SmartSafe

Technology-facilitated stalking:
findings and recommendations
from the SmartSafe project

Messages (55)

Acknowledgements

Contents

Summary of research findings

Our SmartSafe project, funded by Victoria Legal Aid, aimed to examine the emerging issue of technology-facilitated stalking in the context of domestic violence.

We wanted to know if mobile technologies are presenting further opportunities for the perpetration of stalking and domestic violence against women. To explore this issue, we conducted a multiple methods research project consisting of interviews, focus groups and surveys. This findings booklet will focus on the main aspect of our research: our surveys. We conducted two surveys, one with 152 workers in the domestic violence sector and one with 46 victim/survivors. Our findings show that:

- Mobile technologies allow perpetrators access to victim/survivors 24 hours a day

- Perpetrators are using mobile technologies to abuse and harass women easily, instantaneously and at a distance

- Perpetrators are using technology to create a sense of omnipresence in women's lives through, for example, the use of GPS tracking on smartphones, and monitoring women's social media accounts

- Mobile technologies are being used as an easy way for perpetrators to punish and humiliate women

- A wide variety of technology is being used in partner stalking, including text messaging, social media, GPS, and photo and video technologies

- Women report that perpetrators are using mobile technologies to control and monitor them from a distance

- Technology is often used in stalking both during the relationship and after separation

- Technology is used by perpetrators to humiliate and publically shame women, often in sexualised ways.

- The use of technology in stalking has a significant impact on women's mental and physical wellbeing, their day to day routines, employment, parenting and relationships

- Women who have experienced technology-facilitated stalking have often experienced other forms of domestic violence including emotional, financial and sexual abuse

- Women are reluctant to seek help, often feel embarrassed about their experiences and fear they will not be believed

- When women do seek legal help by taking out an intervention order, it is not always effective in stopping perpetrators from stalking women via mobile technologies

- Domestic violence sector workers need assistance and training to support their work with women who are experiencing technology-facilitated stalking

- There needs to be more consultation and cooperation between the domestic violence sector and the telecommunications industry so women are able to more safely and easily use new mobile technologies

- Developers of smartphone technologies, such as Apple and Google, need to ensure that there are easier and clearer ways to minimise the possibilities of being stalked and tracked with their products

- In order for victim/survivors to be able to use mobile technologies safely, we need to take technology-facilitated stalking seriously and develop effective practice, policy and legal responses to address the use of technology as a tactic of abuse

From research to practice – the purpose of this booklet

As a statewide organisation, DVRCV aims to prevent domestic violence by providing professional training, publications and resources for the general community. A critical part of our work is bridging the gap between research and practice.

Our focus is to develop research projects that have useable and practical outcomes. Our SmartSafe research was designed as an inquiry into technology-facilitated stalking in the context of domestic violence.

This booklet focuses on the surveys we conducted with 152 domestic violence workers and 46 victim/survivors. The number of workers who participated reflects a sizeable sample of the Victorian domestic violence sector. However, because it is a relatively small-scale study in terms of the number of victim/survivors who participated, we recognise that these findings are not necessarily representative or conclusive. Nevertheless, our research shows that for workers and victim/survivors in Victoria, there are serious concerns about the use of technology in the context of domestic violence.

We believe it is important that the results from research are communicated in an accessible way to those who can incorporate the findings into their practice. Thus, this report is presented with graphics and direct quotes from victim/survivors to assist practitioners in understanding the impact of technology-facilitated stalking and to identify practice implications.

Our focus here is on what can assist practice, provide awareness and increase knowledge for domestic violence sector workers, which will ultimately improve outcomes for women experiencing violence. Findings from this research will be incorporated into our training programs for professionals.

As a feminist organisation, we aim to ensure that our research findings are presented in ways that can be directly useful for women affected by domestic violence. This booklet sits alongside other resources we have created based on the findings of our SmartSafe project. These include tip sheets and 'how-to' videos on the use of technology for both victim/survivors and workers.

Project background

The Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria (DVRCV) was one of the first domestic violence organisations in the world to have an online presence. DVRCV has been involved in using technology to prevent violence against women for over 15 years. Through our training programs and resources, we have advocated for the safe use of technology for victim/survivors.

Our experiences in providing online resources have demonstrated that technology can be used in ways that benefit victim/survivors of violence. However, we have become increasingly aware of the ways perpetrators may exploit the data trails left by technology – for example by tracking women's website histories. Over the past few years we have been contacted by women who were being abused and harassed via their mobile phones. Service providers have also contacted us for advice about how to assist women who are being tracked and stalked using smartphone technology. However, in the absence of Australian research, we were unsure how widespread the abuse of mobile technologies is in Australia.

Several other researchers concerned about this topic have also noted the lack of data in this area, with advocates from the Safety Net Project in the United States stating that:

> Additional research is needed to examine the extent to which various technologies are being used to stalk victims of intimate partner violence. Survivors would greatly benefit if future violence-against-women research addressed the context and use of specific technologies in intimate partner violence and stalking. (Southworth *et al.* 2005:5)

In 2012 we successfully applied for funding from Victoria Legal Aid to conduct this research. Our goal was to investigate the ways that mobile technologies are being used by perpetrators to stalk and abuse women, as well as how these technologies may be used to improve women's safety, such as by collecting evidence of intervention order breaches. While our research looks at all technology-facilitated stalking, we put a particular focus on smartphones. This is due to the increasing use of smartphones to access the internet, with studies showing that more people are using their mobile devices to access the web, particularly social media such as Facebook, than their computers (Dudley-Nicholson 2013).

We hope that this SmartSafe research will help fill the gaps in our knowledge and build the evidence base so we can effectively prevent the misuse of mobile technologies by perpetrators, and enable women to safely use these technologies.

we have advocated for the safe use of technology for victim/ survivors

Aims and methods

Our central research question for this project was "How do mobile technologies present further opportunities for the perpetration of stalking and domestic violence against women?"[1] To answer this question, we used a multiple methods approach including focus groups, surveys and interviews.

Our research process occurred in stages and involved:

• Holding a focus group with legal workers about what they were seeing in their work and what areas they thought we should be focusing on.

• An online survey using SurveyMonkey, with closed and open questions, with workers in the domestic violence sector.

• An online survey for victim/survivors.

• Consultations with domestic violence workers from four refuges in metropolitan Melbourne, who kindly shared their experiences and ideas about what sort of resources would be helpful for them in their work and also helpful for women to enable them to use technology safely.

START → JUNE 2012 Received funding → AUGUST 2012 Focus group with legal workers → SEPTEMBER 2012 → Survey for workers → OCTOBER 2012 Consulting with refuge workers → NOVEMBER 2012 Survey with women → FEBRUARY 2013 → Findings presented to NCARS workers → MARCH 2013 SmartSafe training → APRIL 2013 Presentation to Counselling and Support Alliance workers → SEPTEMBER 2013 → Final report released → END
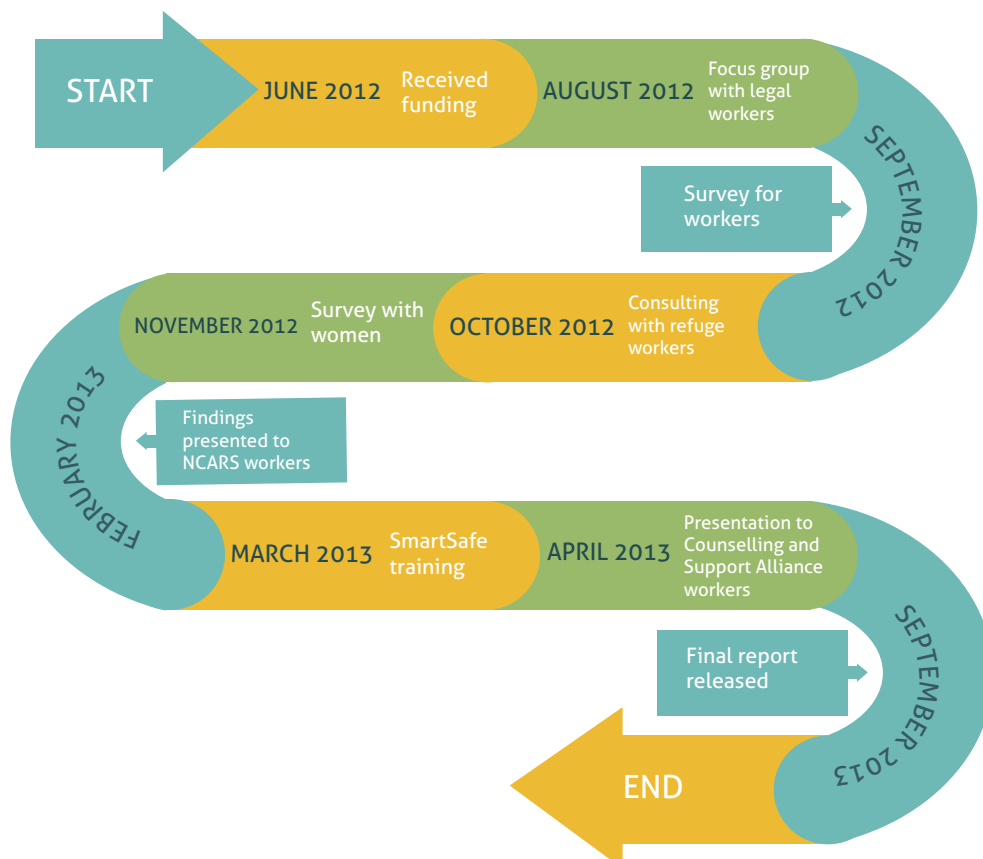
Our SmartSafe research used a feminist multiple methods approach

Our SmartSafe research used a feminist multiple methods approach. Reinharz (1992) describes feminist multiple methods research as a method that enables researchers to link social frameworks with individual behaviour that is "particularly able to illuminate previously unexamined or misunderstood experiences" (1992:197).

The combining of methods allows for research designs that are thorough and creative, which usually results in studies that are credible and useful (Reinharz 1992:197). The combination of research methods is also known as 'triangulation', a technique that enables researchers to more effectively 'zero in' on answers and information (Singleton and Straits 2005:381).

In our research we used surveys with both workers and victim/survivors, literature review, focus groups, consultation and interviews. As Reinharz (1992) highlights, using multiple methods research is suitable for areas of inquiry that are under-researched. Therefore we believed this would be a suitable approach to the area of technology-facilitated stalking in the context of domestic violence. This booklet will centre on the results from our online surveys.

Our workers' survey focused on what domestic violence workers were seeing in their practice. It examined intimate partner stalking in general, 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, and posted on Facebook and Twitter.

We designed the survey so it would be easy for workers to provide quick answers. The survey also provided the opportunity to contribute more lengthy answers.

Our survey for victim/survivors was shaped by our workers' survey and also our consultation with domestic violence refuge workers. 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 research into workers experiences.

Our surveys were located on a purpose-built website (www.smartsafe.org.au) and used SurveyMonkey as the online survey tool. These surveys were designed to include both open and closed questions. For example, workers were given a closed question with multiple choice answers about the kinds of technologies they believed perpetrators were utilising, and an open question asking them to explain how, in their experience, they thought perpetrators were using technology to stalk women.

we followed ethical guidelines for conducting research with women who have experienced violence

In this research, DVRCV followed accepted ethical guidelines for conducting research with women who have experienced violence.[2] This included an explanatory statement on our website which participants had to read before entering the survey. It explained what the research aims were and what questions would be covered, and made participants aware that they had a right to end the survey at any time and to skip any questions they did not feel comfortable with. A small number of participants in our victim/survivor survey did skip questions. In our findings, we have noted when this occurred.

We also provided support numbers and details, and ensured that participants knew they could call our service during business hours for support and referral. The security of online surveys has recently been highlighted by Clark and Walker (2011) who state that IP address numbers should not be stored when conducting online research with women who have experienced violence.[3] This is a standard practice in our online work at DVRCV. We turned off the collection of IP addresses in SurveyMonkey to minimise the possibilities of participants being identified this way.

As our surveys included open questions, we utilised Nvivo to code workers' and victim/survivors' answers to the open questions. This enabled us to more easily code the data, and we used thematic analysis to categorise our findings (Saldaña 2012). We also kept an audit trail of our research processes to substantiate the validity of the development of our analysis.

Our findings: Survey with domestic violence sector workers

The strong response to our survey – 152 domestic violence workers – reflected significant concern about the abuse of technology in the context of domestic violence. These participants worked in a variety of areas including case management, crisis response, housing, policy and legislation.
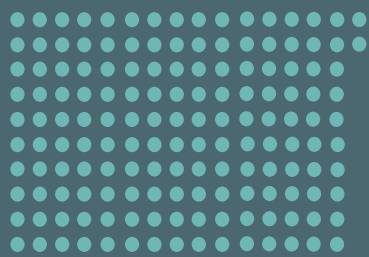
152
workers from the domestic violence sector participated in our survey

5.5
The average length of time working in the domestic violence sector was 5.5 years

What is partner stalking?

Stalking encompasses a pattern of repeated, frequently intrusive behaviours – such as following, harassing, monitoring and threats – that intimidate and cause fear in recipients (Logan and Walker 2009).

Within the context of domestic violence, stalking tends to be a form of abusive behaviour which perpetrators use at the end of a relationship in an attempt to control the victim (Logan *et al.* 2000, Hand *et al.* 2009).

However, studies are emerging that show that stalking behaviours are often part of the relationship before separation (Melton 2007).

Stalking and domestic violence

Workers reported that stalking was commonly experienced by their clients, but responses to it were inadequate.

94%

felt that stalking was an issue for women experiencing domestic violence

85%

felt that there was not enough protection for women experiencing partner stalking

61%

felt that women experiencing domestic violence were not aware of what constitutes stalking

These findings are in line with international research into intimate partner stalking which shows that, while stalking is an issue for many victim/survivors, there is lack of clarity within the domestic violence field as to what stalking is and how it should be seen in the context of domestic violence (Basile and Hall 2011). Research also shows that women can sometimes be hesitant to describe their experiences as stalking and there is often confusion about what sort of behaviour fits into the criminal definition of stalking (Anderson 2009).

Research conducted in the past few years shows that, while stalking by partners is a risk factor for serious violence, including sexual violence and homicide, it is often not taken seriously. An Australian study has found that police and many in the community perceive partner stalking as less serious than stranger stalking (Scott *et al.* 2010).

However, research suggests that those who stalk their partners are particularly persistent and dangerous. Partner stalking can occur for many years, often lasting longer than stalking by strangers or acquaintances. A national US survey found that cases involving intimates lasted 2.2 years on average, compared to 1.1 years for stalking by others (Tjaden and Thoennes 1998:12).

Recent research on partner stalking demonstrates that it has significant effects on the mental health of victims, even years after the stalking has ended (Fleming *et al.* 2012, Kuehner *et al.* 2012, Logan and Cole 2011). Stalking has also been linked to increased risks of homicide, with one study finding that 68 per cent of women experienced stalking within 12 months of an attempted or actual homicide (McFarlane *et al.* 2002:64). In this research the most frequent types of stalking that preceded the attempted or actual homicide was following or spying, unwanted phone calls, and surveillance by the perpetrator.

How prevalent is stalking?

In an Australian survey, one in every five women reported that they had been stalked since the age of 15

Who is most likely to stalk?

Men are the main perpetrators of stalking in Australia and internationally (Strand and McEwan 2011). Men almost exclusively stalk women, and studies have found that when men are stalked, they are most likely to be stalked by another man

(Strand and McEwan 2011, Kuehner *et al.* 2012, Australian Bureau of Statistics 2010).

Who is most likely to be a victim of stalking?

Women are most likely to be the victims of stalking. A meta-analysis of 103 stalking studies found that 75 per cent of victims are women (Spitzberg 2002). A national personal safety survey by the Australian Bureau of Statistics shows that twice as many women are stalked as men (2005). In terms of partner stalking in the context of domestic violence, women are overwhelmingly the victims

Stalking and mobile technologies

Domestic violence workers reported that, in their experience, perpetrators are utilising mobile technologies as part of their stalking tactics. They provided various examples of how these technologies were being used. Overall, 97 per cent of workers stated that perpetrators were using technology and that the most used technology to stalk women was mobile phones, and social media, such as Facebook.

97%

stated that perpetrators were using mobile technologies to stalk women in the context of domestic violence

Workers' perceptions of the types of technologies being used in stalking

82% smartphones

82% mobile phones

82% social media

52% email

29% GPS tracking

Tactics used in technology-facilitated stalking

Research shows that women believe a range of intentions motivates stalking behaviour. A study in the US asked victim/survivors of stalking what they felt motivated the perpetrator. It found that 21 per cent of victims said that their stalkers wanted to control them, 20 per cent said that the stalker wanted to keep them in the relationship and 16 per cent said that the stalker wanted to scare them (Melton 2007).

In our research, we asked workers for examples of technology-facilitated stalking that they had identified from their work with women. By analysing the wide range of responses, we were able to categorise our findings into three themes based on what appeared to be the main ways that perpetrators were using technology to facilitate their stalking: causing fear, omnipresence, and punish and humiliate.

Causing fear

All stalking tactics have the intent to cause fear. But this fear can be heightened when mobile technologies are used as women often have their devices with them 24 hours a day, enabling a perpetrator almost constant access to her life. In partner stalking, seemingly innocuous behaviour can have a different meaning in the context of the relationship. For example, a perpetrator may text only once a week at a particular time, but it has specific meaning to the victim/survivor because of his intimate knowledge of her.

Generally it is another layer of control and intimidation in their repertoire. Text messages that profess their love after serious violence are fairly common. There are also threatening text messages and voicemail. Sometimes the two are interspersed, creating an emotional rollercoaster for the victim

I have one client who has been stalked by her ex-husband via her smartphone. She has tried various tactics to elude him e.g. changing her number, etc. But he seems to be able to track her down each time. He uses the technology to abuse and threaten her and also to track her whereabouts. He also contacts their children via their tablets and sends abusive texts about the client.

Abusive text messages and harassment through repeated text messaging or calls (knowing that women now have their phones with them all the time).

Countless situations involve men using text messaging to threaten and verbally abuse women and their children, and to incite fear as a means of control.

Stalkers can keep sending SMS after SMS. If their mobile number is blocked, they can just change their number. There are also a number of free messaging services that can be used on the smartphone, that cost nothing and allow a person to keep sending message after message.

Women are being tethered by use of technology and monitored.

Omnipresence

Researchers have found that "one of the more terrifying tactics used by stalkers is to make the victim feel that she has no privacy, security, or safety, and that the stalker knows and sees everything" (Fraser *et al.* 2010:44). Mobile technologies enable perpetrators to create the sense that they are present in every aspect of the victim's life. This tactic also erodes the spatial boundaries of the relationship so that, even though a woman may have physically separated from her partner, she is unable to completely escape his presence in her life (Hand *et al.* 2008, Dimond *et al.* 2011). Workers reported that perpetrators used numerous ways to create this sense of omnipresence in victim/survivors' lives. For example, some workers mentioned tracking via GPS:

> *GPS tracking devices added to women's phones so that the perpetrator knows where she is at all times as well as the car GPS.*

> *A past client was under a great array of electronic surveillance. Her partner had installed a tracking device in her car and would text her and let her know that he was aware of her location. She had the GPS disabled on her phone, but this persisted. Also, after engaging a person to repair the front gate, it was discovered that her ex-partner had installed covert cameras both in the home and at the front gate that he had linked to his computer.*

Proxy stalking was also very common, where perpetrators used other people to contact victims/survivors, conveying the sense that women were never really safe, that he is able to contact her regardless of any intervention order, etc. This also heightens her feelings of isolation, and that she is being "ganged up" on in some way.

> *Constant text messages including from family of the perpetrator.*

> *Offender and his family members using social media to keep up to date on partner and children.*

> *Facebook is used often to stalk. Even though the person is blocked they go through friends or family members to continue stalking.*

> *Social networking sites are being used quite a bit. Sometimes it will be a 'status update' blaming his problems on her, or calling her names and accusing her of embarrassing shameful behaviour. It seems that the truly hurtful aspect of this is the 'comments' of support to him from family and friends that leave the victim feeling like she is being ganged up on by an entire community. This is incredibly intimidating.*

Facebook can also be utilised to cause women to feel that her partner or ex-partner knows and sees everything she is doing. Even if a woman has blocked her partner or ex-partner from her Facebook account, he may still able to monitor her through the Facebook pages of shared friends or family, or even their children's accounts.[4]

> *One family had to flee the entire district, as the perpetrator located them due to the victim's son becoming 'friends' with another boy on Facebook who had his location linked to his name.*

> *Utilising friends to see where the survivor is by checking Facebook, especially if she has 'checked in'[5] somewhere.*

> *I have had two clients who have relocated and changed their names but have still been found by stalking the clients friends on Facebook.*

Punish and humiliate

The next major tactic that workers identified being used was the use of technology to punish and humiliate women. An intimate partner stalker often knows his victim's greatest fears, concerns and secrets, and will use this knowledge to punish, torment and humiliate her (Logan *et al.* 2006:26). While perpetrators have long used this tactic, with mobile technologies it can now be done easily and immediately by broadcasting humiliating content to friends, family and the community.

Taking illicit photos and using them against women at difficult times in their relationships/or at the end of relationships.

Videos taken when unaware and put on YouTube.

Slanderous information about a woman sent via Facebook to her new partner by ex-partner's sister. Video of her doing a seductive dance shown to her children by her ex and used to degrade her to them, threats sent via Facebook. Most of these are done in breach of IO [intervention order]."

Photographs/video taken on phones and used as threats that they may be released.

Many situations I have encountered have involved men monitoring women's status updates on Facebook and using this information to inflict injury on women or in their mind 'punish' them for their transgressions.

Women are having their Facebook page hacked into and nasty things written about and to them. One particular woman had her ex-partner saturate her page with information about how he gave her an STI [sexually transmissible infection] – this information was read by her teenage son's friends, among other people

These examples, in particular where sexual images or videos are used as a means of threatening women in a context of domestic violence, are in line with evidence given to a Victorian Parliament Law Reform Committee inquiry into sexting (2013). Examples of non-consensual sexting were provided to the inquiry from women's health services and legal services.

The evidence provided stated that mobile phone images and videos of women (either consensually provided or under coercion) of women were being used by perpetrators to threaten and control domestic violence victim/survivors (2013:24). The Committee recommended that a specific offence should be introduced to Victorian Law that covers non-consensual sexting (2013:152).

Summary: workers' survey findings

Mobile technologies can enable perpetrators to punish and humiliate women easily and quickly

Our survey for domestic violence sector workers was available for approximately two months, from the start of September to the end of October 2012. The large number of participants – 152 workers – enabled us to form a picture of the ways mobile technologies were providing perpetrators with further opportunities to stalk and abuse women. Our survey with workers found that:

● Mobile technologies allow perpetrators access to victim/survivors 24 hours a day.

● Perpetrators are using mobile technologies to abuse and harass women easily, instantaneously and at a distance.

● Perpetrators are using technology to create a sense of omnipresence in women's lives through, for example, the use of GPS tracking on smartphones, and monitoring women's social media accounts.

● Mobile technologies are being used as an easy way for perpetrators to punish and humiliate women.

Technology-facilitated stalking: The experiences of victim/survivors

Many women do not identify stalking behaviours as stalking

As our workers' survey indicated, many women don't identify stalking behaviours as stalking. Because repeated contact can so closely model what we see as 'romantic' behaviour, it can be difficult to know where the boundary has been crossed. For example, at the beginning of a relationship, having someone check where you are, or want to know everything you are doing, could appear to be a sign that the person cares about you (Kuehner *et al.* 2012). Considering this, we wanted to include in our survey women who may not have come into contact with domestic violence services, or who were unsure whether what they had experienced was stalking. To do this we used the term 'unwanted contact' instead of 'stalking', but emphasised that this unwanted contact resulted in the woman feeling fearful.[6] Our research invitation asked the questions: Have you ever experienced unwanted contact from a partner or ex-partner via the phone or internet? Have you ever felt afraid because a partner or ex-partner has tracked you with your phone, harassed you on Facebook or constantly sent you text messages?

To recruit women, we put the call out to all our contacts, placed advertisements on our Facebook site, put up flyers at universities and health centres, and called for volunteers on websites such as Gumtree (gumtree.com.au). 'Snowball sampling' was also used, by encouraging women to pass the survey details on to others. We hoped that this would give us a good cross-section of participants.

Doing a multiple methods research project means that the research approach can be developed and shaped by the findings as the project goes along. Therefore the focus of our victim/survivors survey was informed by our previous survey with workers.

Profile of participants

Our online survey with victim/survivors had 46 participants. The average age was 35. This is noteworthy, suggesting that, despite the widespread perception that technology-facilitated abuse is mainly occurring amongst young people, our research shows that it is happening to older women too. The study conducted on technology and domestic violence by Dimond *et al.* (2011) reported similar findings, with the authors noting that their findings contrasted with public perceptions that technology abuse happens mainly to young people.

35
Average age of participant

92%

self-identified as Anglo

91%

self-identified as heterosexual

37%

have children

9%

identified as having a disability

Use and knowledge of technology

We were interested in finding out more about women's knowledge of their phones and their security settings. From our consultations with workers in domestic violence refuges, we heard that many women had their phones set up for them by their partners and that women were unsure if others knew their passwords. Our research findings support these observations. It is particularly concerning that 22 per cent of women stated that someone else knew their passwords. This may enable a perpetrator to access his partner's or ex-partner's iTunes, email, Facebook or other accounts.

20% said that their partner had downloaded apps to their phone

22% said someone else knew their passwords

22% had their partner set-up their phone for them

49% knew how to change some of their security settings

Stalking experiences

We asked women about their stalking experiences in general. Of the 44 women who responded to this question, 80 per cent reported that they had received text messages that made them feel afraid. They were also made to feel that the perpetrator was tracking them and over 50 per cent believed they were followed.

80% received texts that made them feel afraid

65% received calls that made them feel afraid for their safety

63% were made to feel like they were being watched or tracked

51% were followed

Previous research in the US on domestic violence and technology also found that the use of text messages to harass women was extremely common (Dimond *et al.* 2011). The researchers felt that this may be due to the fact that blocking text messages is actually quite a difficult process on most mobile phones and with most mobile networks.

Technology-facilitated abuse and harassment

Women were asked to note the specific ways they had been abused and harassed using mobile technologies.[7] Their responses show that, while text messaging was the most commonly experienced technology used in abuse, many had also experienced a range of other technology-based tactics, including having private pictures of them shared without permission, being forced to share their passwords, and being tracked by phone location apps or GPS.

Of the 44 women who responded to this question:

78% said a partner or ex-partner had used text messages, phone, etc. to call them names, harass them or put them down

56% said a partner or ex-partner had used mobile technology to check where they were

56% said a partner or ex-partner had made them feel afraid to not respond to a phone call or text out of fear what they might do (i.e. threaten to kill themselves)

47% said a partner or ex-partner had checked text messages without permission

44% said a partner or ex-partner had threatened them via text, email, over social media

39% said a partner or ex-partner had shared private pictures of them without permission

33% said a partner or ex-partner had posted negative information about them on social media such as Facebook

17% said a partner or ex-partner had tracked them with GPS (such as using apps like Find My Friends)

17% said a partner or ex-partner had demanded their electronic passwords

14% said a partner or ex-partner had impersonated them on email, text messages, and/or social media

11% said a partner or ex-partner had used their children's social media accounts to attempt to communicate with them

8% said a partner or ex-partner had bought a phone for them for the purposes of keeping track of them

6% said a partner or ex-partner gave their children a phone or other device as a way of creating further opportunities to contact them against their wishes

Experiences of stalking and harassment via technology

Women were asked to provide more details about the technology-facilitated abuse they had experienced. The same themes emerged in women's experiences as seen in workers' answers about how perpetrators were using technology to facilitate their stalking and abuse – causing fear, omnipresence, and punish and humiliate. The women's experiences also show just how much crossover there is between these tactics; perpetrators often used multiple tactics to abuse and harass women.

Causing fear

Women reported that they were made to feel afraid through threats made via phone calls and text messages. It is important to remember that research has found a strong association between stalking and lethal or near-lethal violence. In particular, unwanted phone calls from violent ex-partners have been linked to increased risk of homicide. Therefore it is important that technology-facilitated abuse such as that experienced by these women is taken seriously (McFarlane *et al.* 2002).

> *He used to follow me when driving, sit outside my house, work and friends houses. Phone me all the time with threats of violence.*

> *He would constantly text me to check up on me during our relationship. This behaviour escalated when we broke up. I would get over 100 abusive texts a day – I never felt free of him. Much of the texts were threatening, specially regarding sexual things which was particularly painful and shameful.*

> *During our relationship, I could never use my phone in front of him because he would always ask what I was doing and he would want me to show him. He would then tell me what to say to the person I was texting. It was as though he never liked me being on the phone unless it was to communicate with him. He bombarded me with text messages after I left him. His text messages were mostly of threats towards my family. There was more than one occasion where he wouldn't stop calling me if he found out I lied to him about where I was. Turning off my phone wasn't an option because I knew I would get in trouble if I kept ignoring his calls.*

Omnipresence

Women who responded to our survey reported that perpetrators were utilising mobile technologies to create a relentless presence in their lives. This included tracking women using GPS, making women feel they were being followed and constant text messaging.

Phoned me saying he knew where I was. Said he was doing that to keep me safe.

My ex would text me over 50 times a day and would make me feel like I was constantly under surveillance. He stalked me for a year after I left him.

I suspect he may have installed software onto my iPhone enabling him to have access to my phone calls, text messages, Facebook, emails, etc. He sometimes says things or behaves in ways that suggests he knows something via a suspicious means.

I have had my ex trace phone records when number was changed and obtained last 10 calls I had made with that number with the phone company. He also pretended to be a female on Facebook, contacting my new partner's brother to get info on me. He texted me at all hours and called constantly.

My ex used to track me with GPS, I felt afraid to tell him to stop doing this. This made it so hard to leave him and I had to get a new phone, and lose all those contacts. He was also very violent in other ways, physical and he would force me to do sexual things. He would send me up to 50 texts a day with horrible and graphic details of what he was going to do to me. He harassed my family to try to find me, but I have moved states (losing contact with most of my supports), to be free of him.

Punish and humiliate

Women reported that perpetrators often threatened to use technology to publically shame them in front of their family and friends. In some cases the perpetrator carried out these threats. Several women also mentioned the sexualised aspect of this abuse.

My ex partner would repeatedly write messages to me of a sexual nature. I repeatedly asked him to stop, but he wouldn't, or he would apologise and try to say it was a joke or that he wouldn't do it again. When I would be at the supermarket or other public places, he would often be there at the same time, and I wondered how he knew where I was. Months after our relationship ended, he continued to send text messages, photos and Facebook messages. I blocked him from Facebook but could not work out a way to do this on my iPhone.

My ex would also text me pornographic pictures, text me things that were very sexual in nature. After we split up this just intensified. I was terrified each time I heard a text coming through. I tried to block his number, but I didn't want to change my number as I didn't want him to impact me in that way. Eventually I did have to change all my numbers, which was sad but I couldn't take it any longer.

Secretly filmed things (possibly) and threatened to send them.

Would track my movements using Facebook, internet banking and email. Would send messages or call verbally abusing me for what had been seen on the internet.

My ex-partner harassed and stalked me for the last four years. He has breached intervention orders constantly. He has contacted colleagues and friends via Facebook and email consistently during this time as well as myself. He has spread rumours about myself and my fiancé that could have damaged our business and has made public calls and 'pages' on Facebook for people to come and take our child from me so I 'get what I deserve'. In between these incidences of abuse he has proposed marriage to me, begged me to go back to him and sent me gifts. He has previously broken into my home. I moved cities and he does not currently know my address but still contacts my friends, etc, to find out my whereabouts. I report everything to the police.

Women's experiences of other forms of domestic violence

Partner stalking has been found to be linked to a risk of experiencing other forms of domestic violence (Krebs *et al.* 2011) and emotionally abusive or controlling behaviour (Tjaden and Thoennes 1998). Emerging research shows a link between stalking and sexual violence (Logan and Cole 2011). Our research findings are consistent with this research. As well as stalking, many women reported experiencing other forms of violent behaviour, particularly emotional and sexual abuse.

Emotional abuse 82%

Sexual abuse 58%

Physical violence 39%

Financial abuse 37%
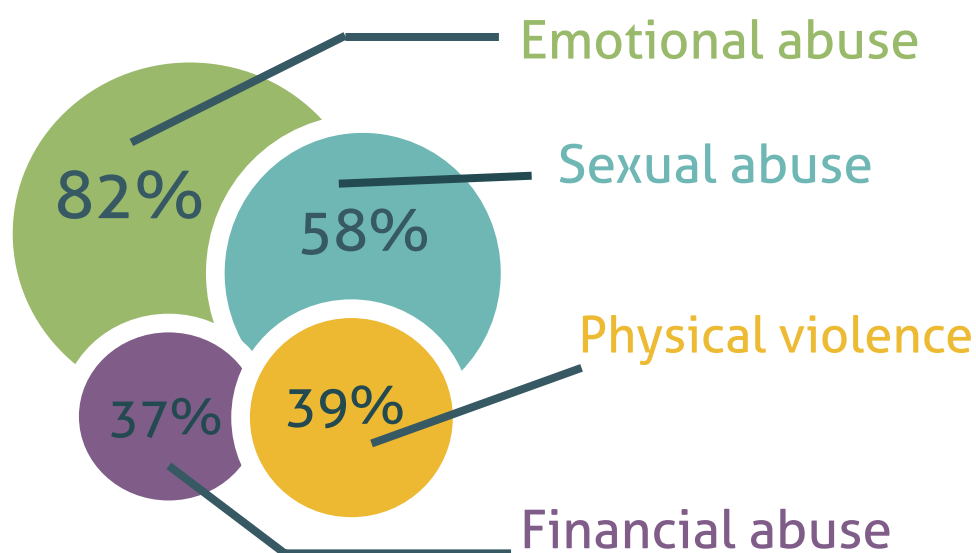
Impact on mental health

We asked participants if the unwanted contact they had experienced had an impact on their mental health and wellbeing. Of the 39 who responded to this question, 84 per cent said it had. Recent research from the US has specifically focused on the impacts of intimate partner stalking on women's psychological wellbeing and has found it results in high levels of emotional distress as well as high levels of antidepressant use (Kuehner *et al.* 2012). A large-scale population study conducted in Australia shows that stalking is one of the most common forms of violence against women and, along with other forms of gender-based violence, it has an impact on women's mental health (Rees *et al.* 2011). It is theorised that because victim/survivors of stalking experience sustained periods of fear, there is a significant impact on mental and physical health as a consequence (Logan and Cole 2011:918).

84% of women said that the stalking they experienced had affected their mental health and wellbeing

These effects were:

"Terrible nightmares, loss of support people, anxiety and depression, panic attacks, lost lots of weight, fear of men

Felt like he might lash out and send photos out, or upload them somewhere

Terrible PTSD

felt like I had to always be on high alert
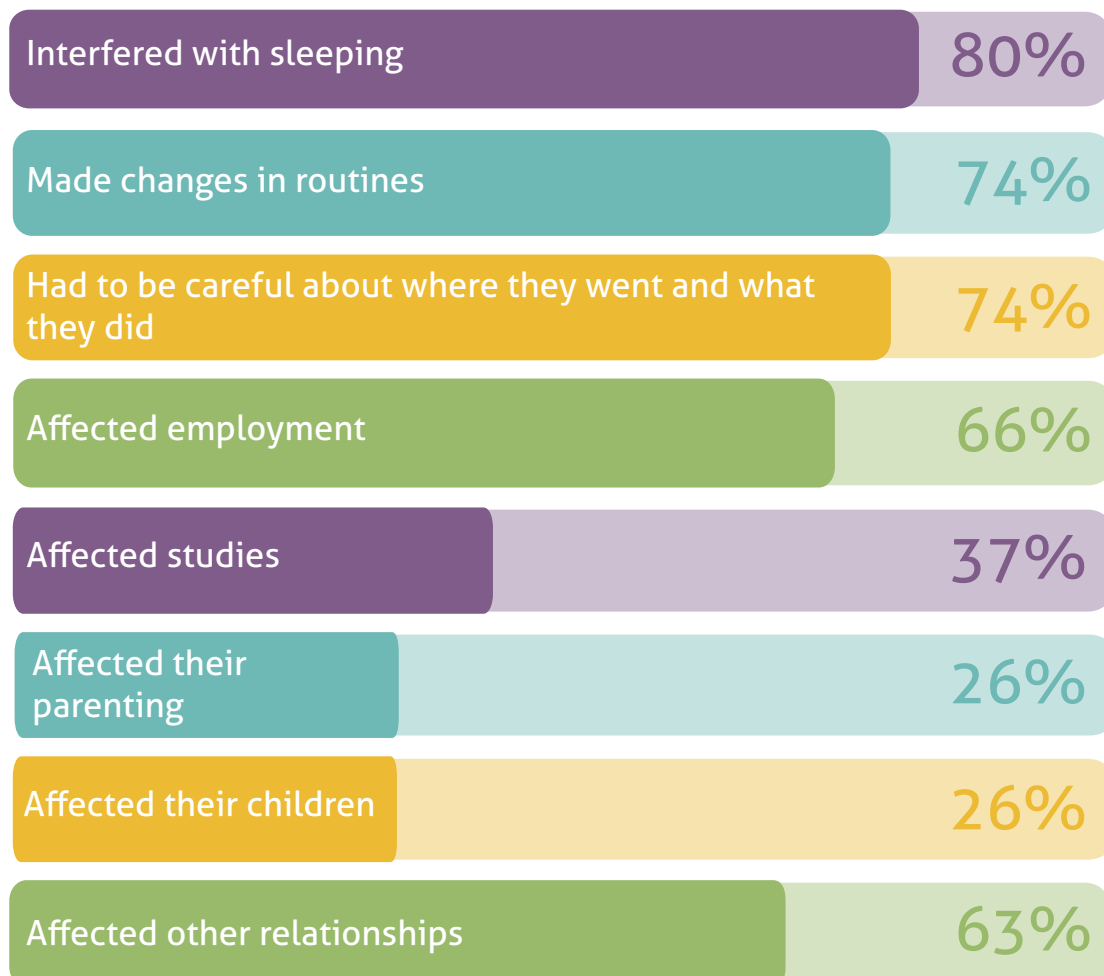
Severe depression

Anxiety and panic attacks

I would get anxiety attacks going out in public thinking I may be tracked down

I experienced anxiety and depression

Lost the ability to sleep well. Felt sick. Had headaches. Was worried a lot of the time"

Wider impact on women's lives

Research has also shown partner stalking negatively affects multiple aspects of the victim's life, including their physical health (Logan *et al.* 2006a), employment (Logan *et al.* 2007, Melton 2007), and relationships (Melton 2007, Logan *et al.* 2006a). These impacts were also experienced by participants in our research. The 35 women who answered this question said the stalking impacted on them in the following ways:

Impact	Percentage
Interfered with sleeping	80%
Made changes in routines	74%
Had to be careful about where they went and what they did	74%
Affected employment	66%
Affected studies	37%
Affected their parenting	26%
Affected their children	26%
Affected other relationships	63%

Seeking help

The final section of our survey with victim/survivors focused on whether they had sought help for the abuse they were experiencing. We were careful to emphasise that women are not responsible for stopping the stalking and abuse; that this behaviour is a pattern of deliberate action the perpetrator is solely responsible for. However, it is important we learn more about women's help-seeking behaviour so we can ensure that, firstly, women know they can come forward and receive assistance, and secondly, that they are responded to in effective ways

We asked the women if they sought assistance for the abuse they were experiencing. If they answered no, they were directed to a page asking them the reasons why they did not feel comfortable seeking help (see page 32). Those who responded that they had sought help were asked further questions about who they spoke to.

Did women seek help?

56% Did not seek help

44% Did seek help

When women did seek help, who did they go to?

77% Friends and family

42% Domestic violence services

35% Police

27% Legal services

12% Helpline

These findings are consistent with other studies. Most women experiencing violence seek help from family and friends, with smaller numbers speaking to domestic violence services, police or legal services (Logan *et al.* 2006a).

Intervention orders

Of the 44 per cent (n=20) of women who stated that they did seek help, 30 per cent (n=6) indicated that they took out intervention orders.

Did women find that the intervention order was useful in stopping the stalking?

50% No

17% Yes

17% Unsure

Research shows that perpetrators who use stalking-type behaviours are more likely to breach court orders than perpetrators who use other forms of abuse (Logan and Cole 2007). Breaches were also mentioned as a factor in why participants in our research felt that intervention orders were not very helpful. Women's answers show that they often did not feel that breaches of the intervention order were taken seriously, particularly if they occurred using technology, such as via the internet and mobile phone. Women in our survey also wrote that there was much confusion about court-ordered contact in relation to children and that perpetrators often used child contact as an opportunity to further abuse them.

Having the courage to actually apply for an order is a huge barrier in the process. Admitting the problem and facing the process (and some police members) is a really daunting and difficult process. At times you are treated as though it is your fault. The order did stop the contact, but doesn't remove the fear. My former partner now lives interstate because of an undertaking he gave to the court (post-intervention order) but I am constantly aware that he could turn up at any time. It would seem that the fear and being 'on-edge' never leaves you.

Phone stopped ringing, and texts, but have since discovered he may have breached it.

He would still text, etc. He didn't seem that afraid of the IVO.

I felt the whole process was confusing, unsure exactly what I could and couldn't do, particularly regarding our children. I also didn't feel that I was safe, that breaches were taken seriously.

The harassment has continued, especially via online avenues, for years. It seems anything online is much more difficult for the police to prove and take to court. Seems to be not taken as seriously.

It didn't stop the text messages and I was raped by my ex while I had the intervention order.

Police did not enforce this. Police could not respond quickly enough. By the time they arrived he had gone.

Why did women not seek help?

56 per cent (n=26) of the women in our research indicated that they did not seek help for the abuse they were experiencing.

They reported a range of reasons why they did not seek help:

felt embarrassed to tell anyone	85%
weren't sure what they were experiencing was abuse	55%
felt afraid to tell anyone	45%
felt they would not be believed	45%
felt they couldn't prove what was happening to them	45%

The finding that many women did not seek help because they were embarrassed is consistent with other studies which show that many women feel shame over the violence they are experiencing (Fanslow and Robinson 2010, Logan *et al.* 2006a). This kind of self-blame is common amongst victim/survivors and is often a significant barrier to seeking help (Rose *et al.* 2011). It is also important to emphasise that embarrassment should be understood as being linked to the tactics used by stalking perpetrators, who often deliberately isolate and shame women (Fugate *et al.* 2005). As our research has shown, new technology can provide perpetrators with additional opportunities to publicly shame women.

Summary: victim/survivors' survey findings

Our survey with women who had experienced technology-facilitated stalking found that:

A wide variety of technology is being used in partner stalking, including text messaging, social media, GPS, and photo and video technologies

Women report that perpetrators are using mobile technologies to control and monitor them from a distance

Technology is often used in stalking both during the relationship and after separation

Technology is used by perpetrators to humiliate and publically shame women, often in sexualised ways

The use of technology in stalking has a significant impact on women's mental and physical wellbeing, their day to day routines, employment, parenting and relationships

Women who have experienced technology-facilitated stalking have often experienced other forms of domestic violence including emotional, financial and sexual abuse

Women are reluctant to seek help, often feel embarrassed about their experiences and fear they will not be believed

When women do seek legal help by taking out an intervention order, it is not always effective in stopping perpetrators from stalking women via mobile technologies

Recommendations and conclusion

Our SmartSafe research sought to explore whether technology-facilitated stalking was an issue for women experiencing domestic violence in Victoria and, if so, how perpetrators were using technology to harass and stalk women. Our survey of 152 domestic violence workers in Victoria found serious concerns about how often and how easily mobile technologies are used to stalk women in the context of domestic violence. One worker said women are being "tethered" by technology.

As theorised by Hand *et al*. (2009), technology-facilitated stalking is not a new form of domestic violence. Rather, technology offers perpetrators more opportunities to control and abuse women. Our research shows that mobile technologies provide perpetrators with easy, accessible, instantaneous and potentially more public methods to control, monitor and shame women. Mobile technologies can also make leaving an abusive partner more difficult. By using strategies such as constant text messaging and GPS tracking, a perpetrator can convey the sense that he is omnipresent and that his ex-partner can never truly escape him.

technology offers perpetrators more opportunities to control and abuse women

While our survey with victim/survivors, with 46 women participating, was smaller in scale than our survey with workers, we can cautiously draw some conclusions from our research. For the women who participated, technology-facilitated stalking had affected their lives in many ways. Their responses show that perpetrators are using mobile technology to abuse and cause fear, and that women felt this had a significant impact on their mental health and wellbeing.

Our survey with victim/survivors also suggested that it can be difficult for women to seek help for technology-facilitated stalking. When they do seek legal help by taking out an intervention order, it is not always effective in stopping the abuse.

> This research is the first of its kind in Victoria and it is one of the few studies conducted internationally on technology-facilitated stalking in the context of domestic violence

More focused research

This research is the first of its kind in Victoria and it is one of the few studies conducted internationally on technology-facilitated stalking in the context of domestic violence. Considering this, we recommend that more resources and research be focused on this emerging issue. Our research indicates that technology-facilitated stalking is common in Victoria and has a significant impact on those subjected to it. Further research could focus more specifically on legal responses to technology-facilitated stalking, such as intervention orders, examining whether current legislation is adequately protecting women from perpetrators who are utilising new technology as part of their stalking tactics.

Consultation with industry

There also needs to be more consultation and cooperation between the domestic violence sector and the telecommunications industry to enable women to more safely and easily use new mobile technologies. The telecommunications industry needs to be aware of the ways these new technologies are being exploited by perpetrators and the damaging impact this can have on the lives of women and children.

An encouraging development in the potential of this cooperation has been Telstra's recent action to provide SIM cards to domestic violence victim/survivors free of charge and its decision to offer silent numbers to victim/survivors at no extra cost (Summers 2013). Further developments could include a streamlining of the processes to block text messages and phone calls.

Developing safeguards

Developers of smartphone technologies, such as Apple and Google, also need to ensure there are easier and clearer ways to minimise the possibilities of being stalked and tracked with their products. Our suggestions include a simple 'safe mode' mechanism, similar to the airplane mode on an iPhone, which quickly blocks a phone from being tracked while still enabling it to be used to make phone calls; the ability to see if someone is tracking a phone by providing an alert when someone accesses information; and easier processes to block unwanted calls and text messages without having to change the phone number. Apple's recent update to the iPhone and iPad operating system 'iOS 7', provides users with a way to block text messages and calls, however those who have older models of the iPhone may be unable to use this feature.

We believe that mobile technologies are a useful tool for victim/survivors to enhance women's safety and assist in recovery from abuse

Eroded relationship boundaries

Our research raises important questions about the ways technology is eroding and shifting personal relationship boundaries. For example, technology may be 'normalising' the expectation that a partner respond to phone contact 24 hours a day. We are concerned about the impact this could have on younger people in particular who may be forming their first intimate relationships. For example, a study in the US showed that 24 per cent of teenagers communicated with their partner via their mobile phones between the hours of midnight and 5am (Picard 2007). Teenagers in the study also said they felt they had to respond to text messages immediately out of fear of what their partner might do.

Our research results touched upon this issue through the examination of how perpetrators can create a sense of omnipresence in women's lives. Several women reported that the perpetrator of abuse demanded to know her private passwords, expected that she respond to his repeated calls and texts, checked phone messages without permission, or monitored posts on her Facebook account. Further research could examine, for example, the extent to which relationship boundaries are shifting to investigate what this means for our sense of safety, privacy and personal space.

We believe that mobile technologies are a useful tool for victim/survivors to enhance women's safety and assist in recovery from abuse. However, our research shows that these technologies are also opening up more avenues for perpetrators to control, stalk and abuse women in the context of domestic violence. If victim/survivors are to be able to use mobile technologies safely, we need to take technology-facilitated stalking seriously and develop effective practice, policy and legal responses to address the use of technology as a tactic of abuse.

Notes

1. This line of inquiry is influenced by Hand *et al.* (2009) who argue that the use of technology by perpetrators to abuse women in the context of domestic violence is not a new form of violence but instead that technology provides more extensive opportunities for the control and harassment of women.

2. The guidelines we followed are recommended in the guide on conducting research with survivors of domestic violence by the World Health Organization (2001).

3. An IP (internet protocol) address is a numeric code that identifies all computers and devices that are connected to the internet.

4. See also Dimond *et al.* (2011:416).

5. Facebook has a 'check-in' function, which is a location-based service that lets you share your locations with people in your social network.

6. This follows a similar approach taken by Logan *et al.* 2006b in their research on partner stalking.

7. Some of these questions were based on the survey conducted by Picard (2007).

References

Anderson, Kristin L (2009), 'Gendering Coercive Control', *Violence Against Women*, vol. 15, no. 12, pp. 1444-57.

Australian Bureau of Statistics (2005), *Personal Safety Survey*, Australian Bureau of Statistics, Canberra.

Australian Bureau of Statistics (2010), *Customised report, Based on data from the 2005 Personal Safety Survey*, Australian Bureau of Statistics, Canberra.

Basile, Kathleen C & Hall, Jeffrey E (2011), 'Intimate Partner Violence Perpetration by Court-ordered Men: Distinctions and Intersections Among Physical Violence, Sexual Violence, Psychological Abuse, and Stalking', *Journal of Interpersonal Violence,* vol. 26, no. 2, pp. 230-53.

Cattaneo, Lauren Bennett, Cho, Sarah & Botuck, Shelly (2011), 'Describing Intimate Partner Stalking Over Time: An Effort to Inform Victim-Centered Service Provision', *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, vol. 26, no. 17, pp. 3428-54.

Clark, James J & Walker, Robert (2011), 'Research Ethics in Victimization Studies Widening the Lens', *Violence Against Women*, vol. 17, no. 12, pp. 1489-508.

Collins, Victoria E & Carmody, Dianne C (2011), 'Deadly Love Images of Dating Violence in the "Twilight Saga"', *Affilia*, vol. 26, no. 4, pp. 382-94.

Dimond, Jill P, Fiesler, Casey & Bruckman, Amy S (2011), 'Domestic Violence and Information Communication Technologies', *Interacting with Computers*, vol. 23, no. 5, pp. 413-21.

Dudley-Nicholson, Jennifer (2013), 'Sensis study shows social media is reaching into every aspect of Australian lives', *Herald-Sun*, May 21.

Fanslow, Janet L & Robinson, EM (2004), 'Violence Against Women in New Zealand: Prevalence and Health Consequences', *Journal of the New Zealand Medical Association*, vol. 117, no. 1206.

Fleming, Kimberly N, Newton, Tamara L, Fernandez-Botran, Rafael, Miller, James J & Burns, Vicki Ellison (2012), 'Intimate Partner Stalking Victimization and Posttraumatic Stress Symptoms in Post-abuse Women', *Violence Against Women*, vol. 18, no. 12, pp. 1368-89.

Fraser, Cynthia, Olsen, Erica, Lee, Kaofeng, Southworth, Cindy & Tucker, Sarah (2010), 'The New Age of Stalking: Technological Implications for Stalking', *Juvenile and Family Court Journal*, vol. 61, no. 4, pp. 39-55.

Fugate, Michelle, Landis, Leslie, Riordan, Kim, Naureckas, Sara & Engel, Barbara (2005), 'Barriers to Domestic Violence Help Seeking Implications for Intervention', *Violence Against Women*, vol. 11, no. 3, pp. 290-310.

Hand, Tammy, Chung, Donna & Peters, Margaret (2009), *The Use of Information and Communication Technologies to Coerce and Control in Domestic Violence and Following Separation*, Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearinghouse, Sydney.

Krebs, Christopher, Breiding, Matthew J, Browne, Angela & Warner, Tara (2011), 'The Association Between Different Types of Intimate Partner Violence Experienced by Women', *Journal of Family Violence*, vol. 26, no. 6, pp. 487-500.

Kuehner, Christine, Gass, Peter & Dressing, Harald (2012), 'Mediating Effects of Stalking Victimization on Gender Differences in Mental Health', *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, vol. 27, no. 2, pp. 199-221.

Logan, TK & Cole, Jennifer (2007), 'The Impact of Partner Stalking on Mental Health and Protective Order Outcomes Over Time', *Violence and Victims*, vol. 22, no. 5, pp. 546-62.

Logan, TK & Cole, Jennifer (2011), 'Exploring the Intersection of Partner Stalking and Sexual Abuse', *Violence Against Women*, vol. 17, no. 7, pp. 904-24.

Logan, TK, Leukefeld, Carl & Walker, Bob (2000), 'Stalking as a Variant of Intimate Violence: Implications from a Young Adult Sample', *Violence and Victims*, vol. 15, no. 1, pp. 91-111.

Logan, TK, Shannon, Lisa, Cole, Jennifer & Swanberg, Jennifer (2007), 'Partner Stalking and Implications for Women's Employment', *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, vol. 22, no. 3, pp. 268-91.

Logan, TK, Shannon, Lisa, Cole, Jennifer & Walker, Robert (2006a), 'The Impact of Differential Patterns of Physical Violence and Stalking on Mental Health and Help-Seeking among Women with Protective Orders', *Violence Against Women*, vol. 12, no. 9, pp. 866-86.

Logan, TK & Walker, Robert (2009), 'Partner Stalking Psychological Dominance or "Business as Usual"?', *Trauma, Violence and Abuse*, vol. 10, no. 3, pp. 247-70.

Logan, TK, Walker, Robert, Cole, Jennifer & Shannon, Lisa (2006b), *Partner Stalking: How Women Respond, Cope, and Survive*, Springer Publishing Company, New York.

McFarlane, Judith, Campbell, Jacquelyn C & Watson, Kathy (2002), 'Intimate Partner Stalking and Femicide: Urgent Implications for Women's Safety', *Behavioral Sciences and the Law*, vol. 20, no. 12, pp. 51-68.

Melton, Heather C (2007), 'Stalking in the Context of Intimate Partner Abuse In the Victims' Words', *Feminist Criminology*, vol. 2, no. 4, pp. 347-63.

Picard, Peter (2007), '*Tech Abuse in Teen Relationships Study*', Liz Claiborne Inc.

Rees, Susan, Silove, Derrick, Chey, Tien, Ivancic, Lorraine, Steel, Zachary, Creamer, Mark, Teesson, Maree, Bryant, Richard, McFarlane, Alexander C & Mills, Katherine L (2011), 'Lifetime Prevalence of Gender-Based Violence in Women and the Relationship with Mental Disorders and Psychosocial Function', *JAMA: The Journal of the American Medical Association*, vol. 306, no. 5, p. 513.

Reinharz, Shulamit (1992), *Feminist Research Methods in Social Research*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Rose, Diana, Trevillion, Kylee, Woodall, Anna, Morgan, Craig, Feder, Gene & Howard, Louise (2011), 'Barriers and Facilitators of Disclosures of Domestic Violence by Mental Health Service Users: Qualitative Study', *The British Journal of Psychiatry*, vol. 198, no. 3, pp. 189-94.

Saldaña, Johnny (2012), *The Coding Manual For Qualitative Researchers*, Sage Publications, London.

Scott, Adrian J, Lloyd, Rebecca & Gavin, Jeff (2010), 'The Influence Of Prior Relationship on Perceptions of Stalking in the United Kingdom and Australia', *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, vol. 37, no. 11, pp. 1185-94.

Sheridan, Lorraine & Davies, Graham M (2001), 'Violence and the Prior Victim–Stalker Relationship', *Criminal Behaviour and Mental Health*, vol. 11, no. 2, pp. 102-16.

Singleton, Royce A & Straits, Bruce C (2005), *Approaches to Social Research*, Oxford University Press, New York.

Southworth, Cindy, Dawson, Shawndell, Fraser, Cynthia & Tucker, Sarah (2005), *A High-Tech Twist on Abuse: Technology, Intimate Partner Stalking, and Advocacy*, Violence Against Women Online Resources.

Spitzberg, Brian H (2002), 'The Tactical Topography of Stalking Victimization and Management', *Trauma, Violence and Abuse*, vol. 3, no. 4, pp. 261-88.

Strand, Susanne & McEwan, Troy E (2011), 'Samegender Stalking in Sweden and Australia', *Behavioral Sciences & the Law*, vol. 29, no. 2, pp. 202-19.

Summers, Anne (2013), 'This Women's Day Remember Fallen in Domestic Wars', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 8 March 2013, viewed 7 June 2013, <http://www.smh.com.au/comment/this-womens-day-remember-fallen-in-domestic-wars-20130307-2fo1v.html#ixzz2VVlUTCGR>.

Tjaden, Patricia Godeke & Thoennes, Nancy (1998), *Stalking in America: Findings from the National Violence Against Women Survey*, US Department of Justice, Washington.

Victorian Parliament Law Reform Committee (2013), *Inquiry into Sexting*, Parliament of Victoria, Melbourne.

World Health Organization (2001), *Putting Women First: Ethical and Safety Recommendations for Research on Domestic Violence Against Women*, World Health Organization, Geneva.