



## Technology and Domestic Violence: Experiences, Perpetration and Responses

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This workshop brings together experts in the field of technology-facilitated stalking and abuse to share knowledge and solutions to an emerging issue in the Domestic Violence (DV) arena. It will produce outcomes that will improve our understanding of the significant risk posed to victim/survivors (particularly women and children) by this violence and provide innovative solutions in violence prevention and responses.

The focus of this workshop is: technology-facilitated abuse and stalking in the context of DV. There has been little documentation of this violence in official statistics and it has been underreported for a plethora of reasons, including: normalisation by victim/survivors on the basis that it is seen to mimic 'romantic' behaviour; the multipronged and prolonged exercise of strategies of violence (characterised as 'coercive control' in which perpetrators engage); because violence is part of victim's 'lifetime' or long-term experience of violence or their broader experiences of violence and discrimination which occurs throughout their lives and in the context of various institutions and settings (George and Harris 2014; Woodlock 2013, 2016; Woodlock and Harris forthcoming). However, as participants of this workshop can attest, as uptake of technology is increasing, so too is perpetrator use of these mediums (see also Dimond, Fiesler and Bruckman 2011; Fraser et al 2011; Hand, Chung and Peters 2009; Mason and Magnet 2012; Senate Inquiry into Domestic Violence in Australia 2015; Southworth et al 2005; Victoria Police 2015). As the *Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence* (2016, 13, part 1) emphasises "[t]echnology is becoming increasingly important in the area of family violence" as 'perpetrators' increasing use of technology to dominate and control victims and as a form of stalking" is observed (15, part 2).

Despite heightened levels of technology-facilitated abuse and stalking, with little data garnered it is difficult to obtain insight into the topic. Complicating the issue, thus far there has been a lack of universal definition for these terms, in an Australian or international context. The absence of such frames is a significant limitation; hindering comparative analysis and, of greater concern, inhibiting development of initiatives to combat the incidence of technology-facilitated violence. Existing research (Douglas, forthcoming; George and Harris 2014; Harris, forthcoming) has highlighted that there is some confusion amongst criminal justice agents (police and magistrates) as to what constitutes technology-facilitated violence. There is evidence that some police and judicial officers regard such violence as less serious or disconnected from other

forms of abuse and traditional ‘in person’ stalking and consequently, that it is not uncommon for police to decline investigating or to actively discourage victim/survivor responses to technology-facilitated violence. Women’s Legal Service NSW (one of the participants) have highlighted (in their casework and advocacy) challenges with responding to violence in multiple jurisdictions, with differing legislations and responses. This can be another impediment to reporting and regulating technology-facilitated violence. Additionally, service providers and advocates report that they lack the technical skills and knowledge in regards to how to protect victim/survivors (Woodlock 2013, 2016).

Gaps in knowledge are concerning, given the: accounts that abuse and stalking is increasing and the invasive and spaceless nature of this violence, which impacts on wellbeing, security and safety. Victim/survivors are exposed anytime they access their phone, tablet, computer, social media accounts or, with the rise of ‘the internet of things’, anytime they use smart devices (Burdon & Douglas 2017). The notion of ‘escaping’ violence is flawed, but is rendered even weaker by technology-facilitated violence which dilutes physical boundaries. Perpetrator breaches of intervention orders by technology have been described as common, but frequently dismissed, yet “[m]ultiple and persistent breaches, even those that may at first appear ‘low’ level, such as text messages, may be indicators of increased risk” (Dwyer and Miller 2014, 50). Perpetrators who engage in stalking are more likely to breach orders, and stalking is one of the key risk factors for lethal family violence (of women and their children) and so such violations by technology can constitute indicators of high risk (Dimond, Fiesler and Bruckman 2011; Dwyer and Miller 2014; Harris, forthcoming; Logan and Cole 2007; Mason and Magnate 2012; McFarlane et al 1999; Woodlock 2016).

Research produced in the American setting has frequently decontextualised technology-facilitated violence (commonly classed as ‘electronic dating violence’, see Reed et al 2016; Reed, Tolman and Ward 2016; Temple et al 2016 or ‘social media surveillance’, see Fox and Warber 2014; Lyndon, Bonds-Raacke and Cratty 2011; Muise, Chritofies and Demarais 2009; Utz and Beukeboom 2011) from DV even where other forms of violence and/or in person stalking has been noted (Harris and Woodlock, forthcoming; see also Bennett, Gurin, Ramos and Margolin 2011). The scope and dynamics of DV can, therefore, be overlooked. There exists too, in some literature, a ‘gender blindness’, where gendered differences between victimisation and perpetration is not fully examined. There is evidence which indicates that both the types and impacts of perpetration are gendered. Failure to acknowledge nuances and divergences in data results in a distorted image of this spaceless violence and its gendered nature (Dragiewicz et al, forthcoming).

The proposed workshop will allow for information-sharing and knowledge development in this field, which has real world applications for: protecting and empowering victim/survivors; improving policy and practice of advocates and criminal justice agencies; developing prevention initiatives; and reducing the incidents and impacts of violence. We note that participants have a history of

engaging with government and non-government agencies in this area, including by: developing submissions to and recommendations for the *Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence*, advising in reviews of police policy and practice, providing information and training to government and non-government responders (including at Legal Aid forums, domestic violence training sessions, judicial training and court support worker events) and providing commentary on proposed law reform and reviews. Their engagement with and practical application of their work is well established. As the dissemination strategy indicates, this workshop will result in not only academic outputs, but also freely accessible outputs which can be utilised by practitioners and for the purposes of providing education for and information sharing throughout the broader community in the interests of raising awareness of technology-facilitated abuse and stalking.