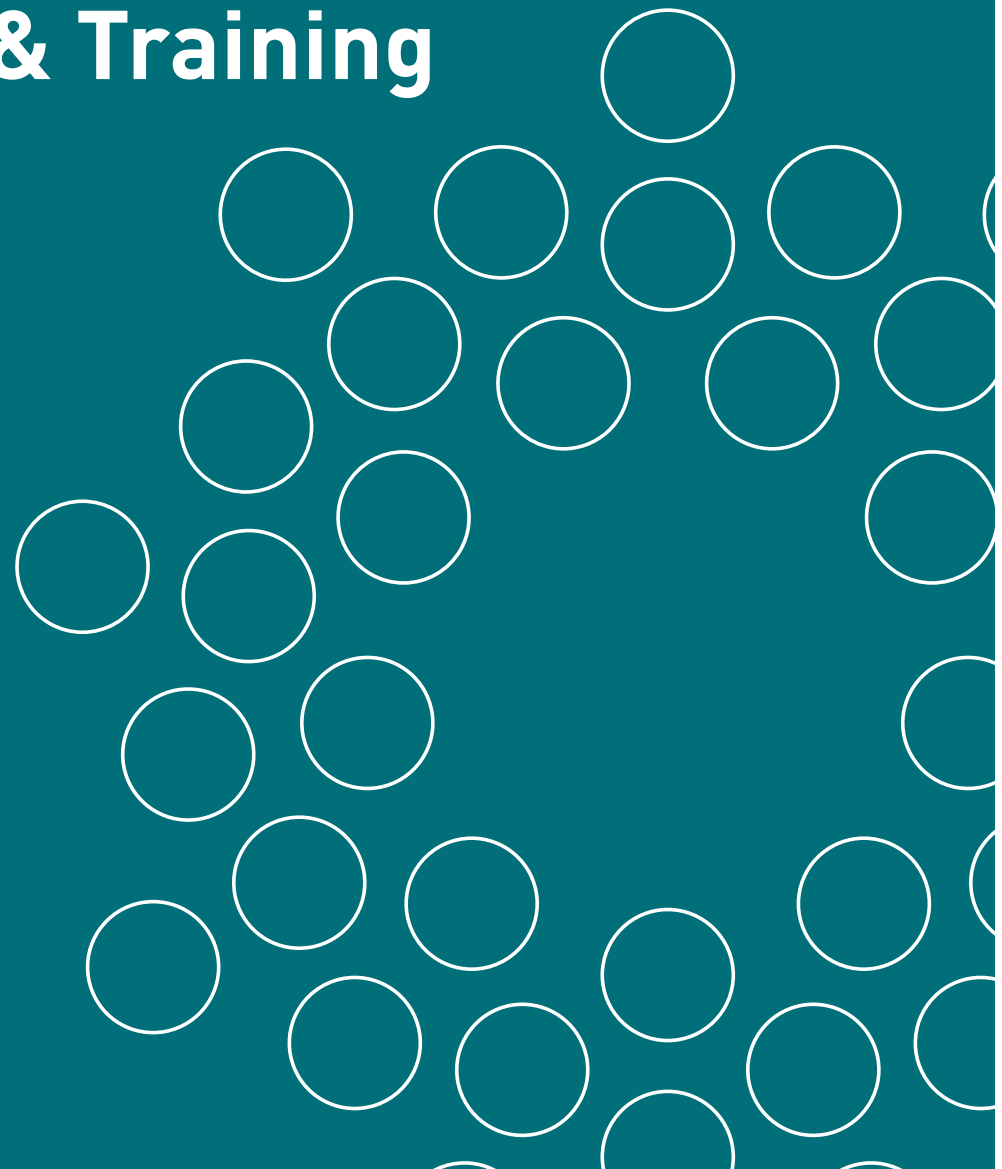


National study findings 2015

# ReCharge: Women's Technology Safety, Legal Resources, Research & Training



The *ReCharge: Women's Technology Safety* project is a collaboration between Women's Legal Service NSW, Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria and WESNET, funded by the Australian Communications Consumer Action Network

# Table of contents

---

Introduction .....	3
Profile of participants .....	4
Types of technology used .....	5
How technology is being used to abuse, control and humiliate women .....	7
Abuse .....	7
Threats .....	7
Monitoring.....	9
Humiliating and punishing .....	10
Particular risks for women from different cultural and community groups .....	11
Impacts on women from technology-facilitated stalking and abuse .....	13
Legal responses .....	15
Effective police responses.....	17
Are current legal protections sufficient?.....	19
Conclusion .....	20
References .....	22

## **Suggested citation**

Woodlock, Delanie (2015) ReCharge: Women’s Technology Safety, Legal Resources, Research and Training, Women’s Legal Service NSW, Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria and WESNET, Collingwood.

# Introduction

---

In 2013, DVRCV conducted the first Australian study into the use of technology by perpetrators in the context of domestic violence. This Victorian-based study, called SmartSafe, utilised a multiple-methods approach and included two surveys: one with 152 domestic violence sector practitioners, and one with 46 women who had experienced domestic violence. The findings showed that the use of technology by perpetrators to stalk and abuse women was a significant emerging issue in Victoria.

Building on this research, DVRCV has been working with Women's Legal Services NSW and WESNET to investigate technology-facilitated abuse in Australia. As part of this, we conducted an online survey for domestic violence sector practitioners in Australia between November 2014 and February 2015. The survey not only examined what and how technology is being used by perpetrators, but also how frequently practitioners were seeing technology-facilitated abuse.

Our decision to survey domestic violence sector practitioners reflects our commitment to prioritising 'practice-based knowledge' (Coy & Garner, 2012). There is much debate about whether practice-based evidence should be regarded as empirical knowledge or seen as more anecdotal information. Coy and Garner assert that these debates challenge traditional orthodoxies of research, and hierarchies of knowledge that privilege the role of academic 'experts', stating:

*Support workers from specialised organisations are frequently interviewed in studies ... because their relationship with service users affords a depth of knowledge and expertise which is often inaccessible to even the most skilled researchers (2012, p. 296).*

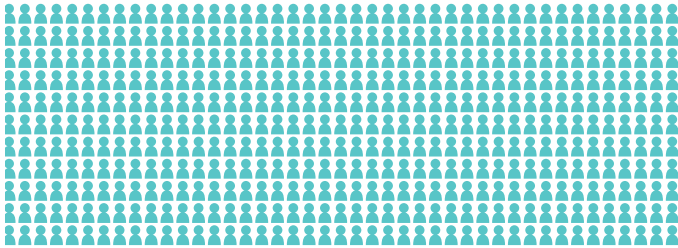
We consider the experiences of domestic violence sector practitioners as primary knowledge sources within our research work, and their participation in our survey has enabled us to gain a deep insight into the issue of technology-facilitated abuse.<sup>1</sup>



<sup>1</sup> It is, however, important to acknowledge that research with support workers does have limitations—in particular, they may not recall events accurately and their estimation of the number of clients impacted by technology-facilitated abuse and stalking could be inaccurate.

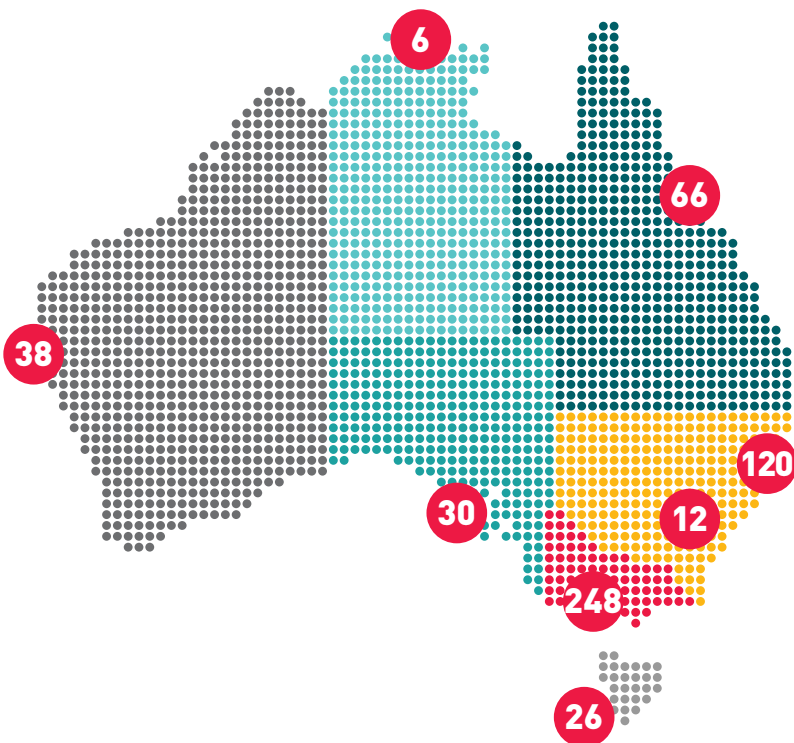
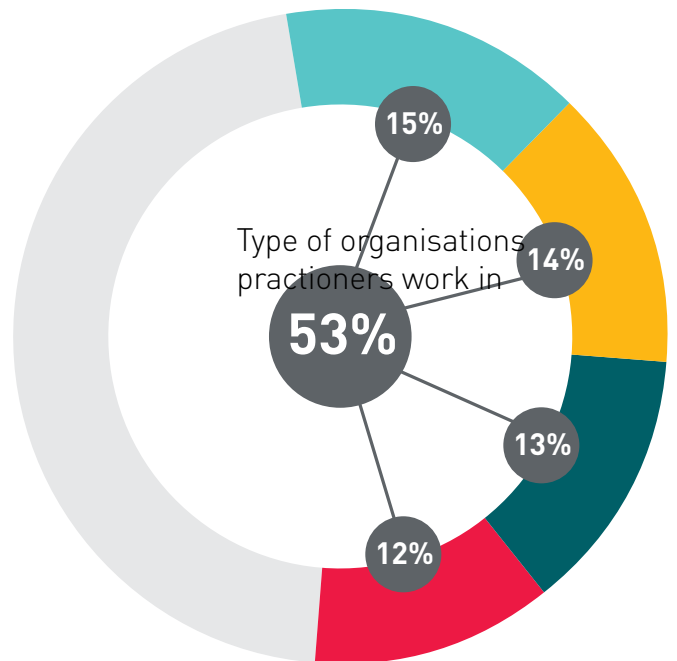
# Profile of participants

Overall, 546 domestic violence sector practitioners participated in our survey.



**546** domestic violence sector practitioners participated in our survey

The majority of practitioners (53 per cent) specified that they worked directly in domestic violence organisations, with others working in legal organisations (15 per cent), sexual assault (14 per cent), housing (13 per cent) and health organisations (12 per cent). Other respondents specified workplaces such as child protection and community development.



The majority of our survey participants were from either Victoria (45 per cent) or New South Wales (22 per cent), with most working in major cities (49 per cent) or regional centres (32 per cent).

# Types of technology used



Almost all survey respondents (98 per cent) stated that they had clients who had experienced technology-facilitated stalking and abuse.

**1 In the practitioner's experience, the type of technology most commonly used by perpetrators was text messaging.** This observation corresponds with our previous survey, in which 80 per cent of survivors said they had been abused via text messages (Woodlock, 2013). The findings are also similar to the Safety Net Technology Safety Survey from the US, in which practitioners reported that women were most commonly abused using text messages (NNEDV, 2014).

Practitioners described how perpetrators were often sending large numbers of text messages per day, creating a sense for women that they could not escape the perpetrator:

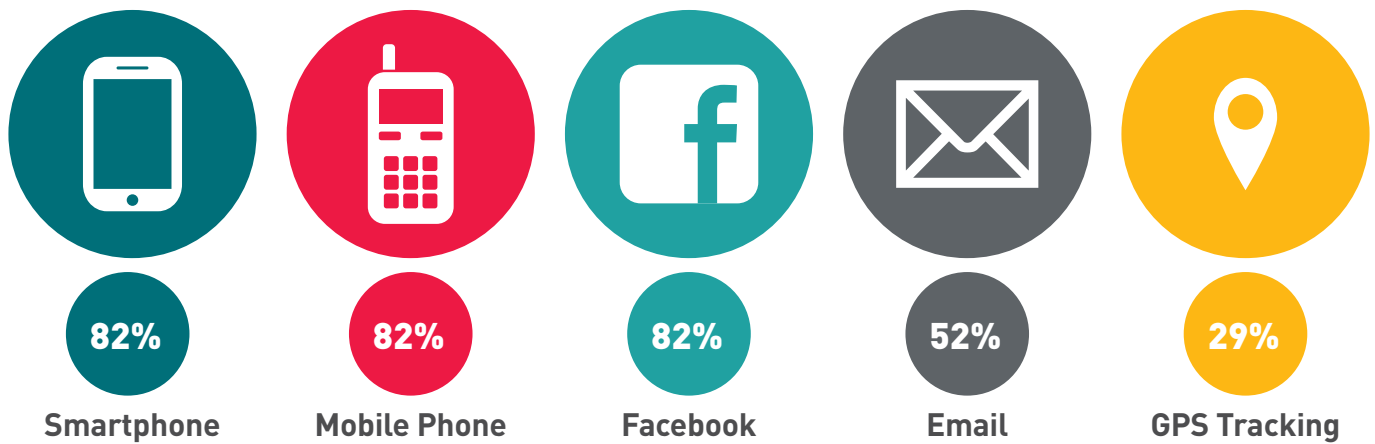


*One client I worked with received approximately 30 plus messages and missed calls during our 60-minute counselling session. This makes them feel like they have nowhere that is safe.*

**2 According to practitioners, Facebook was the next most commonly used technology.** Practitioners reported that perpetrators often contacted or harassed women by making comments on their Facebook timelines. A study from Deakin University also found that Facebook was being used by perpetrators to abuse women, noting that women often had great difficulty in getting support from Facebook to remove these harassing posts (George & Harris, 2014).

## Types of technology used

### Most commonly used technology by perpetrators



**3 The use of GPS tracking via smartphone apps was considered by practitioners to be another commonly used technology by perpetrators**, with 40 per cent stating that it was occurring 'sometimes', and a further 34 per cent stating they said they saw this 'often' or 'all the time' in their work. The number of practitioners in our 2013 survey who reported seeing GPS technology being abused by perpetrators was 29 per cent.<sup>2</sup> The increase identified in the current research could show that practitioners are now more aware of this type of technology and how it is being used, or may be an indication that perpetrators' use of GPS is increasing in Australia.

Practitioners reported that, while this was not the most common form of technology-facilitated abuse they were seeing in their work, it was a form of technology that enabled perpetrators to not only track women but also to cause enormous fear. One practitioner wrote:

*A number of clients have informed me their location had been tracked by a GPS track finder application and they receive threatening and intimidating messages from the perpetrator saying 'they know where they are and to look out'.*

<sup>2</sup> Our first SmartSafe survey in Victoria did not measure the frequency of types of abuse. This number, therefore, represents an overall figure.

# How technology is being used to abuse, control and humiliate women

---

In order to learn more about the ways in which different technologies can be used to abuse, threaten, monitor and humiliate women, we asked practitioners about the nature and frequency of different perpetrator tactics.

**I KNOW WHERE YOU ARE**



## Abuse

According to survey respondents, **perpetrators are most commonly using text, email or instant messages to abuse women**, call them names and put them down, with 47 per cent of practitioners stating that this was happening 'all the time'. **Perpetrators also frequently use phone calls (to mobiles or landline phones) to verbally abuse**, call women names and put women down, with 45 per cent of practitioners stating that this was happening 'all the time'.

**Verbal threats to harm were the most common behaviour, with 33 per cent seeing this 'all the time'**



## Threats

When asked about the kinds of threatening tactics used by perpetrators via technology, practitioners stated that phone calls (to mobiles or landline phones), in which **perpetrators made verbal threats to harm, were the most common behaviour**, with 46 per cent seeing this 'often' in their work, and a further 33 per cent seeing this 'all the time'. Practitioners felt that perpetrators used phone calls because it did not leave evidence:

*Perpetrators seem aware of legal ramifications so they threaten less in writing form and more in verbal.*

## How technology is being used to abuse, control and humiliate women

---

Veiled threats were commonly mentioned by practitioners as a tactic used by perpetrators, and women often found it difficult to prove that the threats were serious. For example, one practitioner told us:

*Police [are] often very reluctant to accept evidence of 'I'm going to get you! You're toast!' [and to recognise that it is] really a threat. Sometimes only the victim understands the threat level in code/type words, which is insufficient as proof.*

Another practitioner stated that perpetrators intentionally make threats in obscure ways so that they can avoid being seen to breach protective orders:

*Threats may be indirect or phrased in a way that may avoid 'breaching' an apprehended violence order, yet the woman knows it has a threatening intention and may be afraid.*

Logan, Walker, Cole, & Shannon (2006) argue

that a violent partner often knows how to specifically torment their victim, using their intimate knowledge to threaten her in ways that may not seem obvious to others, but cause enormous fear for the victim.

**Nearly two-thirds of practitioners felt that social media was being used by perpetrators to make threats**, with 39 per cent saying they say this 'often' with their clients and a further 23 per cent saying they saw this 'all the time'. These threats, many practitioners noted, were frequently made via friends' or family members' accounts, which is known as proxy stalking. Proxy stalking refers to a perpetrator using other people to contact the victim. Melton (2007) argues that a woman may find proxy stalking more terrifying than other forms of stalking because it involves numerous people threatening her.







## Monitoring

Nearly three-quarters of survey respondents reported that their clients had their text messages and phones checked by the perpetrator without permission, with 45 per cent of respondents saying that they saw this behaviour happening 'often' and a further 29 per cent saying they saw it 'all the time'.

Perpetrators are also commonly using text, email or instant messages to check women's whereabouts, with 46 per cent of practitioners 'often' seeing clients experiencing this kind of behaviour, and a further 23 per cent seeing clients who experienced this behaviour 'all the time'.

Banking and other online data are other common ways in which women are being tracked. One practitioner wrote:

*One client had her bank details checked by her suspicious and jealous partner who advised her by SMS that he knew exactly where she was at all times. When the whole scenario was unpacked, it became evident that he knew her whereabouts [because] she had been to an ATM and checked her account and was charged the \$2 fee. Then he traced her to Kmart, where she had used her EFTPOS card in a purchase.*

## How technology is being used to abuse, control and humiliate women

### Humiliating and punishing

**Nearly half of the practitioners surveyed had clients who had reported perpetrators threatening to distribute or post private photos/videos of them**, with 35 per cent of respondents seeing this behaviour 'often' and a further 14 per cent seeing it 'all the time'. These threats were used as a way to control women – for example, to prevent them leaving the relationship or with taking out a protective order. One respondent explained:

*It is common for perpetrators to threaten to release videos/photos of women of a sexual nature, to control them/stop them going to the police or getting an intervention order.*

Another practitioner stated:

*We see mostly sexualised violence in our work-partners threatening women with videos and pictures. The main damage comes when this is used to keep women in the relationship when they want to leave but are scared that [the perpetrator] will release the images.*

Nearly half (42 per cent) of respondents stated that perpetrators 'sometimes' followed through with their threats and distributed intimate photos or videos. Practitioners provided examples of this type of abuse, which is also known as 'revenge porn' or non-consensual sexting:

*A client's former husband has posted sexually graphic photos of her on Facebook. She thinks this has happened whilst being drugged, as he has drugged her several times.*



Another respondent similarly commented:

*One of my clients had an explicit photo of her emailed to members of an adult site, without her knowledge or consent, by her partner (they were together at the time, not separated) who is a senior sergeant in the police force.<sup>3</sup>*

A Victorian inquiry into 'sexting' reported examples of the use of non-consensual sexting in domestic violence (Law Reform Committee, 2013).<sup>4</sup> Anecdotal evidence provided to the inquiry revealed that perpetrators are using mobile-phone images and videos of women – provided consensually or coercively – to threaten, harass and control victims of domestic violence (Law Reform Committee 2013, p. 24). As a result, new sexting legislation was introduced in Victoria in 2014. This legislation prohibits the intentional distribution of an intimate image where that distribution is contrary to community standards of acceptable conduct. The legislation also prohibits people threatening to distribute such intimate images.



<sup>3</sup> Several practitioners in our survey mentioned that members of the police force who were abusive partners or ex-partners were particularly skilled in using technology to facilitate abuse in ways that were difficult for women to prove and escape from.

<sup>4</sup> Sexting is defined by the committee as 'the creating, sharing, sending or posting of sexually explicit messages or images via the internet, mobile phones or other electronic devices'.

# Particular risks for women from different cultural and community groups

Practitioners were asked whether they had noticed **particular issues for different groups of women** regarding technology abuse and stalking. In general, practitioners felt that perpetrators would exploit any perceived vulnerabilities that women had, particularly if they were from a small community and the perpetrator could effectively use technology to further isolate them. One practitioner commented:

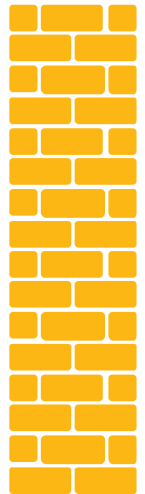
*The more vulnerable the cohort is, the more opportunities are available to abuse.*

The group most commonly identified as facing particular risks in relation to technology-facilitated abuse was women from non-English speaking countries. Practitioners reported that perpetrators exploited the social isolation and language barriers faced by these women, and deliberately isolated them further by restricting their access to technology, which women often relied on to stay in contact with friends and family. One practitioner reported:

*Australian men who sponsor their partners, who are women from a CALD background, will often take away their phone and internet access, causing social isolation.*

## CALD WOMEN FACE ADDITIONAL BARRIERS TO SAFETY:

- language .....
- isolation .....
- strict cultural beliefs.....
- fear of police & courts.....
- immigration risks .....
- financial support .....



Practitioners noted that often perpetrators' families also participated in the abuse of women:

*It appears to me that many women from CALD backgrounds receive threats through third parties on [sites such as] Facebook more often than other groups. Often, whole families get involved in the abuse of a victim.*

Perpetrators could also effectively use technology in their abuse of women with disabilities. Again, perpetrators exploited women's social isolation, and their reliance on technology for their communication. One practitioner said:

*For women with disability, there may be a higher need for using technologies to communicate or link in with services and the community.*

## Particular risks for women from different cultural and community groups

---



Another practitioner explained the myriad of ways that women with cognitive disabilities can be abused and controlled via technology:

*I work specifically with women with intellectual disabilities. I believe they are less likely to be aware of the different ways in which technology can be used to track and abuse. They also have more difficulty accessing and understanding information about how they can protect themselves, such as privacy settings on Facebook. They experience high levels of social disadvantage and poverty so are less likely to have a phone with advanced features, such as a setting through which you can block callers.*

Practitioners felt that perpetrators were using technology in specific ways to abuse Aboriginal women, particularly due to the importance placed on community and connection within Aboriginal cultures. One respondent stated:

*Indigenous women may need to use technology to keep connected to their mob, culture and community but this can place their whereabouts/situation known to the perpetrator if they also have the same connections.*

Practitioners reported that this connection to community can make it easier to publically humiliate Aboriginal women, with one commenting:

*Using technology such as Facebook to abuse Indigenous women places the woman at further risk from other parties, such as other family members, by spreading information or inviting others to abuse the woman. Technology such as phones can be used to put down the woman or spread rumours around the community, which places the woman at greater risk and decreases her feelings of self-worth.*

# Impacts on women from technology-facilitated stalking and abuse

---

The survey included a mixture of closed questions (such as multiple choice questions) and open questions (where practitioners could provide as much information as they were able to about specific issues). We asked practitioners how technology-facilitated stalking and abuse impacted women, and practitioners gave much detail about the ways in which women's lives are impacted by this violence.

## **'Forever looking over their shoulder'**

One of the key themes that emerged from the survey was the anxiety created in women's lives and the sense that they had to always be on high alert. One practitioner explained:

*It adds to the women's anxiety and hypervigilance [to think] 'He seems to be everywhere I am but I don't know how he could?' or 'I cannot get away from him, he is everywhere' when they have left the relationship. [They are being] bombarded with text messages, messages on Facebook etc.*

Practitioners said that technology easily enables a perpetrator to constantly monitor and harass his partner or ex-partner, and this can result in constant fear. One practitioner stated:

*Women feel like they are under constant surveillance, they feel vulnerable and powerless, and they feel like nowhere is safe. They are often hypervigilant, anxious and depressed as a result.*

One of the most noted impacts that practitioners detailed was the way in which technology-facilitated stalking and abuse left women feeling like they could not escape the perpetrator. One respondent wrote:

*Women have often commented that they feel they 'can't escape' or ever get any relief from the monitoring or abuse because smartphones and the internet allow him to be there all the time.*

Hand, Chung, & Peters, (2009) argue that spatial boundaries of security for women leaving domestic violence have shifted due to the global reach of mobile technologies, which can erode women's sense of 'feeling safe' (p. 3) after leaving a violent relationship.

The use of technology to abuse women also resulted in them being fearful to use their phones, which makes it harder for them to receive support from services. One practitioner wrote:

*The vast majority of women indicate that the technology-facilitated abuse makes them feel powerless and controlled. They are unable to 'escape' the constant abuse. It can also make it difficult to get in contact with the women as they are reluctant to answer numbers that are [listed as] private or from numbers that are unknown to them.*

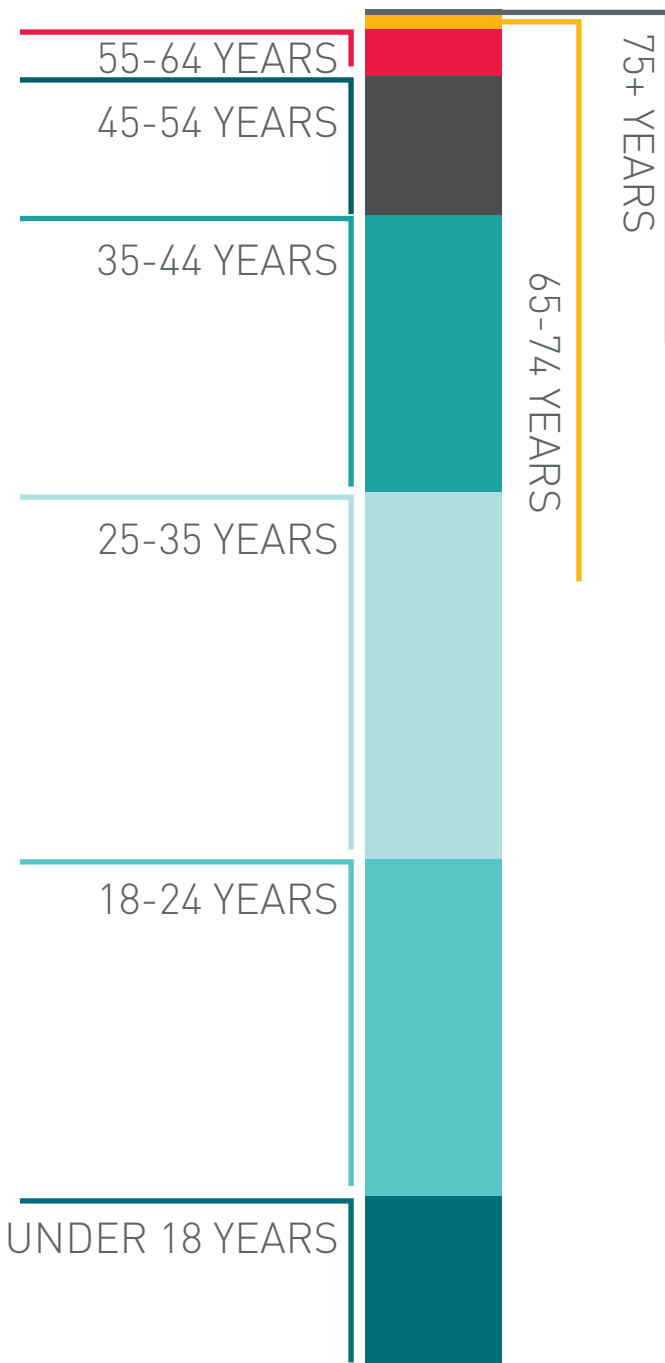
## **'Life-changing'**

According to survey respondents, the abuse that women experienced via technology such as Facebook left them humiliated and ashamed, as the abuse was public and usually witnessed by friends, family and even their children. One practitioner explained:

*It can be life-changing. The humiliation and shame from having things publicly written on Facebook, for example, can lead to family cutting women off, to them having to move, leave the country, [and] lose all their friends.*

## Impacts on women from technology-facilitated stalking and abuse

### AGE GROUPS OF WOMEN MOST AFFECTED BY TECHNOLOGY FACILITATED ABUSE



Stark (2012, p. 25) writes that perpetrators often say or do things in a public setting to insult or embarrass victims, usually as a tactic to silence them. The intent appears to be to damage women's relationships with others and to embarrass women, which Stark argues is a key tactic perpetrators use to isolate women and control them.

Practitioners also highlighted the sexualised nature of much of the abuse, with perpetrators often using threats to share intimate photos and videos of women as a way to control them. One practitioner stated:

*Women are humiliated by the abuse, particularly when perpetrators release photos/videos of a sexual nature of women. Some women feel absolutely 'stuck', 'trapped', powerless and totally controlled when perpetrators threaten to release photos or videos of a sexual nature to family, friends and work colleges especially if they have children and do not want them to find out. This stops [women] from seeking police interventions and intervention orders.*

Embarrassment and shame is a significant barrier to women seeking help about the abuse they are experiencing (Rose et al., 2011). In addition, embarrassing their victim is a tactic often used by perpetrators, who will deliberately shame women in order to isolate and control them (Fugate, Landis, Riordan, Naureckas & Engel, 2005).

## Legal responses

---



**A SIGNIFICANT AIM OF THIS RESEARCH WAS TO GAIN KNOWLEDGE ABOUT LEGAL RESPONSES TO TECHNOLOGY-FACILITATED ABUSE AND STALKING, AND TO MEASURE THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THESE RESPONSES.**

Our focus in the research was on police and court systems, in particular looking at whether police were taking this form of abuse seriously, and whether practitioners felt current laws were sufficient to protect women from technology-facilitated abuse and stalking.

When asked whether they believed that police took technology-facilitated abuse seriously, 62 per cent of respondents thought that this happened 'sometimes', but it was dependent on the officer involved. Nearly one-fifth (17 per cent) felt that police 'rarely' took technology-facilitated abuse seriously, while 13 per cent said that police 'always' took the abuse seriously. It is clear from these responses that there is inconsistency in the way that police are responding to technology-facilitated abuse and stalking. In order to further explore this issue, we asked practitioners to explain why they felt that police may not be taking technology-facilitated abuse seriously.

Practitioners reported that police were quite limited in their resourcing to help with technology-facilitated abuse, and that more physical forms of violence were often seen as a priority. One practitioner remarked:

*Officers have stated there is little they can do.*

Similarly, another stated:

*Police have limited power in their role. The perceived severity of risk of technology abuse is lower (ie, not physical) therefore police have other priorities.*

While non-physical abuse, such as technology-facilitated abuse and stalking, may be considered as less serious than other forms of abuse, stalking by an intimate partner has been linked to an increased risk of homicide. One study found that 68 per cent of women experienced stalking within the 12 months prior to an attempted or actual homicide (McFarlane, Campbell, & Watson, 2002, p. 64). The most frequent types of intimate stalking behaviours preceding attempted or actual homicides included following or spying, making unwanted phone calls, and keeping the victim under surveillance (McFarlane et al., 2002).



## Legal responses

---

Participants in the survey were asked to further detail why they felt that police might not be taking technology-facilitated abuse seriously. The two main themes that emerged from the practitioner responses were that police often claimed that there was not enough proof that it was the perpetrator who was using the technology, and that police seemed to blame the woman for the abuse.

While technology such as text messaging can leave clear evidence of abuse, practitioners reported that police would often claim that this was not enough to show that it was actually the perpetrator sending the text message. For example, one practitioner wrote:

*Police often say they can't be sure the perpetrator actually sent the messages, even though they can prove they were sent from his phone.*

The use of social media, such as Facebook, was also seen as difficult to link to the perpetrator:

*They have difficulties proving that the abuse is occurring, anyone can hack into your Facebook account or set up a false profile, therefore it is fraught with many problems.*

Practitioners also reported that perpetrators themselves would exploit the difficulties that police had in linking them to the abuse:

*Perpetrator may use someone else's phone or claim his phone was lost or stolen and it wasn't him that works a treat.*

Another issue highlighted by the respondents was that police would sometimes blame the woman for the abuse by telling her that she should just stop using technology such as Facebook. One practitioner explained:

*Often police put the responsibility back onto the woman and say she should stop visiting Facebook or using devices.*

Similarly, another respondent stated:

*Police can also blame the women and make a judgment that the women are encouraging the men to keep contact.*

And another wrote:

*Police tend to blame the victim for the abuse occurring, [saying] 'just get off social media'.*

Practitioners felt that there was a lack of understanding from police as to how important social connection was for women experiencing abuse, and that telling women to simply turn off their devices could add to their isolation. One respondent commented:

*Police may believe that the woman may be able to switch off her devices and stop the abuse. However, this may isolate the woman from her support network and may be problematic if there are arrangements to be made about access to children.*

Isolation is often a key tactic used by perpetrators to control their victims and it is important that advice given to women does not add further to her sense of being 'cut off'. Isolation from family and friends, and a lack of social supports after a traumatic experience, are linked with higher levels of psychological distress (Logan & Walker 2009, p. 259). Isolation also contributes to depression and suicidal behaviour in victims of domestic violence (World Health Organization, 2013).



## Effective police responses

---



**...WHEN POLICE TOOK THE TIME TO CHECK THROUGH WOMEN'S SMARTPHONES AND SOCIAL MEDIA ACCOUNTS, THEN THEY WERE USUALLY ABLE TO TAKE ACTION.**

While there were practitioners who were critical of police responses to technology-facilitated abuse and stalking, there were numerous positive examples provided by respondents of police taking women's experiences seriously. Practitioners wrote that when police took the time to check through women's smartphones and social media accounts, then they were usually able to take action.

One practitioner provided a good example of police taking women's concerns seriously:

*Taking the phone or computer and extracting data. Also, taking the time to investigate and at least try and report it as a breach rather than brushing it off.*

Another example given showed that, while it can take time for police to thoroughly examine evidence of technology-facilitated abuse, it can make a significant difference on the outcome for the victim:

*It doesn't happen often, but when police put time and resources into investigating complex technology-facilitated abuse it can make a big difference. For example, an ex-partner who hacked into a woman's emails and then sent emails to himself and other friends from her email address. Police went to some trouble to provide evidence that connected the ex-partner to the emails. Also, police used an expert witness to explain how a defendant had made up false email accounts and was responsible for a whole raft of technological abuses, including posting naked photos on the internet.*

## Effective police responses

---

Several practitioners commented that police could still make a case against a perpetrator, even if he had taken steps to hide his identity:

When it has been slightly unclear that it was the respondent who was breaching the order, some police officers have used the technology to confirm that it was the respondent. The police were then able to charge the respondent for all the other related breaches via technology.

And similarly:

*I have been involved in a case where the perpetrator used a Telstra public phone to send private text messages. The apprehended violence order was initially not applied for because police were unable to establish his identity. However, after collaboratively working together and finding alternative ways of identifying his actions, we were able to prove this person was the sender of the message. Police went out of their way to establish this and an apprehended violence order was put in place.*

Practitioners commented that women with protection orders in place had good outcomes with the police when the contact made by the perpetrator using technology was seen as a breach of this order. One practitioner explained:

*In Victoria, men have been charged with one breach of the intervention order for each individual text message sent (but no criminal charges attached to this usually).*

Another similarly stated:

*Police have taken copies of the messages and used them to prosecute breaches to the intervention order.*

# Are current legal protections sufficient?

Survey respondents were asked whether they felt that there was enough legal protection available for women who were experiencing technology-facilitated stalking and abuse. The majority of practitioners believed that the laws were adequate relating to this issue, but that they weren't being used effectively. This concurs with a recent examination of legal protections for women experiencing technology-facilitated abuse. Sun (2015, p. 79) found that, while there are legal remedies in place to assist victims of technology-facilitated stalking and abuse, 'existing laws are not used as often as they could be, and when they are used, it sometimes requires a creative application of the law to meet the needs of the victim'.

One survey respondent agreed, saying:

*The laws are generally fine. Police just need better training to consider technology as serious abuse and to not put the onus on women to change their behaviour.*

Another practitioner commented:

*There are various laws to deal with this, intervention orders specifically include this. I feel that the issue is to get police to recognise and act on it.*

Respondents felt that, in order for the laws to work, police and magistrates need to take technology-facilitated stalking and abuse seriously. One practitioner wrote:

*A breach is a breach. If it states on the intervention order for the perpetrator not to contact the victim then it should be taken seriously by the police ... [The law] needs to be enforced regardless of how big or small [the breach] and it's not only the police who need to follow this law – it's the magistrates too.*

Likewise, another respondent highlighted the need for police and courts to take the abuse seriously:

*The police, and more generally courts/ magistrates, need to be educated around the impact of domestic violence and sexual assault and that abuse via technology is part of a whole raft of things that may or may not be used by offenders.*

## RESOURCES NEEDED



## Conclusion

---

Our national survey of domestic violence sector practitioners indicates that there is a significant issue throughout Australia of perpetrators using technology to facilitate their abuse of women. Text messages, social media such as Facebook, mobile phones and GPS are being used by perpetrators to control and intimidate women and children in the context of domestic violence. The impact of this abuse on women's lives is significant, with women feeling they are under surveillance 24 hours a day, and that they need to be constantly looking over their shoulder.

Participants in the research noted that there are specific risks around technology-facilitated abuse for women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, with perpetrators using technology to further isolate women from their family and friends. Aboriginal women and women with disabilities were also seen as being at particular risk of technology-facilitated abuse.

The police response to technology-facilitated abuse was seen as mixed, with many practitioners noting that police often do not view this form of abuse as seriously as physical forms of violence. However, there were examples of effective police responses where police took the time and made the effort to take technology-facilitated abuse seriously.

Research in this emerging area is scarce and it is clear from the findings of our research that this is an issue of significant concern for domestic violence sector practitioners. Women experiencing domestic violence are being abused via technology and this abuse has an enormous impact on their lives, restricting their movements, creating fear and causing issues for their health and wellbeing. It is imperative that research in this area continues, and that we create evidence-based solutions in order to effectively support women experiencing technology-facilitated abuse and, ultimately, to prevent this abuse from occurring.



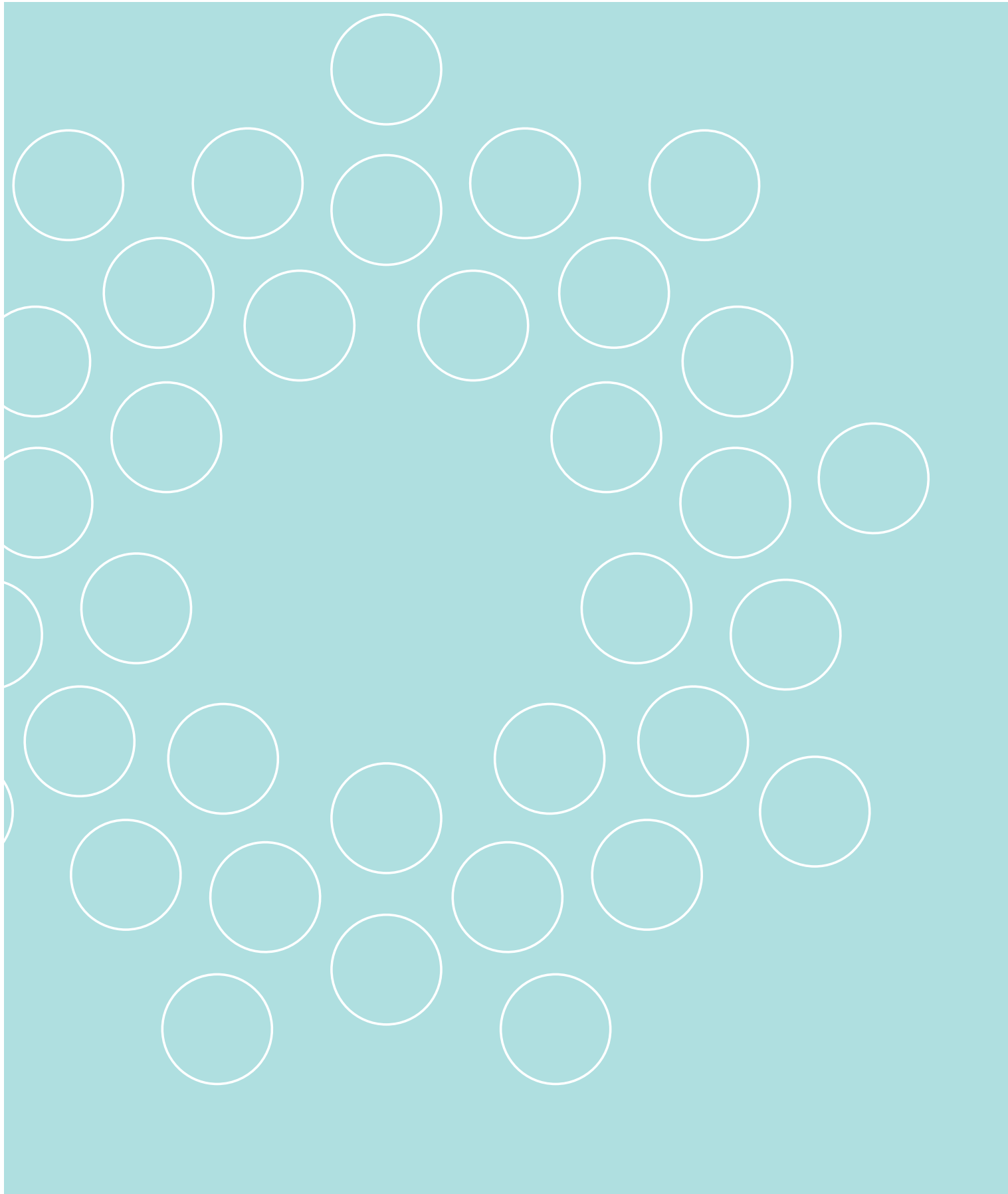
Women experiencing domestic violence are being abused via technology and this abuse has an enormous impact on their lives, restricting their movements, creating fear and causing issues for their health and wellbeing. It is imperative that research in this area continues, and that we create evidence-based solutions in order to effectively support women experiencing technology-facilitated abuse and, ultimately, to prevent this abuse from occurring.

## References

---

- Coy, M. & Garner, M. (2012) 'Definitions, discourses and dilemmas: policy and academic engagement with the sexualisation' *Gender & Education*, 24(3) 285-301
- Fugate, M., Landis, L., Riordan, K., Naureckas, S., & Engel, B. (2005). Barriers to domestic violence help seeking: Implications for intervention. *Violence Against Women*, 11, 290– 310
- George, A., & Harris, B. (2014). *Landscapes Of Violence: Women Surviving Family Violence in Regional and Rural Victoria*. Deakin University, Geelong
- Hand, T., Chung, D., & Peters, M. (2009). *The use of information and communication technologies to coerce and control in domestic violence and following separation*. (Stakeholder Paper 6). Retrieved on 23 June, 2015, from Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearinghouse website: [http://www.adfvc.unsw.edu.au/PDF%20files/Stakeholder%20Paper\\_6.pdf](http://www.adfvc.unsw.edu.au/PDF%20files/Stakeholder%20Paper_6.pdf)
- Law Reform Committee. (2013). Inquiry into sexting: Report of the Law Reform Committee for the inquiry into sexting. (Parliamentary Paper No. 230, Session 2010–2013). Retrieved on 23 June, 2015, from Parliament of Victoria website: [http://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/images/stories/committees/lawreform/isexting/LRC\\_Sexting\\_Final\\_Report.pdf](http://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/images/stories/committees/lawreform/isexting/LRC_Sexting_Final_Report.pdf)
- Logan, T., & Walker, R. (2009). Partner stalking: Psychological dominance or "business as usual"? *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*, 10, 247–270
- Logan, T., Walker, R., Cole, J., & Shannon, L. (2006). *Partner stalking: How women respond, cope, and survive*. New York: Springer Publishing Company
- McFarlane, J., Campbell, J. C., & Watson, K. (2002). Intimate partner stalking and femicide: Urgent implications for women's safety. *Behavioral Sciences and the Law*, 20, 51–68

- 
- Melton, H. C. (2007). Stalking in the context of intimate partner abuse: In the victims' words. *Feminist Criminology*, 2, 347–363
  - NNEDV (2014) 'A Glimpse from the Field: How Abusers Are Misusing Technology', Safety Net Technology Safety Survey. Retrieved on 23 June, 2015, from the Technology Safety website: <http://techsafety.org/blog/2015/2/17/a-glimpse-from-the-field-how-abusers-are-misusing-technology>
  - Rose, D., Trevillion, K., Woodall, A., Morgan, C., Feder, G., & Howard, L. (2011). Barriers and facilitators of disclosures of domestic violence by mental health service users: Qualitative study. *The British Journal of Psychiatry*, 198, 189–194
  - Stark, E. (2012). Looking beyond domestic violence: Policing coercive control [Special issue]. *Journal of Police Crisis Negotiations*, 12, 199–217
  - Sun, L. (2015). Technology-Facilitated Stalking and Abuse: Putting our Legal Framework to the Test. *Law Society Journal*, June 2015
  - Woodlock, D. (2013) *Technology-facilitated Stalking: Findings and Recommendations from the SmartSafe Project*, Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria, Collingwood
  - World Health Organization. (2013). *Global and regional estimates of violence against women: Prevalence and health effects of intimate partner violence and non-partner sexual violence*. Retrieved on 23 June, 2015, from the World Health Organization website: [http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/85239/1/9789241564625\\_eng.pdf](http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/85239/1/9789241564625_eng.pdf)



For more information on the ReCharge project and to download resources including national legal guides, go to [www.smartsafe.org.au](http://www.smartsafe.org.au)