

# Domestic Violence and Tech Abuse

## AskLOIS Factsheet



This fact sheet summarises the Ask LOIS webinar on this topic presented on 3 February 2021 by Karen Bentley, CEO, WESNET  
To view this webinar for free, or to access other resources, visit [www.asklois.org.au](http://www.asklois.org.au)

### This factsheet will cover the following:

- **Technology facilitated abuse and coercion in 2020 – a National Picture**
- **Findings of the WESNET Second National Survey on Technology Abuse and Domestic Violence**
- **COVID-19**
- **Types and frequency of technology used**
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### Technology facilitated abuse and coercion in 2020 – a National Picture

In 2020, WESNET conducted a national survey of practitioners and compared the results with their first survey conducted in 2015. The results revealed that the forms of technology facilitated abuse and coercion used by perpetrators have expanded and the incidents of these forms of abuse have increased. The new findings in the second survey include current and emerging types of technology and purpose and intentions of tactics used by perpetrators as well as impacts on victim-survivors during the relationship and post-separation.

### Findings of the WESNET Second National Survey on Technology Abuse and Domestic Violence (The Second Survey)

The Second Survey received responses from 527 practitioners with a final sample size of 442 practitioners who were mostly Domestic and Family Violence practitioners with some in sexual assault services, legal

services, housing and homelessness services and health services. The survey has found that 99.3% of respondents working in domestic violence services reported having assisted clients who have experienced technology facilitated abuse. In addition, the survey respondents reported that 96% of perpetrators were male and 93% of victims were female.

### COVID-19

The Second Survey was launched in May 2020 during the first wave of COVID-19 pandemic in Australia. The respondents from the Second Survey reported that the increase in the use of technology during COVID-19 provided more opportunities for perpetrators to control, monitor and isolate women. They further reported increase in stalking and surveillance, pornographic materials and sexual abuse of children and women during COVID-19.

### Types and frequency of technology used

In the Second Survey, the respondents were requested to report the frequency of the misuse of technology they have observed by selecting 'all the time', 'often', 'sometimes', 'rarely' or 'never'.

The Second Survey found the following three main types of technology that were misused by perpetrators:

- Text messages (61%) – an increase of 28% from the 2015 survey results.
- Smartphones (36%) – an increase of 17% from the 2015 survey results; and
- Facebook and other social media (35%) – a decrease of 2.5% from the 2015 survey results.

### Emerging technologies

The respondents from the Second Survey reported the following emerging technologies being misused by perpetrators:

- Facetime – 18% of respondents reported being misused 'all the time'
- MyGov, Telecommunication accounts and Centrelink – 27% of respondents reported being misused 'all the time'
- iCloud – 10% of respondents reported being misused 'all the time'
- Google – 10% of respondents reported being misused 'all the time'

## Videos and GPS

The respondents from the Second Survey reported the following in terms of misuse of video cameras and GPS by perpetrators:

- Video cameras (35%) – a sharp increase of 183% from the 2015 survey results; and
- GPS tracking apps (16%) – a significant increase of 131% from the 2015 survey results.

## Types of abuse

Based on the responses provided to the questions relating to the five types of abuse experienced by victims of violence, the following results were found in the Second Survey:

1. Abusive tactics – increase in the number of respondents reporting the use of phone calls, texts, emails, instant messages and social media being ‘all the time’
2. Threatening tactics – increase in the number of respondents reporting the use of phone calls, texts, emails, instant messages and social media being ‘all the time’
3. Monitoring and tracking tactics – overall increase in the number of respondents reporting the use of various monitoring and tracking tactics being ‘all the time’
4. Humiliating and shaming tactics – General increase in the number of respondents reporting the use of various humiliating and shaming tactics being ‘all the time’.
5. Other tactics – A sharp increase in children being given a phone or other devices as a way for perpetrators to contact or monitor women as well as a significant increase in the use of children’s social media accounts by perpetrators to communicate with women.

## Co-occurring abuse

The respondents to the Second Survey were asked regarding other forms of abuse that occur together with technology facilitated abuse.

The most common co-occurring abuse found was stalking at 71% followed by emotional abuse at 70%, sexual abuse at 68%, financial abuse at 61% then physical abuse at 41%.

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

The following responses were reported in the Second survey in relation to the risks faced by women from different cultural and community groups:

- Women with disabilities (44%) – increase of 115% from the 2015 survey results;
- Women from non-English speaking countries (43%) – increase of 76.2% from the 2015 survey results;
- Indigenous women (28%) – increase of 114% from the 2015 survey results; and
- Recently arrived migrants (24%)

## Legal and police responses

The Second Survey found that 61% of respondents reported that the police took technology facilitated abuse seriously only ‘sometimes’ with 52.5% reporting that the lack of understanding about the role of technology in domestic violence by the police being the reason.

## Positive responses

Respondents reported technologies being used positively to collect evidence in support of an application and/or a breach of an intervention order as well as in family or criminal court proceedings.

## Impact on women

In the Second Survey, WESNET observed that there was an increased perception that women are experiencing high levels of fear and terror as a result of technology facilitated abuse including feeling trapped and hopeless.

It was also observed that one of the main consequences of technology facilitated abuse on survivors was increased isolation and a fear of using technology to maintain connection with family, friends and support services.

The respondents in the Second Survey further reported women experiencing anxiety, paranoia, post-traumatic stress disorder and other various impacts on their wellbeing as a result of experiencing technology facilitated abuse.

The following quotes were provided by the respondent in the Second Survey in describing the impacts of technology facilitated abuse on women:

- “Unmeasurable. More than anything else, like rape, torture, etc., that I’ve seen over the years, abuse with technology is so invasive and psychologically destabilising.”
- “Enormous impact. Feeling that they can’t get away. That there’s nothing they can do to escape. That kind of abuse is almost like mental torture.”

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

## Conclusions

- All forms of abuse have increased in the Second Survey in comparison with the 2015 survey.
- Perpetrators have extended their tactics in technology facilitated abuse.
- Concerning trends of using children, video cameras and GPS to monitor and control women were observed.
- Perpetrators have used technology to humiliate and shame women.
- More research is needed to investigate the intersecting issues that increases the risks for women with disabilities, women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women.
- Technology facilitated abuse is co-occurring with other forms of violence.
- Domestic Violence practitioners are moving towards supporting the safe use of technology by women.

## Recommendations

- Future research and evidence development
- Responsible partnerships between technology developers and the Domestic Violence sector
- Training and awareness raising, future policy and legislative development
- Prevention strategies and approaches

## Resources and Training

- [www.techsafety.org.au/resources](http://www.techsafety.org.au/resources) – Handouts and other useful information on technology safety
- [www.techsafety.org.au](http://www.techsafety.org.au)
- [www.techsafety.org.au/tech-abuse-posters](http://www.techsafety.org.au/tech-abuse-posters) – Posters on technology facilitated abuse in simple English and 11 other languages.
- [www.techsafety.org.au/legal-guides](http://www.techsafety.org.au/legal-guides) - Legal guides for survivors, practitioners and police.
- [www.techsafety.org.au/training](http://www.techsafety.org.au/training) - Trainings provided by WESNET.