

SmartSafe project research evaluation



Project rationale and aims

This evaluation report reviews the activities and research of the SmartSafe project conducted by the Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria and funded by Victoria Legal Aid.

The project focused on emerging trends related to the use of new mobile technologies such as smartphones, and how they are being used in the context of domestic violence.

This research is among the first of its kind in Australia. It looks at both the experiences of workers in the domestic violence sector and also the experiences of victim/survivors. The overall goals of this project were to:

- gather evidence on the use of mobile technology by perpetrators in the context of domestic violence, and
- use this evidence to inform processes and practices in the sector to ensure better outcomes for victims/survivors who are experiencing technology-facilitated abuse.

Project objectives and processes

SmartSafe was designed primarily as an exploratory, ‘scoping’ project. Our central research question was: “How do mobile technologies present further opportunities for the perpetration of stalking and domestic violence against women?”

The project occurred in two phases—research and capacity building—which were directed by a series of key objectives including:

- identifying available literature on technology-facilitated stalking
- examining if perpetrators were using technology to stalk women in the context of domestic violence
- discovering what domestic violence sector workers were seeing in the course of their jobs, and
- understanding the experiences of victim/survivors in relation to technology-facilitated stalking.

We also wanted to explore opportunities for victim/survivors to use technology in ways to enhance their safety, and build the capacity of domestic violence sector workers to respond effectively to technology-facilitated stalking.

In this research, we used a feminist multiple methods approach including focus groups, multiple online surveys, consultations and interviews. The SmartSafe logic model (Chart 1, p 2) details our project objectives and key processes.

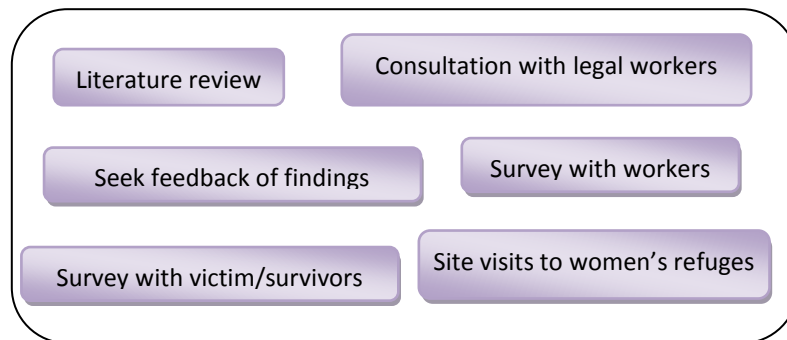
SmartSafe Logic model (Chart 1)

VISION: Women and girls safely and freely able to utilise new technologies

GOAL: To examine if mobile technologies present further opportunities for the perpetration of stalking and domestic violence against women and to identify ways in which women can use these technologies safely.

Phase 1: Research

- Objective 1: Identify available evidence on technology facilitated stalking
- Objective 2: Identify a) if technology is being used by perpetrators b) how domestic violence services are responding to technology-facilitated abuse and c) how victim/survivors of domestic violence are experiencing technology-facilitated abuse
- Objective 3: Explore opportunities for domestic violence services and victim/survivors of violence to use technology to support their own needs.



Circulation of findings

Phase 2: Capacity building

- Objective 4: Build the capacity of the domestic violence sector to respond to how technology is being used to facilitate stalking in the context of domestic violence and to use technology to keep women safe



SmartSafe evaluation methods

Our SmartSafe project utilised numerous evaluation methods in order to examine the effectiveness of our research processes, the involvement of the domestic violence sector and victim survivors in our research and also the communication of our research findings to the sector. The following tables detail our activities, evaluation indicators, methods and our results.

Objective 1: Identify available evidence on technology facilitated stalking

Key activities	Indicators	Methods of data collection	Results
Identify what evidence is available on technology-facilitated stalking, in the context of domestic violence, by conducting a literature review	Is there a gap in knowledge? Is this literature review able to provide the basis of a journal article?	Literature review conducted	Identified gap in literature Literature identified formed basis of journal article

Objective 2: Identify:

- a) if technology is being used by perpetrators
- b) how domestic violence services are responding to technology-facilitated abuse, and
- c) how victim/survivors of domestic violence are experiencing technology-facilitated abuse.

Objective 3: Explore opportunities for domestic violence services and victim/survivors of violence to use technology to support their own needs.

Key activities	Indicators	Methods of data collection	Results
Focus group with legal workers	Number of legal workers that attended focus group Identify if legal workers are seeing technology-facilitated stalking in their work	Keeping list of attendees Keeping notes of discussion	Five legal workers attended focus group Workers identified that many clients were experiencing technology-facilitated stalking
Online survey with workers in the domestic violence sector using SurveyMonkey	Number of workers who responded Identify if domestic violence sector workers were seeing technology-facilitated stalking in their work	Keeping list of numbers of participants Collecting survey responses	152 workers participated Workers identified that victim/survivors were experiencing technology-facilitated stalking
Online survey for victim/survivors	Number of victim/survivors that responded to survey Identify if victim/survivors were experiencing technology-facilitated stalking	Keeping list of numbers of participants Collecting survey responses	46 victim/survivors participated in the survey Victim/survivors provided examples of their experiences with technology-facilitated stalking
Consultations with domestic violence refuge workers from refuges in the metropolitan region of Melbourne	Number of refuges consulted and site visits	Keeping list of consultations	Four refuges consulted (three site visits, one telephone consultation)

Key activities	Indicators	Methods of data collection	Results
Focus group, survey and consultations	Did the focus group, online surveys and consultations provide responses on a) how technology is being used by perpetrators, b) how domestic violence services are responding to technology-facilitated stalking and c) how victim/survivors are experiencing technology facilitated abuse?	Analyse responses	Focus group, online surveys and consultations identified: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) perpetrators are using technology to stalk women in the context of domestic violence b) domestic violence sector workers need support and training in order to minimise the opportunities for technology-facilitated stalking, and c) victim/survivors reported that perpetrators are using mobile technologies to control and monitor them from a distance
	Did the focus group, surveys and consultations provide suggestions for how domestic violence services and victim/survivors of violence are/can use technology to support their own needs?		Focus group, online surveys and consultations identified that victim/survivors were keen to keep using technology (such as their smartphones) and social media (such as Facebook) and needed knowledge of how they could keep doing this safely

Objective 4: Build the capacity of the domestic violence sector to respond to how technology is being used to facilitate stalking in the context of domestic violence and to use technology to keep women safe.

Key activities	Indicators	Methods of data collection	Results
<p>Articles published in key sector publications</p> <p>Promotion of research on DVRCV website, Facebook and twitter</p>	<p>Are the findings of the project being communicated to key stakeholders in a variety of avenues?</p>	<p>Keeping track of articles written and where they are published</p> <p>Keeping track of mentions of project on website, twitter and Facebook</p>	<p>Two articles written for <i>DVRCV Advocate</i> magazine</p> <p>An article written for <i>Parity</i> magazine</p> <p>Blog post on DVRCV website</p> <p>DVRCV tweet about Smartsafe research was retweeted 16 times</p> <p>Research was promoted on Domestic Violence Clearinghouse website, Women’s Health in the North, and North and West Homelessness Network</p>
<p>Professional development forums on SmartSafe findings</p>	<p>Number of workers attending forum</p> <p>Change in knowledge about technology-facilitated stalking</p>	<p>Keeping note of numbers of participants</p> <p>Pre and post questionnaire</p>	<p>Number of participants at forums (38)</p> <p>Results of questionnaires indicated that workers knowledge of technology-facilitated stalking increased after the forums</p>

Key activities	Indicators	Methods of data collection	Results
SmartSafe training (Traralgon)	<p>Number of workers attending training</p> <p>Change in knowledge about technology-facilitated stalking</p>	<p>Keeping list of numbers of participants</p> <p>Pre and post questionnaire for training participants</p>	<p>24 workers attended training</p> <p>Participants indicated that level of understanding of technology and domestic violence increased after the training</p>
Produce plain languages resources, based on our findings, for a variety of different audiences including domestic violence sector workers, legal workers and victim/survivors	Number of resources developed	Keeping note of resources developed and key audiences	<p>SmartSafe booklet of findings with infographics and women’s stories for sector workers</p> <p>How-to videos on smartphone safety designed for sector workers and victim/survivors</p> <p>Easy reference guides for legal workers on technology-facilitated stalking in the context of domestic violence</p> <p>Journal article submitted to academic journal</p> <p>Website with videos, booklet, info sheets, links and support services listed</p>

Findings and discussion

Literature review:

The first step in our project was to conduct a literature review. We searched university library databases and accessed the DVRCV library (which includes books, DVDs and publications).

We found that intimate partner stalking is a relatively under-researched aspect of domestic violence. Only one study with victim/survivors focused on technology-facilitated stalking and abuse in the context of domestic violence (Dimond *et al.* 2011).

We ascertained that our research project would build knowledge in the sector and provide much needed evidence of technology-facilitated stalking in the context of domestic violence.

We have used this material in our findings booklet to support our data.

Our literature review will also be included as part of an article to be published later in 2013 in an academic peer-reviewed journal.

Consultations:

Our consultations with key stakeholders have been one of the most important aspects of our project. To ensure that our research reflected the needs of the domestic violence sector we identified our key stakeholders for this project as:

- legal workers
- domestic violence refuge workers
- domestic violence crisis services, and
- victim/survivors.

We first invited **legal workers** from a range of legal settings to a **focus group** at DVRCV on 14th August 2012. This focus group examined the scope of our research project, what legal workers were seeing in their practice and what resources would assist them in their work. Focus group participants discussed the issues they were seeing in their work with perpetrators using technology in breach of intervention orders and the difficulties in getting these breaches taken seriously. They also spoke of some magistrates who were very aware about the use of technology by perpetrators and that special effort was often made to ensure that perpetrators did not contact women via these means.

Based on the findings from our focus group and our literature review we then developed an **online survey for workers** in the domestic violence field. This survey, hosted on surveymonkey, focused on intimate partner stalking, technology-facilitated stalking and workers' experiences of the legal response to stalking.

This survey was written in consultation with domestic violence crisis workers and was sent out to all our contacts, as well as promoted on Facebook and twitter. We designed the survey so that it would be easy for workers to provide quick answers, or if they had

more time, the opportunity to contribute more lengthy answers. We expected 20 responses to this survey; within a week, the survey had received over 50 responses. By the time our survey closed, 152 participants had responded.

We **consulted** with numerous **women's refuge workers** at four metropolitan Melbourne locations. At these visits we discussed the kinds of issues they were seeing regarding technology and domestic violence. Workers expressed concern about what they saw as a significant issue for women experiencing violence.

Workers reported that technology was being used by perpetrators to track women to secure refuge locations, that perpetrators were abusing and harassing women via their mobile phones 24 hours a day, and that women were being located and also abused on social media, particularly Facebook.

The workers we spoke to were alarmed that women's safety was being put at risk through these new mobile technologies. They also spoke of the positive ways that women used these technologies and the comfort that they could bring to women who were separated from their friends and family in refuge. Workers highlighted the need for domestic violence workers to be supported in learning more about the technologies that could be used by perpetrators and wanted training in this area. They also wanted easy to follow guidelines on how to use mobile phone technologies to keep women safer.

Our next **survey for victim/survivors** was shaped by our workers survey and also our consultation with domestic violence refuge workers. We had 46 victim/survivors participated in our survey for women. We were able to focus on specific areas such as intervention orders and women's health and wellbeing because of what we had learnt from our worker's survey.

Women's responses to our research questions were often quite lengthy and detailed, showing that for many women these were experiences that had made a huge impact. Our participants wrote about wanting to raise awareness of the ways that perpetrators had stalked them via technology and their difficulties in stopping this abuse using intervention orders.

Public circulation of research processes and findings:

Details about our research project have been published in a number of areas. We created a website for our research and the findings called www.smartsafe.org.au

We first publicised our workers survey via email but also on Facebook and twitter to all our followers. Our victim/survivor survey was publicised in similar ways, including a blog post on our website <http://www.dvrcv.org.au/are-you-smartsafe>

Our findings have been published in two editions of the *DVRCV Advocate* magazine (Spring/Summer 2012, Autumn/Winter 2013), which is sent to all domestic violence workers in Victoria. An article on SmartSafe research was also published in *Parity* magazine (March 2013), the national magazine of the Council to Homeless Persons.

Training:

DVRCV has created a one-day training program based on our SmartSafe research. This has been delivered a number of times, and is now on the organization's regular training calendar.

Our SmartSafe training explores how mobile technologies can be used by perpetrators of family violence as a tool of abuse as well as how mobile technologies can support women's safety. Workers learn how to identify and implement mobile technology-related safety planning for women.

Our first training, held in Traralgon on March 19 2013, was attended by 24 domestic violence and other professionals including Victoria Police. Participants were asked to rate their level of understanding of 'technology and domestic violence' before and after the training. Most workers stated that the training increased their knowledge from 'low' (see Chart 2) to 'high' and 'very high' (see Chart 3).

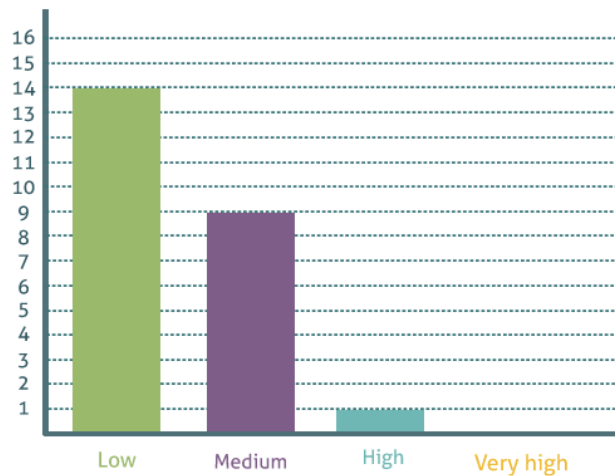


Chart 2. Training participants level of knowledge before SmartSafe training

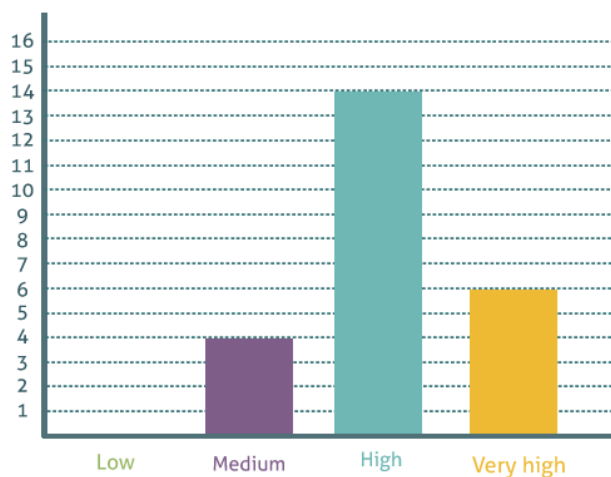


Chart 3. Training participants' level of knowledge after SmartSafe training

Professional Development Forums:

The first forum presentation of our SmartSafe findings was given at a Northern Advocacy Crisis Response Service (NCARS) forum on 19 February 2013.

The forum was hosted and organised by the Northern Integrated Family Violence Services (NIFVS) based at Women's Health in the North (WHIN).¹ Twenty-seven workers from the NCARS partnership attended the forum, co-facilitated by DVRCV's Dr Delanie Woodlock and Dr Amy Webster.

An evaluation of the NCARS forum was done in collaboration with WHIN. The evaluation form was about the entire forum, which included talks from Victoria Police, a survivor and a worker from the Women's Domestic Violence Crisis Service.

Many workers commented that the SmartSafe presentation was the highlight:

"SmartSafe presentation was great and has given sector support to contribute to keeping women safe"

"The SmartSafe stats will help me discuss FV issues"

"Great to hear that others are worried about online stalking and safety."

Participants in the forum were also asked what they would like more information about in the future. Workers wrote:

"Further training surrounding stalking/technology"

"Personally need a huge amount of training re modern technology"

"Future updates re information technology"

"More training around safety/privacy with tech."

¹ NCARS is a face-to-face crisis response service available 24 hours a day, seven days a week for women and children experiencing family violence in the northern region. NCARS is a partnership between NIFVS, Victoria Police and the Women's Domestic Violence Crisis Service.

Workers were asked to rate the forum overall; 'high' was the main response (see Chart 4).

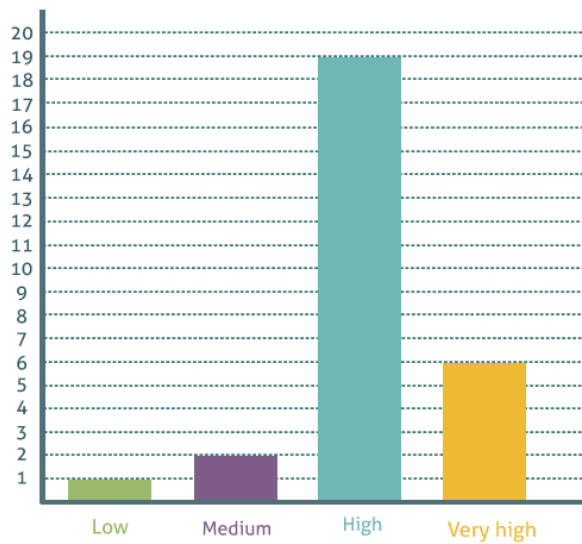


Chart 4. How the forum was rated overall

Forum participants were also asked how relevant the forum was to their work: 'very high' was the main response (see Chart 5).

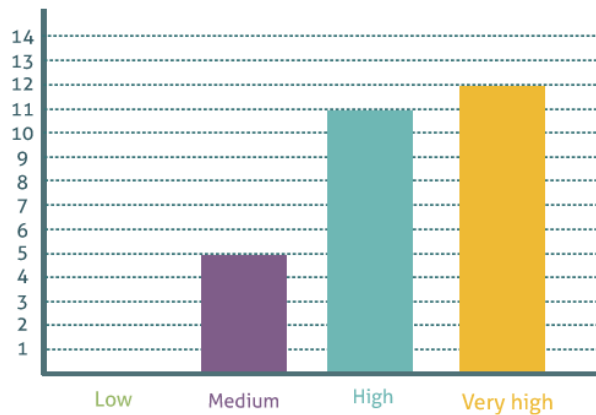
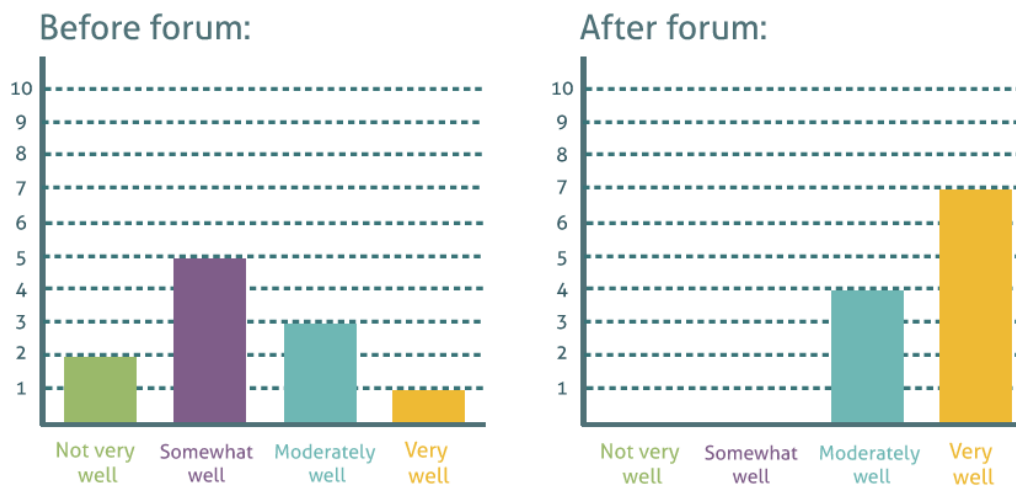


Chart 5. How relevant was the forum to participants work in the domestic violence sector

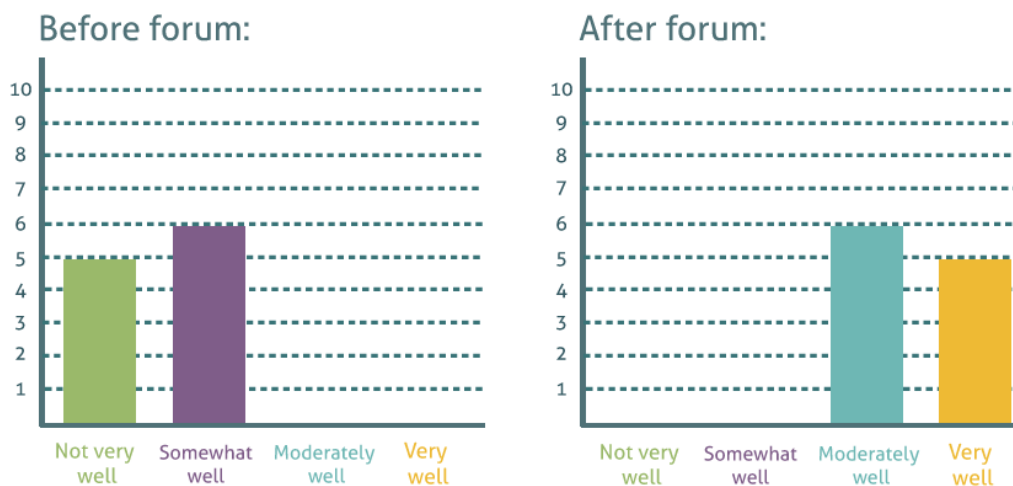
We next presented the findings at personal development training for the Counselling and Support Alliance (CSA) in the Northern Region, also hosted by the Northern Integrated Family Violence Services (NIFVS). The CSA is a network of family violence counsellors and group work facilitators from nine community health centres and three other community organisations.

Eleven workers attended this forum. A pre- and post-training questionnaire to evaluate the impact of our research findings on their knowledge of technology-facilitated stalking, showed the following results:

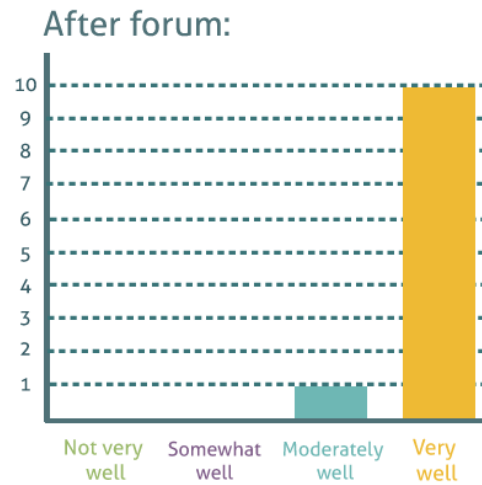
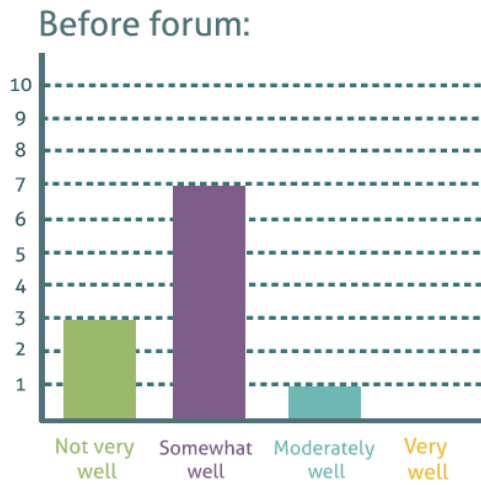
Q: How would you rate your understanding about stalking in the context of domestic violence?



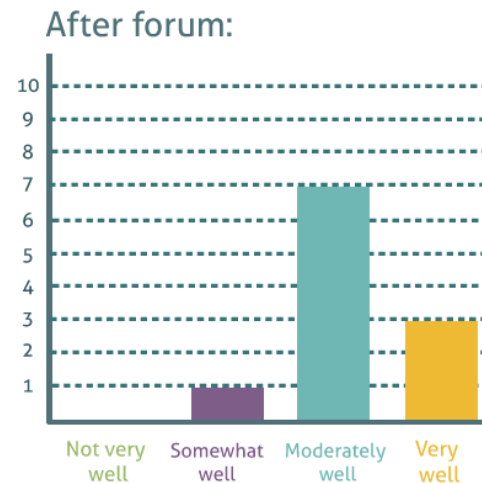
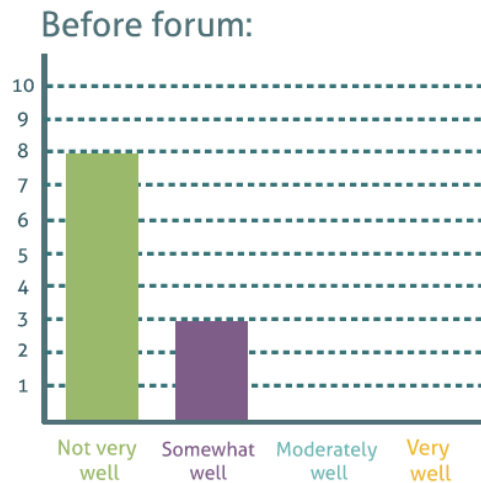
Q: How would you rate your understanding about the ways in which mobile technologies could be used by perpetrators to stalk and harass women?



Q: How would you rate your understanding about the impacts of technology-facilitated stalking on women's lives?



Q: How would you rate your understanding about ways to minimise technology-facilitated stalking?



Although there was no space for comments on the evaluation form, one worker nonetheless wrote:

“Fantastic workshop. Thank you so much. This rating form doesn't really capture how brilliant I found the information and want to know more. A+ work. It left me feeling that there is so much more that I need to learn.”

Publications:

Our SmartSafe research has been published and circulated in a variety of formats.

In order to share our results with workers in the domestic violence sector we have published an online **findings booklet**. This booklet focuses mainly on our survey results. It also supports our findings with academic research in order to situate our research in a larger context of work on intimate partner stalking and its impact on victim/survivors.

This booklet also contains **infographics** of our main findings which enables the reader to more easily understand our findings and how it may relate to their work.

We have also **created a website** for our findings www.smartsafe.org.au

This website has sections on the legal aspects of our project, including an overview of the laws relating to technology-facilitated stalking.

One of the main sections of the website is the “how-to” videos which are aimed at both workers and those who may be experiencing technology-facilitated stalking. These videos explain how to:

- change privacy settings on an iPhone
- how to delete history on an iPhone
- how to gather evidence by taking a screenshot of your phone, and
- how to change privacy and security settings on Facebook.

The videos also have English subtitles to make them more accessible.

Key findings

- As indicated by our literature review, there is a gap in knowledge regarding technology-facilitated stalking
- Legal workers from Victoria have witnessed the impacts of technology-facilitated stalking on their clients seeking intervention orders and believe there is some confusion about how effectively intervention orders are covering technology
- The large sector response to our survey, with 152 participants, clearly shows that technology-facilitated stalking is an issue of concern to the domestic violence sector
- Domestic violence refuge workers need support to learn more about how to best assist women who are experiencing technology-facilitated stalking
- Victim/survivors need the technology-facilitated stalking they are experiencing taken seriously and the legal response needs to reflect the significant impact that stalking can have on women and children's lives
- There is significant interest from the domestic violence sector in training related to domestic violence and technology
- Training participants rated our training highly and said their knowledge of technology-facilitated stalking had increased after SmartSafe training
- Forum participants found the SmartSafe research highly relevant to their work and are interested in finding out more about this issue
- Our research increased the knowledge of forum participants with all showing heightened awareness about technology-facilitated stalking after our presentation
- Our findings have been published in a variety of mediums to increase their accessibility. We have used infographics and videos to circulate our findings to several audiences.



Discussion and reflections

The SmartSafe research is considered by DVRCV to be a successful project, not only for us as an organisation, but for the meaningful impact it has had, and will continue to have, on the domestic violence sector.

It is important however to reflect on processes that could have been different and ways in which our research process changed from our original aims.

Our intention at the start of this research process was to use surveys, focus groups and semi-structured interviews as our research methods.



We were surprised by the **large number of survey responses** we received from our first survey with domestic violence sector workers, with many of the open questions containing lengthy detail and valuable stories about what workers were experiencing.

This strong response, which **exceeded our expectations seven-fold**, did mean that significantly more time was dedicated to the analysis phase than originally planned. Because of the breadth of information our survey received, and the 12 month timeframe of the project, we decided not to proceed with further interviews to collect additional data.

As part of this project, we did conduct two semi-structured interviews with young women who were victim/survivors of technology-facilitated abuse. These interviews focused mainly on what **types of resources would be helpful** for victim/survivors.

We had expected to create printed material as a result of our research, showing workers and victim/survivors how to change certain settings on phones and how to minimise the opportunities for perpetrators to stalk and abuse women via their phones. However we decided not to proceed. The logic behind this decision was that rapid changes in technology would make such booklets out-of-date too soon.

We decided instead to create a series of easy-to-follow, directional **videos** for both workers and victim/survivors. Based on the findings of our research, these videos provide instructions on how to safely use mobile technologies, such as smartphones, and how to minimise the opportunities for perpetrators to harass and abuse women via these technologies. These how-to videos use plain language and have English captions. They can be found on our website www.smartsafe.org.au

We have also published our findings in a downloadable booklet on the SmartSafe website, which is aimed at sharing our findings with workers in the sector. More details about our research will be published in an academic journal (publication date to be confirmed.)

We also recognise that there needs to be caution in widely publishing information about all the ways that smartphones have been used, and could be used, by perpetrators, as we do not want to 'up-skill' perpetrators. Our focus has therefore been on safely providing information to specific audiences.

We believe this has been a successful move: we have had an enormous response to our SmartSafe training, which is based on our research findings, and our SmartSafe forums. These avenues enable us to talk directly to workers in the sector; our training has been conducted with domestic violence and other professionals in the wider community, such as the Victorian police.

We had initially planned to conduct a follow-up survey to our research that would focus on the outcomes of the SmartSafe research. However, we decided not to proceed with this as we were able to test our outcomes directly with workers at the two professional development forums and in our SmartSafe training.

The feedback we received indicated that our findings were useful for the sector and that the resources we had produced have had a beneficial impact on workers' knowledge and understanding of technology-facilitated stalking.

Conclusion

Our SmartSafe research, funded by a grant from Victoria Legal Aid for \$23,700, has exceeded our expectations. While the research has been innovative, revealing important emerging trends in an academic capacity, the findings have also been practical, able to be fed back into the sector in meaningful and valuable ways.



In this way, the SmartSafe project has also directly benefitted the sector, and by extension, the lives of victim/survivors.

The evaluation of the SmartSafe research project has found that technology-facilitated stalking is a significant issue for women experiencing domestic violence and that women’s safety, health and wellbeing are impacted by technology-facilitated stalking.

Practice in this area needs to be supported with a strong evidence base, such as our SmartSafe research, in order to adequately and accurately respond to victim/survivors needs.

Our project evaluation shows that workers in the sector are concerned about these issues and are eager for knowledge and skills in this area. Women can and should be able to use new mobile technologies safely, however we need to be aware and kept up-to-date with the ways that perpetrators can exploit these technologies and find more opportunities to stalk and harass women.

Due to the overwhelming participation and interest of the sector in our research we believe that it is imperative that our research in this area continues.

Acknowledgments:

Thank you to Victoria Legal Aid for funding this project.

References:

Dimond, J, Fiesler, C, and Bruckman, A (2011) “Domestic Violence and Information Communication Technologies”, *Interacting with Computers*, 23(5), 413–421.