, was an ethical dilemma for the researchers. These risks and safety concerns need to be further explored. While we felt that the participants were best placed to determine, for example, whether their email address was safe to use, we as researchers in the area of the technology-facilitated domestic violence are aware of the numerous safety risks and possible ways that perpetrators can

gain access to women's accounts. There were several times during the research that we did not feel comfortable sending information to a participant's email address, mainly due to the perpetrator's ongoing use of technology to monitor the participant. This was in spite of the woman's perception that it would be safe to send to her email. As feminist researchers, we felt conflicted about the right way to approach this. We firmly believe that work with survivors of domestic violence around risk and safety should be led by survivors, but also understand that risk assessment is multifaceted, and that women can sometimes underestimate the risk of harm (Campbell, Webster & Glass 2009).

Interview process

Women were interviewed either over the phone or at a support service office. These offices are appropriate and familiar places for participants, and a setting where women felt safe and comfortable. Participants were provided with plain language written information about the project which outlined the research aims and benefits, what participation would involve, how participants could withdraw from the research or make a complaint about the research, and how participant information would be securely stored.

Interviews that took place at support service locations were organised by the services. Both researchers were present in and recorded the interviews, one taking the lead and the other offering support. For interviews conducted via the phone, contact was made via a support service who, with each participant's permission, passed her details on to the researcher. We then organised a time to call and recorded the interview. All participants received a $50 gift card to acknowledge their contribution and time. We also gave a donation to the services that assisted us, in recognition of their time and the effort that went into finding participants for our research.

The interview process followed several steps in order to give each participant the opportunity to learn more about the project and her rights as a participant, and to control how she wanted the interview to proceed. Some of these steps included:

- explaining the nature of the interview and semi-structured interview questions; participants were reassured there were no right answers and that we were interested in their experience;
- acknowledging the sensitivity of the subject and that it may raise painful feelings, and reassuring the participant that the interviewer would be sensitive to this;
- working with the participant to develop a step-by-step strategy for how to proceed in a variety of scenarios. For example, the interviewer may ask the participant 'If you begin to cry, how do you want me to respond?' and 'If you don't want to answer a question, how will you let me know?'; and
- reminding participants of phone numbers for debriefing and available assistance and resources used in responding to abuse (for instance, through WESNET and the eSafety Commissioner).

Focus group process

- The aforementioned steps were followed for a focus group which was conducted in person at one of the research sites. Women had previously participated in individual interviews and were recruited through a support service. Two additional steps included:
- working collaboratively to discuss the process and guidelines for the focus group; and
- emphasising the confidentiality of group discussions.
- The group decided that respect was key and that all speakers should feel heard and validated when they shared their accounts. Participants were part of different support groups and had a strong appreciation for and awareness of the need for privacy and not sharing information revealed in the focus group with anyone else. As Tutty et al. (2006) and Fearday and Cope (2004) have emphasised, more so than other research participants, survivors of violence understand the intimacy and trust involved with disclosing experiences of violence.

Analysis and interpretation of findings

We used thematic analysis to categorise the findings and NVivo to assist with coding the interviews (King & Horrocks 2010; Saldaña 2012). Applying the system of thematic analysis outlined by King and Horrocks (2010), we first coded the interviews descriptively, using codes such as 'GPS used to track' and 'Contact with police'. Next, we applied interpretive coding to the findings, where meaning was interpreted according to the research question and analysed within a feminist understanding of domestic violence. Interpretive codes included 'Technology used to control' and 'Victim-blaming by police'.

We employed double coding to increase the trustworthiness of the analysis, with both researchers reading and coding the transcripts separately. We then compared and contrasted our codes and themes and worked together to develop a thematic structure of descriptive and interpretive codes. The final stage of thematic analysis is to define overarching themes (King & Horrocks 2010), which both researchers worked on together. These overarching themes include 'The use of technology by perpetrators is often not taken seriously as a form of abuse' and 'Technology is used alongside other forms of abuse'.

It is important to make visible the interpretive process, as our pre-existing feminist understanding of domestic violence influenced how we understood the women's accounts and how we made sense of individual women's stories and wider themes across the interviews. However, there is an argument that by doing this we are merely confirming what we already knew about domestic violence. As King and Horrocks (2010) caution, this can result in an analysis that is biased, only coding aspects of the data that fit within a particular theoretical perspective. Consequently, it was important for us to be open to unexpected and new themes that might contrast with our theoretical perspective.

Profiles of participants

There were 13 survivors of domestic violence engaged for this study. Throughout this report (and in associated publications), pseudonyms have been used. Below, we provide profiles of each woman: their age, type of location, parental status and an overview of the abuse to which they were subjected. We note that some details have been slightly changed, so as to protect their identity.

Shelly is 33 years old and lives in regional Victoria. She has two young children. Shelly was subjected to domestic violence from her ex-partner. She was not living with him at the time but had bought a house with him. The technological abuse her ex-partner subjected her to included text messages, phone calls, GPS tracking, use of social media and image-based sexual abuse (IBSA). Her ex-partner also subjected her to sexual, physical, financial and psychological abuse.

Priya is 30 years old and has two children. She lives in remote New South Wales. Priya is Indian and came to Australia several years ago on a partner visa after her ex-partner had been in Australia for two years. Priya had been subjected to domestic violence in her childhood. The technological abuse her ex-partner subjected her to included text messages, phone calls, GPS tracking and the use of social media. She was also subjected to physical, psychological and financial abuse.

Cody is 44 years old and has one child. She lives in regional Victoria. She was subjected to childhood sexual abuse and has been subjected to domestic violence by several ex-partners. The technological abuse that Cody discussed in the interviews related to the father of her child. He subjected her to abusive phone calls, text messages, emails and use of social media. She also felt she was being tracked via GPS. She was also subjected to physical abuse (including non-fatal strangulation), and sexual, financial and psychological abuse. The perpetrator also was violent towards her dog.

Lola is 25 years old and has one young child. She lives in remote Victoria. She has been subjected to violence in previous relationships, but in the interview focused on the abuse from her child's father. Lola was subjected to abuse via text, phone calls and social media. She was also the victim of IBSA. Her ex-partner also subjected her to physical abuse (including non-fatal strangulation), as well as sexual, financial and psychological abuse.

Natalie is 42 years old and from New Zealand. She lives in regional New South Wales. At the time of the interview she was still living with her partner, but there was an intervention order that stipulated he was not to be physically and/or verbally abusive towards her. The technological abuse she was subjected to included the use of text messages, phone calls, emails, GPS tracking and use of social media. She was also subjected to physical abuse (including non-fatal strangulation), and sexual, financial and psychological abuse.

Maya is 31 years old and from New Zealand. She lives in remote New South Wales and has two young children. Maya was subjected to technological abuse from her ex-partner that included text messages, phone calls, GPS tracking, email and social media. Her ex-partner also subjected her to physical abuse (including non-fatal strangulation), and psychological and financial abuse. Her ex-partner was also violent to their animals.

Claire is 42 years old and lives in rural Victoria. She has two children and was subjected to domestic violence by their father. Claire was subjected to technological abuse including the use of text messages, phone calls, GPS tracking, emails and social media. The perpetrator also subjected her to physical abuse (including non-fatal strangulation), as well as sexual, financial and psychological abuse. He was also abusive to their children.

Kira is 26 years old and lives in regional New South Wales. She has one child. She was subjected to childhood sexual abuse and had also been subjected to violence in a previous relationship. The technological abuse that she experienced was from an ex-partner who used text messages, phone calls, GPS tracking, emails and social media. She was also subjected to IBSA. Her ex-partner was also psychologically and sexually abusive towards her.

Ivy is 30 years old and lives in regional Queensland. She is an Aboriginal woman and has four children. Ivy was subjected to childhood sexual abuse and domestic violence in previous relationships. The technological abuse she focused on in the interview was from her recent ex-partner, who used text and email to abuse her. Her ex-partner was also financially, physically and psychologically abusive.

Louise is 25 years old and has one child. She lives in rural New South Wales. Her ex-partner subjected her to technological abuse including text messages, phone calls, use of social media and IBSA. He was also physically, sexually, financially and psychologically abusive. His mother also attempted to monitor and control her access to finances.

Monica is 31 years old and has three children. She lives in regional Queensland. Her ex-partner used text messages, phone calls, social media and IBSA as part of his abuse tactics. He also abused her physically (including non-fatal strangulation), financially, psychologically and sexually.

Jane is 34 years old and lives in remote New South Wales. She has five children and is an Aboriginal woman. She was subjected to technological abuse from her ex-partner, including via text messages and phone calls. He was also physically, sexually and psychologically abusive.

Fiona is 50 years old and has three children. She is Bolivian and lives in regional Queensland. Fiona was subjected to domestic violence from the father of her children. The technological abuse she was subjected to included the use of text messages, phone calls and IBSA. Her ex-partner was also physically, sexually, financially and psychological abusive.

Nationality and cultural associations

The nationalities and cultural associations of participants are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1: Nationality and cultural associations of participants

Nationality and cultural associations	Number of survivors
Aboriginal	2
Australian (non-Indigenous)	7
Bolivian	1
Indian	2
New Zealander	1

Average age of participants

The average age of participants was 33. This is an older cohort than is present in much of the literature, which largely focuses on electronic dating violence and aggression among high school and university cohorts. Consequently, commentators have assumed that such violence is unique to or more common among youth. This hinders both understanding of technology-facilitated domestic violence and responses to the phenomenon (George & Harris 2014; Harris 2018). A small body of work has indicated older age groups are also involved, as victims and perpetrators. Cavezza and McEwan's (2014) research on ex-partner cyberstalking found that, on average, offenders were 37 years of age. Similarly, the average age of survivors in the SmartSafe study was 35, suggesting that 'despite the widespread perception that technology-facilitated abuse is occurring amongst young people…it is happening to older women too' (Woodlock 2013: 21).

Channels used to enact technology-facilitated abuse

All participants in this study experienced technology-facilitated abuse and stalking. Table 2 outlines the channels through which harm was enacted.

Table 2: Channels used to enact technology-facilitated abuse (*n*)

Channels used	Number of survivors
Image and video (image-based sexual abuse)	9
Email	9
GPS	8
Social media	11
Calls	13
Text	13

Defining technology-facilitated violence

Cybersecurity guidelines and protocols are largely premised on the notion that the threat is posed by outsiders, and insider threats to safety, security and wellbeing have been largely overlooked by scholars and industry (Dragiewicz et al. 2019). As Goode (2017) noted in his review of identity theft in Australia, technology-enabled crime against intimate partners and family members comprises a substantial proportion of offences where the offender is known to the target. In these settings, the sharing of knowledge, account ownership and access is common. Unique relational dynamics, then, are important to consider when exploring the phenomenon of technology-facilitated abuse. Additionally, we emphasise that dynamics of violence in abusive relationships must be at the foreground. Throughout the literature and government and non-government sectors, the term technology-facilitated domestic violence has not been uniformly defined. Consequently, insight into this phenomenon is limited.

It is useful to identify the types of behaviours to which survivors and their network of family and friends can be subjected. Naming behaviours can potentially assist women to recognise violence, seek assistance, and help support police and others to respond to these acts. To that end, we note that, within the context of an abusive relationship, technology-facilitated domestic violence can include but is by no means limited to the use of ICT or other technologies to:

- send defamatory, abusive or threatening communications to a survivor;
- make and/or share clandestine or conspicuous audio and visual recordings of a survivor;
- dox a survivor (to release private or identifying information about them);
- gain unauthorised access to a survivor's device to enable an unauthorised function or impair an authorised function;
- enable impersonation and/or identity theft (of a survivor, a person in the survivor's social network or a person of authority such as a police officer); and
- stalk a survivor (track their activities, movements or communications).

The aforementioned behaviours may be accomplished through access to a survivor's physical property or accounts and can be achieved using force, coercion, stealth or deception (Dragiewicz et al. 2019, 2018; George & Harris 2014; Harris 2020a, 2018; Harris & Woodlock 2019).

Digital coercive control

Typologies can be useful but are limited. The ways that abusers seek to exert control and to intimidate have meanings and manifestations specific to the survivor. Behaviours that cause fear for a survivor may be innocuous if they occurred outside of an abusive relationship. Encouraging children to turn on video functions during an audio call, for instance, might seem normal or acceptable; however, if this occurs when a woman has relocated to an unknown address such as a refuge for her protection, it can be dangerous (Dragiewicz et al. 2019). Additionally, perpetrators may perform acts which a particular woman views as disconcerting or threatening because of her experiences, perceptions or history. Sexual slurs in abusive messages or references to particular people or events, for instance, can distress a survivor who has experienced sexual assault or trauma in her past. Likewise, communicating at certain times of day or on particular dates may have a meaning and suggestion of threat, based on past experiences (see also Woodlock 2013).

If the context of technology-facilitated domestic violence is overlooked, so is the impact on a survivor and the potential risk she faces. Thus, we stress the relational and individual features of technology-facilitated domestic violence mean that it cannot be easily or absolutely catalogued. We instead propose that *digital coercive control* (or technology-facilitated coercive control; see Dragiewicz et al. 2018) be adopted as a framework to understand 'the use of devices and digital media to stalk, harass, threaten and abuse partners or ex-partners (and children)' (Harris & Woodlock 2019: 533). As Harris and Woodlock (2019: 533) explain:

> This phrase specifies the method (digital), intent (coercive behaviour) and impact (control of an ex/partner) and—because of the concept of 'coercive control' is central—situates harm within a wider setting of sex-based inequality.

This concept includes forms of harm not typically regarded as 'serious' and foregrounds the dynamics of violence and abusive relationships (Stark 2007).

We recommend that there be further exploration and evaluation of the concept of coercive control in regard to Indigenous women, culturally and linguistically diverse women, and LGBTIQ people. Nonetheless, 'coercive control' is effective in capturing the 'spatially diffuse' techniques and tactics of male violence against women such as isolation, intimidation, threats, shaming, gaslighting, surveillance, stalking and degradation (Stark 2007: 208; see also Stark 2012). Certainly, we regard digital abuse as spaceless, transcending geographies. Additionally, the focus in a coercive control model (as opposed to an incident model) is on the intent, impacts, patterns and cycles of abusive relationships. It is underscored by an assumption that there are intersectional and structural inequalities and that men engage in coercive control to maintain and reinforce their status and power (Hester 2010; Stark 2007). Lastly, digital violence is, we believe, not separate from other forms of harm but another element of domestic violence and inextricably bonded to the broader cultural values and practices that gender it (see also Douglas, Harris & Dragiewicz 2019b; George & Harris 2014; Woodlock 2017, 2013).

Navarro (2015) distinguishes between low-tech and high-tech methods used by perpetrators to engage in cyber-abuse and cyberstalking. She suggests they differ in the degree of technological knowledge and resources required. For instance, spyware is used to track online computer usage and to delete search history and emails, and screenloggers or keyloggers are used to capture screenshots or record keystrokes so as to obtain personal identification numbers, passwords, and email and internet site addresses entered (see also George & Harris 2014). Arguably, media and popular attention is on high-tech strategies such as the use of drones and spyware, and these are assumed to represent most women's experiences. While in our study women reported instances of both low-tech and high-tech abuse, we note that women's experiences of technology-facilitated violence may be largely or exclusively low-tech. Access to devices and intimate knowledge of a woman can enable perpetrators to open a device or guess account or password information. Additionally, as we have documented in this project and in other projects with colleagues (Dragiewicz et al. 2019), abusers gained access to devices or information through theft, force and deception.

We also stress that high-tech tactics can be difficult to discover. Indeed, some women in our study suspected that perpetrators had used a raft of techniques and technologies they had not detected. They also acknowledged that information such as their location could have been gleaned through high-tech channels (eg GPS tracking devices on cars) or perhaps through low-tech channels such as location-enabled features on their phones, like Apple's 'Find My Friends' app. In fact, not knowing whether high-tech strategies or other means had been used was a cause of both anxiety and concern for women. We do wonder if the divide between low-tech and high-tech abusers is perhaps less firm than some have imagined. Many forms of technology (including the internet and various platforms such as YouTube and TikTok) have fostered information-sharing networks which can give perpetrators new tools and tactics for enacting harm.

Types of technology-facilitated abuse

Abuse and harassment enacted through technology

Abusive messages, sent during relationships and post separation, were often gendered and sexual. Kira's ex sent messages 'that I deserved to be raped because I needed somebody to straighten me out'. Jane (2014), writing on technology and violence against women, suggests that sexual violence is often presented as 'corrective' responses to 'transgressions' women are said to have committed, such as rebuking or rebuffing men. Participants maintained that 'name-calling' was common, especially 'if he didn't get his own way'. In one of our focus groups, participants said they were frequently called a 'slut' in text messages. Here, we point to ways that technology-facilitated violence could be more readily identified but also have an individualised meaning. Some women may not find such a message offensive; it might make others uncomfortable. For one of the survivors we spoke to, her past history—being sexually assaulted as a child—and her perpetrator's knowledge and exploitation of this history meant such slurs had a particular impact. She recalled how, during their relationship, he had referenced and blamed her for the past victimisation, and she believed that he knew it would trigger her memory of assaults and trauma.

Women could receive high numbers of abusive messages even when any contact violated an existing intervention order. Louise told us her ex-partner would send a string of messages '10 in a row' before she had a chance to reply and that it was:

> …full on harassment with phone calls all the time. I'd get phone calls at four o'clock in the morning – phone call after phone call and if I'd tell him to stop, like there would be [no] chance he would.

Likewise, Kira described the prevalence as 'constant. I wouldn't be surprised if it was a hundred a day. It was very, very frequent'. Multiple media were engaged: 'It got to the point where it was a text message and email, so I got the same text message in an email.' One woman said, 'It was like…if she's not going to read it on the phone she will get it on email.' Intervention orders did not necessarily stop abusers. Moreover, as Shelly found:

> …if I blocked him he'd just put his phone on private and continue to call me, leaving abusive messages. Constant, horrible abusive messages.

The anonymity and identity shielding afforded by ICT aided perpetration.

Use of technology to shame and humiliate

Perpetrators used technology to shame and humiliate survivors in our research. Stark (2012) argues that such practices serve to silence and control women. While this tactic is commonly employed, it is often individualised. Perpetrators know women's intimate fears and personal history and will use this knowledge to torment a woman, to try to stop her from leaving, and to show that he has the power to humiliate her beyond the private sphere (Logan et al. 2006; Woodlock 2017). Technology now enables perpetrators to do this with more ease and immediacy and to a wider audience.

Perpetrators would often use technology to get phone numbers and other contact details of friends and family. Maya said that, when she first tried to leave, the perpetrator had rung her family and friends to obtain information about where she was. He then emailed some of her close friends and abused those who did not assist him in locating her. Claire's ex would similarly reach out to those she was close to when he could not get in touch with her:

> He would track me on my mobile phone. He had a tracking device on my mobile phone. He would go through my phone and take everybody's number so if he couldn't get hold of me he would start calling people to find out where I was even if I just went to the supermarket.

Natalie's perpetrator rang all her friends to tell them she was doing 'crazy stuff' and 'saying that I was an arsehole, negative things and that he doesn't know how to deal with me'. He also shared details of her sexual history with her mother and a group of her friends to embarrass her. He monitored her social media and, while they were together, forced her to announce and affirm their relationship: 'He was putting it out there that he owned me.'

Lola was tormented by her ex, who kept the video of their daughter's birth from her but showed his family. She felt this was one of his tactics to control and humiliate her:

> Even when we were together he was trying to show his family. I'm like, 'please don't. It's really gross!' I wanted to see it, but I didn't expect him to keep it and not show me… he still has it and I don't. It's weird. It's controlling.

While perpetrators have long used tactics of public humiliation to control and punish victim–survivors, the stories of the women in our research show that technology has changed both the ease and reach of this abuse. Perpetrators used technology to record sexual images of victim–survivors and threatened to release these images in order to control the victim. They also used sexual images as a way to humiliate and publicly shame women and punish them for ending the relationship.

Image-based sexual abuse

Women in our research were subjected to IBSA, with perpetrators often threatening to distribute or following through with distributing these images to family or friends and in online pornography communities. Survivors also reported that perpetrators would contact their friends and family, to find out about their whereabouts, to share embarrassing information with them, and also to turn others against them.

Six out of the 13 (46%) women in our research reported incidents of IBSA. The term IBSA (first coined by McGlynn & Rackley 2017) includes three main types of behaviour:

- non-consensual creation of nude and/or sexual images (this can include fabricated images altered such that a person's face is attached to another person's body);
- non-consensual distribution of nude and/or sexual images; and
- threats to distribute nude and/or sexual images (Henry, Flynn & Powell 2019).

There has been limited research into the use of IBSA in the context of domestic violence. Most research in Australia has been conducted via surveys, which have shown that females and males report similar rates of IBSA victimisation (Henry, Flynn & Powell 2019). However, interview research conducted with 25 victim–survivors of IBSA reported that most of the women were subjected to IBSA by a current or previous partner and framed the perpetration in the context of domestic violence. They felt the IBSA was part of a pattern of 'controlling' and 'belittling' tactics used by the perpetrator (McGlynn et al. 2019).

One of the six women in our study had been subjected to IBSA twice. As with other forms of sexual abuse, women did not initially discuss the IBSA they had been subjected to but often brought up the topic after talking about sexual abuse. It was also the discussions around these forms of abuse that many women found emotionally difficult during the interviews. Shelly explained that the perpetrator had 'inappropriate' photos but that he refused to delete them after they separated. He used these photos to manipulate her:

> …he brings up that he has these photos, and he's tried to use them as an emotional tool as well. Just saying 'I've got a whole memory stick full of photos of you, if you want to get smart I'll post them'. Just stuff like that, using them as a tool to try and control what I'm doing so I won't do certain things.

When asked if the images were created consensually, Shelly explained that at the time she felt they were a bit of fun, but after she discovered that he had been having affairs, lying and manipulating her, she felt the creation of the images was part of the pattern of abuse she was subjected to. Shelly said:

> It was a little bit degrading, and I did really get upset about it at the start. I wanted to go over there and delete it. And in the end, I've just come to terms with it. It is what it is, he's got what he's got. Just let it go.

Similarly, Lola knew that her partner had nude and sexual images of her, which he had threatened to distribute. But, like Shelly, she felt she had to take back control by not caring what he did with the files.

Three women were aware that the perpetrator had publicly shared images of them. For two of these women, the files were shared on a public online platform, including a kink discussion board and a pornography chatroom. Fiona said live footage of her and her ex-partner having sex had been distributed on a pornography website: 'humiliating and degrading and a behaviour I did not want to participate in but felt coerced in[to] being part of'. The perpetrator later used her participation as a way to humiliate her in family court and frame her as a 'desperate' woman.

Interfering with devices and accounts

Women spoke of their abusers impairing authorised functions of devices or accounts to cause inconvenience and distress. Claire's ex accessed her devices and email accounts and employed various techniques to hide and delete messages and files and to stop her uploading documents. She was studying and he 'used to tamper with my assignments and things like that and hide work'. She recalled how she would 'submit essays that weren't submitting and I was having problems with my laptop all the time'. Being unsure of exactly what he was doing left her feeling like she was 'going crazy'. This interference could be classed as covert technological harm. Other instances were more overt, when abusers wanted the victim to know what they had done. Lola described her ex as tech-savvy. She said he reasoned that his expertise justified his managing her devices and accounts. After the birth of their child, he created a shared profile on an app to store data, but after separation he changed the password and refused to tell it to her. Because of this, she lost months of photos of her son. 'I asked him about it, and he said "it's not yours, you can't have it. Bye bye".' Some abusers used clandestine means (eg vault apps, or a decoy app, which can hide pictures, videos, calls or texts) to hide content on women's devices or their own.

Monitoring activities and location

Numerous women said their abusers had obtained access to their passwords, email and social media accounts and used this access to track them. Maya's ex had spoken about and ordered trackers while they were together. Post separation, she discovered that he had been tracking her through her devices, her children's devices and various software. Shelly was not sure whether her ex was using tracking devices, other technology or real-world networks (proxy perpetrators) to trace her movements. She suspected it was the latter. 'He's still very much in control of what happens,' she lamented: 'He still knows what I'm doing.' She would go to the gym and 'get a random message from him'. She was aware that a girl he knew there would 'grab her phone as I've turned up', which she did not feel was coincidental, and said that he was 'using people and technology to find out where I am and what I'm doing and who I'm with'. Similarly, Natalie reported that her abuser used technology to track her and that he had admitted this to a friend of hers. She said:

> …he'd just appear. I'd be in some random supermarket and he'd just be behind me, or I'd be in some bushy [bushland] area…he'd just appear in random places…just behind me… I just had the nervous tic of looking over my shoulder every five seconds. Because I didn't know where he'd pop up.

Another woman reported that her ex used technology to find out where she had relocated. Technology-facilitated and 'traditional' (in person) stalking seemed to be used in concert, with perpetrators using information obtained via digital channels to watch, follow and intimidate a woman in person.

Perpetrators used harassment as way to place women under surveillance and pressure them to report on their activities and movements. Louise, reflecting on the seemingly never-ending barrage of text messages and phone calls from her partner during their relationship, emphasised it 'wasn't like a normal phone call [or message]' because he was 'checking up to know what I was doing all the time, where I was, who I was with'. Other abusers gave their victims devices on shared plans, which they used to monitor where the women went and what they did.

Monitoring devices and accounts

Survivors reported monitoring of their phone and social media messages and email accounts during their relationships. As Bancroft (2002) noted, writing on patterns in abusive relationships, abusers frequently express jealousy and possessiveness. Assumptions of ownership and accusations that women were unfaithful or 'out of control' abound and abusers used these to justify their control, management and scrutiny of the women's use of technology. Natalie recalled that her former partner had been jealous of her friends and 'If I went to the bathroom or anything, like left my phone somewhere, he'd go through my messages.' He would also download her messages and 'get very jealous if I talked to my female friends on the phone'. He inadvertently revealed that he had hacked into her email account and she knew 'he can hack a phone'. Fiona recalled not being aware at the time that her abuser was reviewing her call and message histories:

> He would say it in a way that I didn't realise he was actually looking at the phone bill. I didn't realise he would have been looking at the phone bill and checking how long and how often I would call certain people and would remark 'oh you talk to such-and-such for [a while] every day, don't you? I'd say 'no, I don't'… He said 'yeah, you do'.

In some instances, abusers would monitor women's digital communications to both exert control and gain insight into their lives post separation, including their response to violence.

Women could view a perpetrator's actions as normal, or romantic; one survivor mentioned:

> I had friends saying, 'gosh, he's rung you 15 times. Like, doesn't he get that you're out having coffee with a friend?' I'm like 'oh, just ignore him'. Little things that I kind of mistook as, oh, he's very caring, was obviously the beginning of the grooming and the controlling and the forward behaviours that I ended up accepting actually, as someone caring for me.

A support practitioner interviewed for Woodlock's (2013) SmartSafe research (see Harris & Woodlock 2019: 542) remarked on how normalisation can occur:

> It is the subtle forms of stalking that women are often less aware of and have become used to. The checking of phones or constant messages for some women may have become part of daily life.

Some abusers framed their practices as positive. Maya's former partner suggested that his review of her emails was benign and helpful. He said he attached his phone number to her email account because she was forgetful and 'if I lost my password at least he could retrieve it for me'. He would routinely open her inbox and 'clean up' her emails for her: 'He'd be like "I cleaned up your emails for you because you had thousands in there."' At the time, she did not view this as problematic but, on reflection, felt it 'was just his way of seeing who had emailed me or anything'. Her abuser also installed tracking software 'under the umbrella of security', keeping her devices and accounts secure. She later found out he had gained access to her secondary email account and was tracking her mobile device. Fiona had not realised, during their relationship, that her abuser was reviewing activity on her phone. She told us:

> At that time, I didn't have a smartphone and I thought how lovely it was that I got this gift, but it was on a plan that he had and used to, I guess, control me and see where I was and what I was doing.

This manipulation, and the narrative that the abusers put forward, mirrors what Bancroft (2002: 67; emphasis in original) describes as:

> *Lying or misleading you about his actions, his desires or his reasons for doing certain things*, in order to guide you into doing what he wants you to do.

Presenting oversight and access to technologies as caring as opposed to controlling has been noted in another study we conducted with colleagues. There, men offered to add women to devices and accounts, required a survivor to enter her password in front of him, or offered to buy and set up their technology (Dragiewicz et al. 2019).

Even when women were not comfortable with sharing information or accounts or being pressured to use new or different devices purchased by partners, it was not necessarily perceived to be dangerous or negative. In fact, women did not always view perpetrator control of and access to phones or accounts as problematic. Generally, as relationships progressed and perpetrators used technology to coerce and control in other ways, women became sceptical of their past intentions.

Perpetrator recordings

Beyond research exploring how perpetrators use intimate recordings and IBSA to threaten, coerce and extort survivors, there has been little scholarship on how perpetrators use recordings (such as recordings of conversations between the parties) in the context of domestic violence. Douglas and Burdon's (2018) work is an exception. The authors (2018: 157) document the 'increasingly ubiquitous use of smartphones' by both survivors and perpetrators and assert (2018: 159, 160):

> Perpetrators can use non-consensual recordings for the purposes of coercively controlling their victim…which can be experienced as intimidating and cause an abused person to be fearful.

Recording, in their study, could be covert or overt. In our study, only one survivor reported being aware of a perpetrator recording their interactions. This occurred post separation and one of her children had observed him filming. She believed that it was 'something that he's started to do, without me realising…it seems to continue without me able to [do anything] and I can't prove that [he is recording me]'. She alleged that he was recording their children too. 'He's quite deceptive,' she surmised.

As Bancroft (2002) and Dragiewicz (2011) assert, abusers frequently try to put forward their version of an abusive relationship and discredit a survivor's narrative. To that end, one survivor stated that her abuser sought to:

> …use text messages as a form of documentation – to embellish a case… He outlines events that have NOT occurred, twists events and frequently uses it as a platform to air grievances that are untrue. I was told by a lawyer who read his texts to me that he is setting me up.

The intent here seemed to be the same as that of the recordings—to present an account that would discredit the survivor's allegations of abuse.

Contexts of technology-facilitated domestic violence

Violence before and after separation

Women in this study reported experiencing technology-facilitated domestic violence both during relationships and post separation. This aligns with other research we have conducted on this topic. In a study on women's experiences of family violence in regional and rural Victoria, George and Harris (2014) found that survivors experienced what we identified as abuse and stalking inside and outside of their relationships. Cyberstalking continued or increased after separation. In one case, a perpetrator used a range of monitoring and tracking apps to locate a woman and her new partner and commit aggravated assault. More recently, when examining female survivors' experiences of cyber-enabled intrusion, surveillance and identity theft in New South Wales and Queensland, Dragiewicz et al. 2019 found that 12 of the 20 study participants were aware of digital violence being used during the relationship and all reported that it increased at the time of separation. Seven survivors reported that their former partners began using digital violence during separation. No women reported that digital violence either ceased or decreased during separation.

It is important to recognise the continuation and, in most cases, amplification of technology-facilitated domestic violence after relationships end, to challenge the myth that violence is 'escaped' upon separating from an abuser. Kira's account mirrored those of other women in this study. She noted that her former partner had engaged in technology-facilitated domestic violence during their relationship. He expected her to be constantly contactable on the phone and would send abusive and threatening text messages if he could not reach her. She said, 'But it escalated quite significantly when I ended the relationship.' Essentially, 'It became more stalking and threatening' and he employed technology as a means to enact harm more frequently. He also used more digital channels to enact harm, 'daily threatening me and my family'.

Separation is the most dangerous time for a survivor, and violence often spikes rather than dissipating, and others—such as family members, friends and new partners—are also targeted in this phase (DeKeseredy, Dragiewicz & Schwartz 2017; DeKeseredy & Schwartz 2009; Fraser et al. 2010). Technology has created new channels with which perpetrators can engage in violent behaviour, even where the survivor has physically relocated from a residence. Consequently, as Hand, Chung and Peters (2009: 3) explain, the 'concept of "feeling safe" from an abuser no longer has the same geographic and spatial boundaries as it once did'. The spacelessness of digital abuse has 'changed the ways abuse impacts survivors long after leaving' (Dimond, Fiesler & Bruckman 2011: 420). This speaks to the need to consider digital harms in safety planning and risk assessments. There also needs to be recognition that perpetrators may be covert or overt in their use of technology-facilitated domestic violence (see also Dragiewicz et al. 2019; George & Harris 2014; Harris & Woodlock 2019).

Women in our study reported incidents where perpetrators sought to hide the ways they used technology in the context of domestic violence. Survivors felt that they may have uncovered only a fraction of the techniques their former partners had used. Indeed, some women worried that they were not aware of the ways their abusers continued to use digital channels for surveillance post separation. As well as covert technology-facilitated domestic violence, there were cases where perpetrators were open in their approach, even delighting in the women knowing they were being harassed, humiliated, intimidated, controlled and stalked by technology. One woman reported that her ex had used technology to locate her and appeared to want her to know this fact. For example, he told their children during visitation information about her new neighbour, indicating he had also physically visited the area. Overt displays of technology-facilitated domestic violence were likely intended to deter women from seeking assistance or support, ending a relationship or attempting to regulate the violence. Some women's former partners maintained that their surveillance or efforts to manage or use devices or digital accounts were designed to protect or assist the women. Either way, when faced with overt instances of technology-facilitated abuse, the outcome was the same. Many women described feeling as though it was unsafe to seek assistance, as though the perpetrator's omnipresence and omnipotence was overwhelming.

Proxy perpetrators

Some abusers showed awareness of how digital communications could be used to craft narratives, such as to suggest they were loving partners who sought to reconcile. In a focus group, women shared how their abusers would:

> …make sure we fought in person, with words, and then he'd apologise later through message. So, it looks like he's a great guy. He's on point, apologising for his bad behaviour. So, making it seem like he's a good dude and that's all anybody would ever see, is just him admitting fault to everything and being selfless and kind and caring.

Speaking to such manipulation, Bancroft (2002: 14) suggested that abusive and controlling men succeed 'in getting people to take his side against her [a survivor]'. DeKeseredy (1990; see also DeKeseredy & Schwartz 1993) proposed that, in patriarchal societies, abusive men may have like-minded allies who formulate, share and reinforce ideologies and values that support violence and who provide resources and guidance. Ultimately, this 'allows men to feel normal and justified when committing violence against current and former intimate partners' (DeKeseredy & Schwartz 2016: 4). As DeKeseredy and Schwartz (1993) theorised, peer support enables abusers and fosters proxy abuse, harassment and stalking.

In our project, women told us that abusers used technology to promote their narratives of being 'good guys', to garner support and to commission people to perpetrate abuse, during relationships and especially post separation. This was apparent in Kira's account. She relayed that her ex:

> …spread messages around to other people and they all thought I was doing the wrong thing. I was getting that everywhere.

When this support was provided through social media it was inescapable: 'There wasn't ever a break from it.' Lola remembers how her ex crafted a narrative that positioned him as a 'good guy', even during their relationship:

> His friends knew nothing [about the violence]. They thought we were happy. They thought he was a really good person. He kept up the appearance for everyone.

On disclosing violence, she initially received support, but this quickly dissipated once her ex made contact with her family. Social media provided a space where her network—and his—demonstrated their allegiance to her abuser, publicly, on Facebook pages and within Facebook Messenger group chats. Likewise, Cody said her abuser used Facebook to build networks of support and connect with her family: 'He's so calculated.'

As we have seen in other work in this field (see Dutton & Goodman 2005; George & Harris 2014; Harris 2016), people in an abuser's social network (and, as Lola's story shows, women's own social networks) can be recruited to engage in technology-facilitated domestic violence as proxy perpetrators. Shelly spoke of how friends of her ex would text him to report on her whereabouts and activities. He would then contact Shelly, notifying her that he was aware of what she was doing. Women also described how abusers would, when their contacts were blocked or intervention orders issued, use friends' phones to contact them. The perpetrator would 'go on other people's accounts and would continue to harass me through that'. Kira's account indicates that features of rural communities can nurture such peer support networks. Speaking to her past victimisation (sexual assault as a child and adolescent and domestic violence as an adult), she explained:

> I grew up in a very small community… once one [person] started [engaging in violence] it was kind of a trend where many males in the community would just, I guess, jump on board, if that makes sense?

Thus, space can potentially shape peer support networks.

Children and technology-facilitated domestic violence

Using and coopting children

Abusers used children to provoke a response from women and to re-establish contact. Shelly talked about how, when she blocked her former partner on various social media platforms, or when she refused to speak to him, 'he contacted my daughter through social media and claimed "he's really worried about me. That he needs to get in contact with me"'. He would manipulate her daughter into revealing how he could see Shelly. 'He never came to watch her netball games', she said, but:

> …as soon as I'd draw the line and block him, he'd messenger her and say 'what time do you play tomorrow? I want to come and watch'. Because she felt excited that he wanted to watch, so she gave him all the details.

Women also reported being concerned that children were given devices by their fathers to facilitate monitoring. Maya's ex gave her daughter a wearable fitness tracker and she was fairly sure that during visitation he paired the watch to his computer so it would reveal the locations she travelled through and thus could be used to locate her. Women believed that, as well as unintentionally enabling abusers, children were actively recruited by abusers to do their bidding. Claire's step-mother advised her:

> …get your house swept [for recording devices] …don't be surprised if your eldest who has been manipulated within an inch of his life, when you've gone out, has let him in.

She wondered if it was 'utter paranoia' or, more accurately, 'the length he [her ex] may go to'. Claire was concerned that her abuser would 'prey on my son' through a phone he gave him and would use gaming systems, given to her children, 'to track what we're doing and how we're going' because his contact was restricted by the conditions of an intervention order.

Post separation, some perpetrators framed their actions in monitoring children's use of technology as protective and caring. Fiona said her ex made his children tell him the passwords to their device 'to keep her safe'. Here, she emphasised the importance of understanding his behaviours in the context of domestic violence, as efforts to coerce and control. She appreciated that 'parents do know things like that, codes [passwords etc]. It's not unusual, but he does it to monitor and surveil them'. She continued:

> I've got a friend who's got a tracking device on her son (he hurt himself from riding) and he said, 'just look me up, where I am [if you're worried]', you know? She's a great woman, right? So, she's got his best interests. But in a DV [domestic violence] situation, it's completely different.

Digital harms and parenting

'When you've got children [with an abuser], you're never free', Fiona stated. Women talked about their concerns in relation to sharing custody—contending with ongoing abuse, fear that their children were being subjected to harm, and having to monitor how the abuser was using technology in regard to their children. Additionally, numerous survivors in this study said that perpetrators had sought to destabilise their relationship with their children (see also Kirkwood 2012, 2007). As Fish, McKenzie and MacDonald (2009: 5) assert:

> …the fact that many women gain fulfilment and social affirmation from their role as mothers is well known to perpetrators of domestic violence, who may use that knowledge against women, directing their attacks towards this aspect of their partner's life to undermine her identity as a mother and also the mother-child relationship.

Likewise, Mullender et al. (2002: 158) contend it is 'not an accident that abusive men attack women's abilities to mother', as 'they know that this represents a source of positive identity, the thing above all else that women try and preserve, and also that this is an area of vulnerability'. In our study some perpetrators played on children's emotions by telling them that, in formally responding to violence, women were responsible for negative impacts or repercussions men faced. In doing so, abusers often used technology or revealed they had been monitoring their partner's use of technology. Claire became aware that her ex hacked her email account and read messages from her lawyer, which mentioned potential periods of incarceration he would face. When her daughter returned from visitation, it became apparent that he had discussed the matter with her when she asked Claire, 'Is Daddy going to jail for his bad behaviour?'

Abusers also suggested women's efforts to protect children were instead efforts to destabilise the father–child relationship. Cody outlined how her ex sought to manipulate their daughter. Cody had asked him to complete a men's behaviour change program and take a drug test before seeing their daughter. She recalled that, amidst a barrage of abusive messages, he sent their daughter a text saying he would not see her 'until you're old enough to make your own decisions'.

He accused Cody of deleting messages he sent to their daughter, saying 'Mum's put my messages into spam'. She felt that he was trying to blame her for the separation and lack of contact:

> [He was] trying to make it look like I was controlling. Well, I was trying to control the situation, but not being controlling… I wanted her to have a dad who's stable, a dad who shows her that she's worthy of making some changes.

Some perpetrators, during visitation, actively sought to restrict a child's access to their mother by restricting access to technology. Fiona talked about how her ex tried to 'socially isolate' her children and 'take their phones or hide their phones. Turn their phones on silent when they're expecting my call'. Her child's psychologist said, 'Yeah, it's very normal to take phones off kids, so they don't have them in their rooms.' Fiona expressed: 'I get that, but my kids aren't overly using their phones.' She emphasised the need to recognise the abusive context. As she said, 'He's using that as a controlling aspect [so] that they can't contact me.' One of her children had wanted to have the phone by her side so she could call her mother 'when she was scared'. 'Sometimes she's waking up in the middle of the night and didn't feel comfortable reaching out to him.' In this situation, she felt the intent was to interfere with her relationship with her child and to exert control.

Women also described difficulties in navigating their child's contact with their father via technology. Shelly noted that her children had bonded with her ex, and said her ex exploited their desire to maintain the relationship. He sent social media messages to their daughter asking her to encourage Shelly to contact him. He also tried to get information to help him to initiate contact with Shelly in person, such as at their daughter's social events. She was frustrated at the situation and said: 'I'm angry at her because I'm trying to get him out of our lives… So it caused issues in that way [in our family] as well.' Women also reported tensions with children when they tried to take away devices given by perpetrators that could have recorded or documented conversations or locations. Lastly, women reported that abusers used shared parenting arrangements as a way to contact women via technology, especially when a protection order restricted contact outside of issues pertaining to the children (also noted in George & Harris 2014).

Impacts of technology-facilitated domestic violence

It was evident that women's lives had been impacted by technology-facilitated domestic violence in myriad ways. Technology had become a weapon used against women. Shelly commented:

> …you see a side of a phone that you probably wish you didn't know about. Like phones before this relationship have just been phones.

Women's wellbeing, safety and sense of security was undermined by the abuse, harassment and stalking to which they were subjected. One woman spoke of how the torment she endured via ICT affected her mental health. She had previously engaged in self-harm, but not for almost 15 years. After receiving digital images and text messages referencing a distressing time of her life and past trauma, she said:

> I had the cutting thoughts come back… to the point where it got dangerous for me to hold scissors and knives because it was just that thought 'get it over and done with'. He knows how to push my buttons and he did it.

Survivors spoke of other impacts on their mental and physical health. Natalie suffered from stress-induced seizures. Another woman reported:

> It wakes you up at night. I don't sleep. I don't sleep well. I go to sleep well, but I wake up with my heart constantly racing.

Louise said her 'depression and anxiety was through the roof… Even just the fact that I know he can message me now has thrown me off'. Being aware that abusers were interfering with their devices but unsure of the techniques employed led some survivors to feel 'crazy', 'a bigger lunatic than him'. Survivors also talked about feeling 'paranoid' when making efforts to detect and block accounts that could belong to their former partners or proxy perpetrators.

High volumes of and continuous exposure to abuse, harassment, harm and stalking via technology—post separation and after police had been engaged and intervention orders obtained—took a toll on women. Technology-facilitated domestic violence seemed inescapable. Shelly said that receiving such text messages 'brings me back five steps'. Other women talked about the progress they had made in recovering and rebuilding their lives and feeling as though this was jeopardised by ongoing digital violence:

> I've moved forward with my career. I've moved forward with my education. I've moved forward by having peace, but it never ends. There's always hypervigilance. Your heart races. A text. Like, I just got a text from him now. Your heart races.

Focus group participants agreed that the sounds of messages being received, for instance, evoked discomfort:

> It'd get to the point sometimes where you'd hear the message, beep.
>
> You'd be like, oh damn.
>
> Yeah, I've stopped having my phone on.
>
> You start hating that noise.

Fear was articulated by many participants and was exacerbated by the spacelessness of technology-facilitated domestic violence. Survivors felt digital harms were overwhelming and everywhere; women could be targeted any time they accessed a device or digital profile. The idea that there could be undetected perpetration loomed large in women's minds. Fiona worried that 'there's some things you will never know about, with technology'. This is true whether perpetrators employ low-tech or high-tech strategies, but Natalie believed, 'you become powerless when you have someone that is quite IT savvy', 'not only watching you physically, it's watching cyberspace and not knowing what is put out there'.

Women emphasised the continuation (and escalation) of technology-facilitated domestic violence. The frequency and persistence of harassment, the omnipresence and omnipotence afforded by technology and the fact that perpetrators could shield their identity and actions had, quite simply, devastating effects of women's lives, as this statement shows:

> The list is endless. I experience harassment via text messages as a regular part of my life and there is nothing I can do to stop this. I feel powerless.

Other women spoke of how their expectations and plans for future relationships had shifted:

> …you just worry about that in the future with other people. Like I'm not ready to go into a new relationship, but if I did I think I'd have a phone policy before that even began.

In this vein, Claire talked about her wariness about letting new people into her life:

> It's very isolating and you do think too, how do I know he hasn't made friends with someone at work and they're keeping tabs on me or they're able to forward him emails?

It is not only perpetrators, but ICTs such as platforms that could trigger survivors. This was inadvertent but unfortunate. As one woman surmised:

> Things like Facebook have, 'this time last year' reminders and pictures of happy couples coming up and it's like, I don't want to remember this. Every time I wrote a status update about when we were fighting but it was really cryptic. It's like, I don't remember what this was about, but it was a bad time, I don't like it. I don't want to see any of that, so I turned it off.

Platforms generally assume users want to remember posts, but, as the above quote shows, this is not true for all. Being confronted with past references to violence is alarming and disheartening. Social media sites also assume that potential contacts are friendly, if not neutral. They prompt users to follow or connect with others based on mutual associations, such as in Facebook's 'people you may know' feature, Instagram's 'suggest for you' and Twitter's 'who to follow' list (Harris 2020b). These features can be an attractive to some, but where the contacts are people associated with an abuser this is definitely unwelcome (Bivens 2015).

Spaceless violence, place and space

Kira emphasised that the spacelessness of digital violence meant that 'There wasn't ever a break from it', even post separation; 'you can't actually escape it'. She felt that, whereas other forms of violence 'is normally to your face… I had to be present for that to happen', 'When it came to technology, it didn't matter where I was, he was still able to access me'. With technology, 'you never got to escape, which I hadn't experienced before, because every other type of abuse…ended at some point'.

The unique aspects and impacts of spaceless violence need to be emphasised, but so too do the ways that place and space can shape experiences of technology-facilitated domestic violence. Here, we follow de Certeau's (1984) distinction between *places* as fixed geographic locations and *spaces* as having both practical and ideological components, created and shaped by the actors, actions, beliefs and values in a particular place at a particular time (Harris 2018, 2016). Both geographic and ideological elements will influence how perpetrators behave and how survivors experience and respond to violence.

In this study, as with our previous studies (George & Harris 2014: 47–48; Harris 2016), women identified RRR areas as conservative or conducive to violence against women because of values and structures of populations which 'seem to be linked to constructs of tradition, gender and patriarchy, and unequal power relations that position women as dependants'. We acknowledge that there is great diversity in and between RRR landscapes. Nonetheless, for some women, these aspects of culture fostered abuse and discourse that supported perpetrators. As Hogg and Carrington (2006: 180) discuss, gender constructs in rural communities can have unique features and meanings 'constructed more narrowly around heteronormative conceptions of masculinity that subordinate others through practices of domination that have historically relied on the exercise of violence'.

Such expressions of hegemonic masculinity have been observed in rural sites internationally—in South Africa by Jewkes et al. (2006), in the United States by DeKeseredy and Schwartz (2009), in the United Kingdom by Hey (1986) and Whitehead (1976), and in New Zealand by Campbell (2000).

Numerous survivors also spoke of the absence of anonymity in RRR spaces, both for themselves and perpetrators. As Victoria Police (2019: 21) note in their *Code of Practice for the Investigation of Family Violence,* rural women face 'considerable disadvantage' when responding to violence, including 'where the perpetrator may be a valued member of the community'. Women maintained that widely held views that abusers were 'good guys' or 'local heroes' (with peer support networks) deterred them from seeking assistance. Disclosing and responding to violence was, for many women, confronting. One survivor remarked of her abuser:

> He is established – he knows people and he's well liked. There are probably some people that have seen through him. But yeah, it's socially isolating… he's in a boy's club and knows lots of people. He knows lots and lots of people. He has a vast amount of people, like everywhere he goes. He knows many, many people, whereas I don't.

RRR women may have smaller social circles than those living in a metropolitan area. Limited supports can be further reduced if, as we have documented in this report, perpetrators actively isolate women, as is common in abusive relationships. Several women in our study referred to their residences as geographically isolated. Some felt that abusers actively sought to distance them, from both other places (houses and community centres) and people. Claire talked about other tactics used by her abuser to socially isolate her:

> He went around the streets telling people that I'm crazy… Because we're in a small country town he was going in and out of shops… He affiliated himself with one of the local churches and got them on his side.

Louise recalled:

> He was really controlling with my friends. If he didn't like people, I wasn't friends with them anymore… I lost a lot of friends that way.

In these circumstances, technology can be a key channel to maintain access to loved ones. However, during relationships abusers frequently sought to restrict women's use of technology. Fiona discovered, post separation, that her ex had blocked contacts on her phone.

Post separation, survivors were often pressured to disengage from technology, or elected to do so in order to manage their safety and avoid abuse. Consequently, they had fewer interactions via ICT and weakened relationships with friends and family. In some cases, abusers used technology to destroy women's friendships. When Maya left her abuser, he sent hundreds of messages to her and her network and targeted them in person; 'He basically went around and destroyed a few of my friendships,' she lamented. 'They were scared.' For newly arrived women (including those on temporary visas), with limited or no supports in their new country of residence, technology offers opportunities to maintain contact with friends and family (National Advocacy Group on Women on Temporary Visas Experiencing Violence 2018; Segrave 2017). ICT is vital for this group, who are highly vulnerable and 'invisible', without citizenship rights (Douglas, Harris & Dragiewicz 2019a, 2019b).

Criminal justice responses

Police

Many survivors experienced anxieties, discomfort and barriers when formally responding to violence in rural areas which they felt were not always recognised. The interactions Natalie had with police were, in her words, 'frustrating', 'pretty rude' and ultimately difficult 'when you're raw' after an incident sparking police intervention. She felt that the 'country police' she encountered treated her like a perpetrator: 'I get pulled through the third degree,' she expressed. The disconnect from police that some women felt was evident. Survivors said that police 'don't know what I've lived with' and 'how the game is played' by abusers, meaning that when police arrived at a scene or met with abusers, officers could misunderstand what was happening or be manipulated by perpetrators. One woman identified a perpetrator who was a former police officer. She was, unsurprisingly, nervous about contacting police for assistance. She believed her abuser was protected and that there was a failure to respond to the harm she disclosed.

Traditionally, police have focused on physical abuse, arguably overlooking other forms of harm (Douglas 2019). While recent studies have suggested that there can be less recognition of the dynamics of domestic violence, non-physical forms of abuse and coercive control (George & Harris 2014; Goodman-Delahunty & Corbo Crehan 2015), there has been extensive reform in police practice, policy and training, including in the aftermath of the 2015 Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence. Yet women's perspectives of policing domestic violence, more holistically, can be described as mixed. Their perspectives of police responses to technology-facilitated domestic violence were largely negative. Louise, in contrast, with the exception of one officer she met, characterised her interactions with police as 'really good'. She said she was 'really surprised when I first went in to report that I was taken seriously. I was actually really worried that I wasn't going to be'. However, another woman—echoing many in our study—stated that she had 'sought help with police, as in with technology, and they can't give you any help'. Maya found some police to be 'awesome…when I showed them the messages they were like "oh my gosh"'; others she felt dismissed her disclosure, such as when she showed them messages which made her feel unsafe:

> …they were like 'look, we've read the messages, he's not threatening you. He's not being nice but he's not threatening you. We can arrange for you to stay somewhere but it's his word against yours at the moment', which is not the right thing to say.

The interaction she viewed as favourable was with specialist (domestic violence) police, and the unfavourable interaction was with generalist police. Claire, likewise, was enthusiastic about the interactions she had with specialist officers.

This mirrors findings in other research, which shows that women are more satisfied (often highly satisfied) with specialist police officers and have a mixed response to generalist officers (George & Harris 2014). Segrave, Wilson and Fitz-Gibbon (2018: 112), drawing on interviews with 163 Victoria Police officers, found that many generalist police 'continue to express profound cynicism and weariness' about complaints of domestic violence 'and the members of the public who bring them forward'. They call for specialisation and professionalisation of domestic violence roles. Certainly, survivors in our research preferred specialised officers and called for more training and education about domestic violence for generalist police.

Cody saw a relationship between the age of officers and their performance. She said:

> …the older ones are a bit stuck in their way, they think they know it all. It's like an old driver – they get stuck in their bad habits. Their ways of driving and thinking. And some of them don't seem to have a personable manner about them. They feel totally unapproachable.

Cody also asserted that the gender of the officers she met with influenced their policing of non-physical violence, including that facilitated by technology. 'It's an inbuilt man thing,' she said: '"Are you bleeding? Well, then you're not hurt. What do you want us to do about it? He's annoying you, block his number".' While only Cody mentioned gender differences in police performance, we note that some studies have critiqued traditional and frontline models of policing as masculinised (Douglas 2018b; Loftus 2008; Prenzler & Sinclair 2013; Prokos & Padavic 2002), including in responses to domestic violence in rural areas (Nicholson 1998).

Unpacking police responses to technology-facilitated domestic violence, women reported that sometimes police critiqued how they had communicated with abusers. Consequently, while reporting incidents to officers, some women left the police station, electing not to continue with a matter. Dissatisfaction with police could also result in a decision not to report future incidents to police. This was the case with Lola. On one occasion, she disclosed an incident to police, showing them the message history of a text argument with her ex-partner. After officers saw that she had sent him a 'laughing face' emoji, they told her 'you antagonised him, so there's not much we can do'. She explained that she had sent the emoji because she thought he was being 'ridiculous', but also that it was part of her strategy to 'try and talk him down, because he was really angry' and she wanted him to have calmed down by the time he got to her house.

Generally, women felt that they had sufficient evidence of digital violence but that it was often not accepted by police, especially in regard to breaches of intervention orders. Claire had, at the time of our interview, an intervention order that she said had been breached 22 times, without charges being issued. She alleged that the perpetrator had primarily breached the order by technology-facilitated stalking through the internet and gaming devices and by sending abusive text messages. Claire believed she had a wealth of evidence of these infractions:

> I'm presuming too, well, I've got it, here it is. Here is what he has said in the text message. This is how many times he messaged me. These are the photographs I have been able to take on my phone of being around when he's not even allowed to be there touching our son.

But officers told her 'there's not enough evidence' to proceed. Officers did not always inform women of the status of their cases. Claire noted that police had issued charges for one of the breaches but she was not told of this, or when the charge was later overturned. Officers encouraged her to 'deal with' her abuser's technological breaches of an intervention order. She remembers presenting evidence of his digital harassment and stalking and being told 'you're just going to have to learn to live with him… he's going to be in your life for the rest of your life, you're going to have to learn to deal with it'. Louise felt she was also pressured into 'dealing with it' when officers encouraged her to agree to an intervention order that permitted contact (while abuse and harassment via technology were prohibited).

It was not uncommon for women to be told that abuse and stalking carried out using technology was unpleasant, perhaps, but did not require police intercession or, more overtly, that it did not constitute domestic violence. Shelly spoke to police about 'really nasty, demeaning' phone calls her ex-partner made which she thought violated her intervention order and was told: 'we can't really charge him for calling you names'. Her domestic violence support worker asserted that 'he should be charged for that, it is family violence, and it's emotionally abusive'. As well as feeling as though police were minimising and decontextualising digital harms, some women felt police did not recognise the danger it could pose.

Fiona had detected various instances of covert surveillance her perpetrator had engaged in using technology, so she asked an officer 'is there any way of checking that my children aren't being bugged or anything?' and was frustrated that the police 'can't help you in that way'.

We emphasise that technology-facilitated domestic violence is not distinct from but embedded within and occurring alongside 'offline' forms of intimidation, control, coercion and abuse. Thus, while we can speak to police responses to digital harms specifically, we should examine women's broader experiences of police responses to domestic violence. Overall, survivors' experiences can be described as mixed, though more negative than positive. Usually women had multiple contacts with police. When Ivy was asked if she found police helpful when seeking assistance, she replied 'sometimes and sometimes not'. Another woman declared:

> I don't find them very supportive at all… I guess they see so much domestic violence, it's just another domestic… I don't have a lot of faith in them, in the police force, with domestic violence at all.

Priya also had multiple contacts with police. Although it appeared there were interactions where officers had missed opportunities to refer her to services or intervene by regulating violence, she ultimately felt police were 'very great'. This she largely determined based on one interaction with a female officer that really resonated. The officer was aware of her bridging visa status and said:

> 'Australia has one rule – if you're from any country, if you're rich or don't have money or nothing, everyone has the same rule. Everyone respects. So you have a right to [live] without getting hit from anyone'. Still can remember that words, that's really powerful word. It's really powerful… 'we are not looking at who you are and where you're from. Now when you come to enter this country, you must obey these rules and you're protected by these rules'.

Having her experience validated and her right to live without violence was, for Priya, profound. We also note that both the Aboriginal survivors in our cohort reported that the generalist officers who assisted them were 'pretty good'. This is an important and unexpected finding. Other research has found that rural survivors are not always comfortable talking to generalist officers, who could be, in the words of one support worker, 'more of a lottery', with some officers viewed positively but others engaging in what was regarded as culturally insensitive or racist behaviour (George & Harris 2014: 70).

Some survivors felt that police minimised the abuse, coercive control, intimidation and threats to which they had been exposed. Women maintained that police were not always aware of the dynamics of domestic violence—the many forms abuse can assume, the way perpetrators engaged in coercive and controlling behaviours and, ultimately, the risk they faced. Trying to communicate this to officers could make survivors feel, in their words, 'like an absolute lunatic and like you're overreaching'. A number of survivors emphasised that, when police arrive on the scene, they meet abusers who can seem calm and charming and women who struggle to communicate and manage frantic or distressed energy. From listening to survivors' accounts, we also believe that it would be beneficial for officers to have further education or training on recognising and responding to trauma. One woman cautioned:

> …you have to be very careful with police, you have to be very calm with them… I don't know if they understand domestic violence and how it affects a woman and your emotions and your pain and your trauma.

Women sought to help police understand why parties—survivors and perpetrators—present in certain ways. Indeed, when we asked one focus group what they wished police knew about domestic violence or technology, or the training or changes in practice they would want to see, it was this area where they wanted improvement. They wanted police to appreciate 'how crafty some of these guys can be', to 'Read between the lines' and to understand that 'when a woman is stressed that she is not the crazy person' that he claims she is: 'that is a result of the emotion'; 'that's from the pushing'.

Recognising and responding to risk

One woman in Australia is killed each week of the year in the context of domestic and family violence (Australian Domestic and Family Violence Death Review Network 2018), and abusive and obsessive contact and stalking via technology has been identified as an emerging trend across domestic homicide and filicide cases (Death and Family Violence Review and Advisory Board 2017; Dwyer & Miller 2014). The NSW Domestic Violence Death Review Team (2017: 134) found abusers stalked victims in 39 percent of cases, prior to the fatal assault, noting that over 50 percent of cases 'included the abuser using technology to stalk the victim, such as persistent text messaging, checking the domestic violence victim's phone, and engaging with the victim on social media/dating sites under a false identity'. Legal and justice systems have a crucial role to play in preventing technology-facilitated domestic violence and safeguarding and empowering victim–survivors. Governments recognise this and have called urgently for informed reviews and reforms in this arena. The Senate Finance and Public Administration References Committee's (2015: xi) inquiry into domestic violence asked the Australian Government to 'consider strategies to tackle the increased use of technology to facilitate abuse against women and to ensure women have adequate legal protections'. Likewise, the Council of Australian Governments (2016: 2) has prioritised efforts to 'limit technology-facilitated abuse' and seek best practice and policy in combating technology-facilitated domestic violence.

Internationally, research suggests that levels of intimate partner stalking (Logan et al. 2007), threatened or actual use of weapons (Logan et al. 2003), torture (Websdale & Johnson 1998) and homicides (Gallup-Black 2005) are higher in urban places than in rural places. In Australia, geographical crime statistics are not commonly compiled, so comparisons between such crimes across landscapes are hard to locate (McPhedran 2014). As stalking, threatened and actual use of weapons and torture have been identified as risk factors for or precursors to homicide, these are vital issues to flag in risk assessment processes.

In Australia, risk assessments are conducted by individual agents (such as police officers and domestic violence support workers), while multi-agency risk assessment panels (comprising domestic violence support workers, police, corrections staff, housing service officers, mental health workers, alcohol and drug services, children's agencies, child protection practitioners and others with case knowledge) are also conducted in cases flagged as potentially high risk. Strangulation is also an indicator of risk in assessment processes (Australian Domestic and Family Violence Death Review Network 2018; Death and Family Violence Review and Advisory Board 2017; NSW Domestic Violence Death Review Team 2017). As noted earlier, a high proportion of survivors (*n*=6) in this study had been strangled by perpetrators on one or more occasions but did not always identify these acts as strangulations. This is a difficulty in safety planning and risk assessment which warrants greater attention. The connection between offline and online risk too, can be overlooked in risk assessment processes. Survivors emphasised that in person stalking was often facilitated by or occurred alongside technology-facilitating stalking, which may not be recognised. Women suggested that digital abuse, monitoring and surveillance were frequently dismissed or seen as less serious than other forms of harm. We caution that, consequently, key intel showing homicide flags can be missed.

On risk, survivors also mentioned another area which should be further examined: the presence of firearms and what survivors regarded as threatening references to them. One woman in our study spoke about the presence of firearms being a threat:

> I was struggling to live each day, kind of thing, emotionally and how I was being treated, that was just another layer, the guns. Because obviously if everything's okay and you're thinking 'why has someone got – he has a silencer!'

Some perpetrators had firearm licences; others did not. Many women are all too aware that, while gun ownership can be restricted through intervention orders, guns are common in rural landscapes. Even if an abuser lost access to legal firearms, it was likely that he had access to other weapons, including firearms, through his network (Harris 2016).

Ivy reported that police were 'helpful when my ex-partner that I broke up with [was] threatening me with a gun', including in assisting her in securing an intervention order prohibiting contact. Her abuser had sent many text messages to her referencing the gun. The threat was implicit in some messages and explicit in others: 'he said if he sees me in [the area] he'd come and kill me'. Police were not as reactive, however, in Fiona's case. When attending a call-out after her ex had attempted to enter her property, one of the officers found:

> …firearm paraphernalia, firearm bits and pieces, they found handcuffs, empty bullet shells…knives…large knives. I'd never seen them before.

He did not have a firearm licence but, she notes, did have firearms. An officer discouraged her from pursuing an intervention order:

> …she said, 'you sure you want to do this?' She actually asked me, and I thought, now I think, why did she say that? I said 'I need this. I need this for protecting me.'

The officers apparently did not believe that she would be able to secure an order and that it might escalate his behaviour. Reflecting on this, she wondered why they did not believe she had grounds for an order. She also highlighted that she felt unsafe and that the order offered some comfort.

In smaller communities there was less anonymity than in metropolitan areas, and values and perspectives regarded as conservative are more common. Rural women who identified as alternative (in regard to their appearance or lifestyles) spoke of perceived tensions with police officers, which they attributed to police responses to their 'difference'. Lola, for instance, who has tattoos and piercings, suggested that officers were wary of her and her friends, who also have more extensive and varied body modifications. She had visited the police station in her region with friends supporting her to discuss incidents of violence. She felt police were dismissive because they were alternative in appearance; 'the people you're with get overlooked because of their appearance', she asserted. 'I think if I had gone alone, they would have taken me a little more seriously,' she said, but added, 'I wouldn't have been brave enough on my own.' Feeling as though she or her supports were unwelcome or 'out of place' ultimately made her hesitant about approaching police in future.

Similarly, one survivor who practised BDSM (bondage, domination/discipline, submission/sadomasochism) felt that, when she disclosed this, officers became suspicious about violence that she reported. She emphasised the difference between the consent and respect she associated with BDSM and the control and coercion associated with domestic violence but felt that officers did not understand: 'ew, you're weird. Moving on, you're a waste of my time'.

Some criminalised women also worried about how they would be perceived by police. Research conducted by the support and advocacy service FlatOut (2015), presented in their submission to the Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence, suggests their fears may not have been unfounded. In 13 cases reviewed by FlatOut (2015: 5), the report's authors noted 'police bias, misconduct and inaction in responding or failing to respond to criminalised women's reports of family violence'. In this vein, a worker interviewed by the group had 'worked with criminalised women [who are] very scared to call the police because police know them and don't take them seriously or treat them differently' (FlatOut 2015: 8). We found that perpetrators sometimes sought to capitalise on these anxieties. When Cody outlined the steps that she wanted her ex-partner to take before he saw their child, he started criticising her and her ability to parent, by referring to her past convictions:

> [He said] 'you were convicted of this and that', and I'm thinking oh my god, that was another life. I don't even resonate with that person. My child has changed my life, changed the way I think of myself.

He communicated this via mobile phone, so 'that's it, out there in a text', and she predicted how officers would respond:

> If I go to the police, 'oh, you're convicted of this and that, are you?' …if I ever show anyone it's like they'll question me.

She said she does not even 'think of the police, to be honest. Not until something bad happens'. In contrast, Ivy, who had previously been incarcerated, at times found police to be helpful and respectful.

Intervention orders

Increasingly, in Australia (as well as in Canada, the United States, United Kingdom and New Zealand) legal responses are focused on civil protection or intervention orders. Orders are 'one of the most common legal remedies sought by, or on behalf of' survivors of domestic and family violence (Douglas 2018b: 216). The effectiveness of such orders in preventing frequent, serious or repeated victimisation is often called into question (Douglas 2007; Goodmark 2018). However, there is literature indicating that orders can be successful at reducing subsequent incidents; increasing help-seeking, particularly from police; and stopping an abuser contacting a survivor (Douglas 2018a; Dowling et al. 2018; Migliore, Ziersch & Marshall 2014). Research suggests that, due to limited resourcing, services and accommodation in rural and remote communities, intervention orders can be less effective in non-urban than urban areas (George & Harris 2014; Logan, Shannon & Walker 2005). The distress and also risk that formal responses will escalate violence in rural areas has been noted elsewhere in the literature (Harris 2016) but should be reiterated.

Louise found the process of applying for an intervention order to be 'really really stressful'. Mirroring other studies, which showed women felt these orders were 'futile paper shields' incapable of stopping violence (Jordan & Phillips 2013: 34), as evidenced by numerous breaches (George & Harris 2014), there were mixed feelings about the protection they afforded. Lola weighed up whether or not an order would protect or endanger her, before deciding not to proceed:

> I did think about it seriously at one point, but then I thought, I've seen so many people get angrier after having an intervention order. To them it's just a piece of paper. They're not going to listen to it, they're going to do more damage because you've pissed them off. And at the moment I'm doing really well keeping him at arm's length and I don't want to annoy him further. He's a big dude.

Some orders had conditions prohibiting perpetrators from making contact, including through technology. Where this provision was not included, women said they did not 'feel safe anymore'. Shelly (echoing women interviewed in George & Harris 2014) wanted more information about intervention orders, including the range of orders and conditions that could be imposed, and to have 'somebody maybe explain to me, or talk to me about what's been going on and what do I want from this order… probably a bit more support'. Many women in our study told us that perpetrators had breached orders—including by using technology—multiple times. Maya said her ex 'went psychotic' when the order was issued, sending hundreds of abusive and threatening texts. When we last spoke to her, he had breached the order approximately 10 times. Another woman said her order had been breached over 20 times. Natalie's ex was also not deterred by the order: 'he was consistently messaging me. Just didn't give two hoots about the order'. When an order was first issued against Shelly's ex he told her 'I don't give a shit—I'll do what I want… they're fucking paper airplanes'. However, he was deterred by the response to his breach: police charged him with assault and breach after a call-out and 'he never breached it again after that'. She said, 'I feel very protected with the order.'

Priya's account highlights some of the reservations that survivors may have in regard to orders. She withdrew her case before the court at one time, because 'I feel very sorry for him' and 'sometimes he is very good. Sometimes he has a kind heart and will be loving me… he knows I love him'. Love for her partner and the cycle of abuse (the 'hearts and flowers' or 'honeymoon' phase, post eruption; Bancroft 2002), can lead survivors to delay or stop formal responses. They may seek an end to the violence, not the relationship. Priya also did not 'want him to go to jail, because if something happened, I don't know who would look after me because I'm dependent on him', being on a bridging visa at the time. Additionally, she feared judgement and repercussions from his family, who lived with them.

Courts

Women in this study talked about finding courts to be confronting. The public visibility of 'private violence', especially in smaller towns, could be distressing. As observed in other research we have conducted, the court event is one of risk for survivors and their children in rural locations and women have been fatally injured after leaving a hearing (George & Harris 2014; Harris 2016). As we documented, survivors have reported receiving death threats (communicated through text messages and mimed actions) while in the courtroom and being assaulted when exiting the court. The physical structure of courts in rural places (such as those with single entry and exit points, an absence of security guards and a lack of safe and separate rooms for survivors) can contribute to the dangers women encounter (George & Harris 2014; Harris 2016). In a focus group conducted as part of the current research, several women relayed and reinforced these findings—the distress and danger women associated with court appearances and how perpetrators capitalised on these sentiments:

> It's happened to me twice, getting an intervention order where the guys say 'oh court is neutral ground'. So you're sitting in the court of course they're pissed off that you're getting an intervention order so they walk past to go to the toilet and they keep walking past you and murmuring things as they go past.
>
> You end up screaming. Like 'get him away from me'. Because that's happened. I've got PTSD [post-traumatic stress disorder] …I've been triggered and actually just started screaming in there…
>
> They've actually said a word or threatened me and my baby. There was one guy who said 'you go all the way with this? You've got a kid'… Like that's it, get him away from me…
>
> They made me sit next to him on the same bench in the courtroom while they're reading out the charges and stuff and it's like, I don't want to be near him.
>
> I know they're small [the courts] but there's always that worry about when you're coming for the intervention order where he's going to be… if he's going to have that one last stab at intimidating you and setting you off for the day. You're all confident walking up and then you see him and he's just standing there and you've got to walk past.

Additionally, survivors spoke of how sharing evidence of technology-facilitated domestic violence (in the course of pursuing intervention orders or criminal or family law) affected them. One abuser provided intimate images of a woman to present her as a 'bad mother' during a family law appearance. It had 'no relevance in a courtroom, however, in his eyes, it was because he wanted to make—paint a picture of me being a vindictive, desperate woman'. Given the visibility that women have in rural areas, and especially in the court setting, this was highly troubling to her. Speaking of her experiences in the Family Court and of dealing with family law and domestic violence matters, Claire expressed frustration that 'unless it's homicidal' the domestic violence was viewed as separate from and unrelated to shared parenting arrangements. Kira agreed that domestic violence issues were not fully considered by courts. 'I don't believe for a second that any judge would hand over my kid', she said, 'but he might be allowed visitation rights which would also allow him the option of giving them technology [so he could] track or control me.'

Support services

Generally, women had positive perceptions of support services. Given our cohort of participants was accessed through these services, this finding is perhaps not surprising. However, we note that not all women we spoke to continued to be engaged with support services. Ultimately, women identified benefits in accessing specialist domestic violence agencies, which recognised the range of harms they had experienced, including technological abuse, validated their experiences and assisted them to respond to harm. Cody appreciated the individualised approach workers adopted, the in-house mental health workers and the art therapy programs the organisation provided. However, she had a negative experience at another agency, where a worker did not discuss a safety plan with her or offer consistency and she went 'nine months without seeing anyone'.

Support services are overburdened and under-resourced, and this can limit the operations, capacity and appearance of organisations. Maya contended that seeking help can be confronting:

> I went into shock in the first refuge I went into. It was filthy dirty. It had giant rats running around. I was given a box full of stuff. Now, I don't feed my kids packet kind of stuff. It's always fresh fruit and vegetables and I literally cried.

Yet she could not fault the workers, including her 'fantastic' case worker who fought for her to get assistance at Centrelink. Shelly valued the 'amazing' worker who assisted her, and the programs the centre offered to her and her children. Lola highlighted how the service she accessed validated her experiences. She said of her case worker:

> …she asked me a lot of questions in depth and I realised how bad it actually was, and I realised what exactly I was running away from. Before then, I had no idea. I was just running on gut instinct. She sort of opened my eye to everything. I'm like, 'holy crap! Okay, I'm one of them'.

This unique role these support services play and the way they fight for survivors was absolutely shown in Priya's account. Priya's partner had come to Australia to study and, after several years, she joined him on a bridging visa. When she arrived, it was not to a stable situation; she learned that her partner was dependent on a raft of illicit drugs and 'his whole life was terrible because of drugs and money-wise'. As their arguments grew more frequent, so did the violence she experienced. She characterised daily beatings as 'normal life'. Her partner controlled all their finances, including money she had earned from work, spending the bulk of their money on drugs and some food. She says she 'didn't know anything about Australia' and he appears not to have tried to share information about available services or resources. She needed clothes but 'didn't know at the time there's a Salvation Army or second-hand shop—nothing'. After she became pregnant, she debated whether or not she would apply for an intervention order and later left their home. She had no family or friends and knew of no services that could assist her. She had periods of homelessness while pregnant. Being on a bridging visa, she was not eligible for any assistance, so 'it was very hard to get help from other services or money or funding'.

Services assisted Priya in securing accommodation, support and a protection visa. The barriers faced by immigrant women and temporary migrants more broadly are compounded in rural areas, as Priya's account demonstrated (George & Harris 2014; Immigrant Women's Domestic Violence Service 2006; Mason & Pulvirenti 2013; Menjívar & Salcido 2002). Providing the help Priya needed was beyond the scope of their remit, given her visa status. They elected to work with her anyway. Given the spate of physical violence which she was subjected to and hospitalised for, the risk factors for homicide noted in her case, her homelessness, her lack of finances and resources, her pregnancy and the absence of informal supports, the dangers she and her child faced were grave. The intercession of a support service was likely key in saving her life.

Women's use of technology

Disengagement and safety work

Survivors were often expected or instructed to modify their use of technology, or felt that they needed to in order to combat or avoid abuse. They would change their online behaviour and their digital contact with friends and supports and close accounts. Maya changed her phone numbers multiple times. Lola spoke of family members and friends publicly supporting her ex on social media platforms. When she wrote a Facebook post about her experiences of shared parenting, she received abusive messages from her sister. 'He's got eyes everywhere,' Lola said, '[including] mutual friends and I don't doubt they are going and talking to him about everything.' Lola modified her use of social media and said 'I just don't post anything'. For women who were geographically and/or socially isolated, changing their use of technology weakened their ties to informal support networks. One survivor recounted:

> I had to change the security settings and figure out how to make everything private… I felt like I had to not post as much as I usually would. So I couldn't update my family on things that were happening with [my child]. My family is all long-distance…I felt like he'd ruined something good for me.

Women also spoke of managing their safety by restricting the information they shared via technology and contact with family and friends. Natalie explained that she has 'quite protective friends and so I've been guarded about telling them [in emails] what's going on too, because I don't want the craziness' of her abuser also targeting her loved ones.

Women described the discomfort and distress resulting from abusive digital conversations. Unfortunately, they felt they had to retain such messages as evidence. 'If I've deleted it, and he's got it, then it's almost like I'm lying about it,' one woman said, 'so you've got to keep it and have reference to it.' Focus group participants agreed: 'I have to keep everything otherwise he'll try and twist my words and use them against me.' Some women discussed how, to avoid exposure to digital harms, they had blocked numbers and contacts, but this meant that they missed out on opportunities to capture proof of technology-facilitated domestic violence. Survivors noted they were constantly collecting evidence and learning about safety settings and measures they might adopt. This burdened women with what has been termed 'safety work' (see Kelly's foreword in Vera-Gray 2017). That is, women are required to:

> …invest their time and energy to protect themselves from male violence, which, in the case of DCC [digital coercive control] entails that women become tech savvy. (Harris & Woodlock 2019: 540)

The labour, emotional toll and financial cost of safety work was ongoing, unrelenting and exhausting. Kira spoke of being 'more hyper-vigilant, because they can come any time and you can't stop it'. Women felt as though they also had to keep abreast of any changes in platforms, emerging technologies and app policy and operations, while still dealing with and recovering from ongoing violence. As Fiona asserted:

> …you can't keep up with it and you've done so much, when you're going through so much pain and trauma and you're trying to get your life back together, that's just something else to have to think about… trying to keep your children's emotions together as well, so you're like the backbone again.

Maya trusted her intuition—'my intuition is what kept me safe throughout this process'—and was certain that she and advocates assisting her had not detected all the tactics her ex had employed to stalk her via technology. She consulted with teams of people and said:

> I was getting frustrated and going downhill when I kept saying I have this feeling he knows where I am. They'd be like 'why do you think that?'

She persisted and discovered a raft of mechanisms and strategies he had employed to monitor her communications, activities and movements, but it was a long and stressful process. She still worried that there might be other channels he had used that she had missed.

The architecture (and sometimes management) of technology could inhibit women's safety work. Focus group participants reported that, because their abusers had blocked them on Facebook first:

> I can't unblock him because I'm already blocked and he can unblock me anytime he likes and go through my Facebook because we're still friends and I can't delete him, because I'm blocked.

Some participants had selected settings on their phones to block their abusers from calling or texting, but these settings did not always work. Additionally, some women spoke about the limited capacity of their devices as restricting the images and recordings they could save as evidence of interactions with perpetrators, for their protection.

Survivors performed—and are expected to perform—safety work, whereas the responsibility of perpetrators to change their behaviours received less attention. Claire said:

> …I didn't want to go home because I was scared of what [devices and software] was in my house. Even my lawyer said, 'look, if you don't have to talk to people, don't, until we can get this all figured out'. Yeah, it was literally – it was like I went into lockdown… Here I am, the one having to do it all and he's still running around having a wonderful life. So that's probably – that was some of the hardest things to have to accept as well. Just the fact that I'm the one being made out to be crazy and I'm the one having to do all the work… He just coasts on with life.

Likewise, Natalie knew her abuser could hack a phone so kept hers on her person but said 'I shouldn't have to do that'. Women asserted that perpetrators of technology-facilitated domestic violence need to be held to account:

> It's like you have to accept that this is the way it is for the moment until someone actually stands up and acknowledges it and goes 'this isn't right and we're going to do this about it'. But…no-one is prepared to do that… I'm not the only woman out there that's going through this and… why isn't more being done about it?

We found that, as in our other studies (Dragiewicz et al. 2019: 18), some survivors 'strategically used ICT as part of the safety work they did to protect themselves and their families', such as by 'enduring ongoing electronic monitoring and communication as part of their attempts to assess and manage threats posed by their abusers'. Priya, for example, said she kept lines of contact open because 'I'm scared to cut off the communication because he'll get very angry…he was angry [when] I stopped communication. That's why he is going to kill me'. This finding aligns with 'survivor theory', developed by Gondolf and Fisher (1988), that women are active strategists in their experiences of and responses to violence. As Holder (2001: 8) explains, 'abused women are very active in measures that seek to "manage", cope with and/or extricate themselves from the violence'. The women in our study used a range of strategies to respond to technology-facilitated violence, including seeking help from police, advocates and their social networks. This may manifest in survivors managing, negotiating and enduring technology-facilitated domestic violence.

Contact with family and friends

If survivors feel pressured to or elect to disengage from digital media and devices, their contact with social networks may weaken. Women may also have limited supports if their abuser has sought to isolate them, destroy their relationships with family or friends, or if the survivor's family members or friends have enacted abuse (as discussed in the sections *Proxy perpetrators* and *Using and coopting children*). In such circumstances, both real world and digital worlds could seem unfriendly or unsettling. When disclosing or responding to violence or exiting relationships, women might encounter opposition, aggression, disconnect and silence.

Yet technology can be a way to make contact with family and friends. For two of our participants who lived in areas they described as 'isolated', technology was important in overcoming geographic and social isolation. One woman said:

> It was quite an extreme situation and controlling… I have a good amount of friends… I'd be on the phone or I'd be texting, and that was my outlet for a crazy situation.

Using technology to seek information and support

Women who were aware that their use of technology was being monitored were reluctant to use their devices, so it is perhaps unsurprising that only three of the women in our study used technology to find information about responding to domestic violence or to locate a support service or legal assistance. Maya's abuser had access to some of her accounts and had installed tracking software on some of her devices. Consequently, she worried that her internet inquiries about her relationship and her abuser's traits would be detected. She explained:

> I learned very quickly, from early on in our relationship, that if I was going to Google anything I needed to figure out – if it was something like 'is somebody a narcissist?' or 'am I in an abusive relationship?' – that I needed to know how to delete that and delete it from the back way.

Of the other women who used technology to seek information and support, Natalie used Google to conduct research into domestic violence. Shelly joined a Facebook support group, which features 'women from overseas and everywhere', which she found:

> …really good, because people post stuff and you can read it and kind of relate. You can vent there as well, and it's a private group, so I've found that really helpful. That's been a great support and great help as well.

We note that advocates (domestic violence support workers, working in legal and non-legal capacities), practitioners and justice agencies (police and courts) are increasingly using technology (for details of these practices, see George & Harris 2014; Harris 2018; Harris, Dragiewicz & Woodlock 2020). Advocates, for instance, have used ICT to deliver information, provide assistance and referrals, and to build capacity and train workers within their organisations. Police and court agencies have used technologies such as body-worn video cameras to assist in gathering evidence of domestic violence, and they use the internet to provide information about formal responses to domestic violence and even to apply for intervention orders. There are many potential benefits to these applications, including extending the channels available to survivors seeking help, bolstering the number of survivors assisted, capacity building with limited resources, and enhancing responses to domestic violence.

Policy implications and recommendations

Domestic violence is a major criminal justice issue and represents a significant proportion of police duties (Segrave, Wilson & Fitz-Gibbon 2018; Special Taskforce on Domestic and Family Violence in Queensland 2015; State of Victoria 2016). In recent years there have been extensive reforms of police and judicial sectors, some stemming from large-scale reviews of police and judicial policy and practice (Queensland's Special Taskforce on Domestic and Family Violence in Queensland 2015; State of Victoria 2016). Such examinations of criminal justice agencies have typically noted that further domestic violence training is needed (Australian Law Reform Commission and New South Wales Law Reform Commission 2010; Bell et al. 2011).

The findings of this project have implications for community, government and non-government sectors, and we have outlined potential recommendations pertaining to these fields below.

Recommendations for agencies involved in responding to domestic violence

Training and education

Women called for more training and education for agencies involved in responding to domestic violence in recognising strategies and tactics of abusers, the dynamics of domestic violence and how trauma can manifest and present. This would, they believe, aid in identification of violence, the primary aggressor and risk assessment processes.

Increased recognition of technology-facilitated domestic violence

Awareness of technology-facilitated domestic violence is growing among advocates, practitioners and researchers. We note the importance of training offered by WESNET and the eSafety Commission which has contributed to further identification of and enhanced responses to this phenomenon, particularly in the domestic violence sector. We recommend that government (and, we would hope, industry) continue to support these agencies in their activities.

Unfortunately, women report that criminal justice responses frequently overlook and minimise digital violence or regard it as distinct from other forms of abuse. It is imperative that digital harms are seen in the context of women's broader experiences of violence. The criminal justice model is typically incident based, but only by examining the patterns of behaviours and the strategies and tactics employed by perpetrators that we can gain insight into a woman's experiences, the impacts of violence and the risks she faces. This is key to enhancing efforts to reduce and prevent violence and protect and empower survivors.

It is also important to appreciate that the spacelessness of technology-facilitated violence shapes how violence is enacted, perceived and responded to; it is difficult or impossible to escape this violence. The persistence, omnipresence and omnipotence of perpetrators using these channels can deter women from seeking assistance or separating from a perpetrator and negatively effects health, wellbeing and sense of security.

Incorporating technology-facilitated domestic violence in risk assessments

The use of technology by perpetrators could be an indicator of high-risk abuse occurring. Further police investigation of the patterns of digital abuse used by perpetrators in enacting domestic violence and when breaching domestic violence orders is needed. Additionally, it is vital that there be greater consideration of technology in risk assessments, as technological abuse can reveal key intel signalling risk of fatal violence. Noted 'homicide flags', including coercive and controlling behaviours, can be documented through technology, as can frequent, obsessive communications and stalking via technology.

Recommendations relating to safety work

Emphasising perpetrator responsibility

While advice on safety measures that women can take is valuable, survivors emphasised that perpetrators need to accept responsibility for and change their behaviours. In various studies, survivors have called for education in schools around healthy and respectful relationships to shift and challenge values that can foster and facilitate violence. Ideological shifts too can be pursued in the community alongside structural change that promotes gender equality and confronts power imbalances. Training in the justice sector (for instance, for police and magistrates) can also raise awareness of technology-facilitated domestic violence and contribute to efforts to hold perpetrators to account.

Information about online safety

We note that there are resources on online safety (including those produced by WESNET and the eSafety Commissioner) that can assist survivors in the safe use of technology. However, we note that many women are not aware of these sites and services and asked for resources in this arena. We advocate for further tech-safety education and promotion of available supports, aimed at agencies that respond to domestic violence and the broader community.

Recommendations for telecommunications companies

Enhanced responses to survivors

Telecommunication agencies need to understand how abusive relationships can complicate and impact on account ownership and finances. Survivors expressed frustration, anxiety and financial burdens associated with attempts to pay bills, separate their accounts from their abuser and gain control of accounts. We acknowledge there has been progress in this area with some providers but emphasise that more progress is undoubtedly needed.

Recommendations for researchers

Spacelessness of technology-facilitated violence and the impact of space

To understand the full ramifications of technology-facilitated abuse for victim–survivors, the spacelessness of this abuse needs to be emphasised. The ubiquity of technology in women's lives and the surveillance tactics used by perpetrators often result in women feeling that abuse is inescapable. However, perpetration and experiences of technological abuse are shaped by features of geography and community. The location in which women live, specific cultural notions of masculinity and femininity, understandings of domestic violence and the resources available for help also impact how technology-facilitated abuse is responded to and regulated.

Image-based sexual abuse in the context of domestic violence

We aver that further research needs to be conducted on the use of IBSA within the context of domestic violence. The impact of pornography on the enactment of harm and in abusive relationships also warrants research; we note that IBSA is often distributed via pornography websites.

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