

eSafetyresearch

Online safety for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women living in urban areas

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eSafety research program overview

Under Section 15 of the *Enhancing Online Safety Act 2015* the eSafety Commissioner (eSafety):

- supports, encourages, conducts and evaluates research about online safety for Australians
- collects, analyses, interprets and disseminates information about online safety
- publishes reports and papers relating to online safety for Australians.

The research program is underpinned by four key themes including:

1. tracking trends
2. supporting the development of eSafety resources and programs
3. inter-agency and international co-operation
4. program and resource evaluation.

This research fits under theme 2.

Relevant content provided by eSafety includes:

<https://www.esafety.gov.au/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-peoples>

For any enquiries relating to the eSafety research program, please contact research@esafety.gov.au

Acknowledgements

eSafety acknowledges the traditional custodians of country throughout Australia and their continuing connection to land, waters and community. We pay our respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, and to Elders both past and present. We would like to express our sincere gratitude to the people who have contributed to work in this area and continue to work with us.

This report includes a summary of research undertaken by the Social Research Centre, Australian National University which was commissioned in June to August 2018 to undertake qualitative interviews with service providers in contact with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women living in urban areas. This summary

report also includes material drawn from desk research and data sourced from the Australian Bureau of Statistics.

Key findings

- This report summarises primary research undertaken by the Social Research Centre together with relevant published literature and Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) data. The primary research summarises qualitative interviews with 27 service providers who support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women living in urban areas and who experience technology-facilitated abuse.
- The report focuses on women living in urban areas, recognising that there is considerable diversity in the living circumstances, service access and needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women regardless of where they live. The majority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women live in urban and regional areas.
- Interviews with service providers identified six types of technology-facilitated abuse. They were, in order of prevalence based on the interview data:
 - abusive phone calls and text messages
 - destroying or restricting technology access
 - social media and third-party abuse
 - monitoring and stalking
 - image-based abuse
 - fight videos.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women living in urban areas did not experience substantially different impacts of technology-facilitated abuse from those felt by other women i.e. heightened levels of stress, anxiety and depression, self-doubt and negative impacts on both relationships and finances. Some impacts, however, appeared to be amplified. These were: the risk of being socially isolated from kinship networks and fear of shaming and family retribution. Social isolation combined with financial difficulty and the emotional pressure from extended family was such that some women returned to the abuse perpetrator.
- Service providers also reported that extended family and community members often took the side of the perpetrator and responded to messages on social media, particularly where the woman had been silent about the domestic violence.

- Service providers had mixed awareness about women’s sources of support for technology-facilitated abuse. They noted that some women reach out to Elders, family and close friends as trusted supports though sometimes these people could not provide help due to their lack of technological expertise. The feedback also suggested that formal support provided by police could be improved — though some positive experiences were mentioned.
- The research identified a number of barriers to seeking support for technology-facilitated abuse. Social barriers included low levels of digital literacy, community attitudes, awareness of technology-facilitated abuse being a form of abuse, the practice of sharing devices, changing phones regularly and lateral violence (violence towards peers). Other barriers to seeking support were shame and victim blaming, and fear of community retaliation.
- The noted service system barriers to seeking support for technology-facilitated abuse included justice system barriers, issues with police, challenges in providing sufficient evidence, fear of racial prejudice and fear of police brutality, barriers related to child protection and courts, and legislation issues. These barriers were intertwined with housing and financial difficulties, drug and alcohol issues and overlapping pressures that prevented women from seeking support for technology-facilitated abuse.
- Underreporting was also highlighted, with some studies showing that up to 90% of violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women may not be reported.
- The research highlighted that, given the complex circumstances facing many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women living in urban areas, a combination of responses is needed. Service providers recommended:
 - providing different types of media to get the message across about technology-facilitated abuse. Videos, as an example, were a favoured format
 - face-to-face contact, particularly for older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders who need to learn about technology-facilitated abuse
 - using plain English and appropriate images
 - providing information on how to change privacy and location settings, and targeting information specifically to Elders.
- The research showed that combining responses of community leaders and place-based community groups with relevant agency responses, such as

police and courts, will help to empower Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women to tackle technology-facilitated abuse.

Introduction

Background

This report summarises recent research about the online safety issues experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women living in urban areas in Australia.

The objectives of this research were to:

- understand the nature of online safety issues reported to service providers¹ assisting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women who live in urban areas
- learn about the support systems available
- understand barriers to accessing support
- hear service providers' recommendations for improving support.

In this report we use the terms 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander' and 'Indigenous' to refer to people and groups whose ancestors lived in Australia prior to colonisation. Preferences in terminology have changed over time and vary across Australia between individuals and communities.

The UN Declaration of Human Rights asserts that 'particular attention shall be paid to the rights and special needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders, women, youth, children and persons with disabilities.' (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2019). The focus for research reported here aligns with the Third National Action Plan's recommendations to improve our understanding of how to reduce domestic, family and sexual violence in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in remote, regional and urban communities. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and their children have been identified as one of six national priority areas in The Third Action Plan 2016-2019 from the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022 (Australian Department of

¹ Service providers are staff and professional organisations providing social or health support.

Social Services, 2019). According to COAG (2016) responses to domestic and family violence need to be built from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives. COAG also found that it was important to identify local community leaders and to allow them to develop their own locally-appropriate responses, independent of any government or political responses.

The research reported here will support further development of resources by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to help enhance online safety in their communities. Some resources have been developed already. Be Deadly Online was created in 2013 with the Geraldton, Carnarvon and Yarrabah communities in Western Australia and Queensland (Office of the eSafety Commissioner, 2019b). Be Deadly Online includes animations and posters designed to help communities manage risks such as cyberbullying and sexting. In 2017 eSafety released a fact sheet on image-based abuse and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, followed by the launch of Your Online Journey app in 2019. Your Online Journey is a free app for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who are not yet online or are not confident online. Developed with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, it is helpful for anybody who lacks the knowledge or confidence to go online. It was specifically created to support people living in remote areas with limited internet access. Other resources are available on the eSafety website <https://www.esafety.gov.au/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-peoples>

In addition to these resources, a number of community organisations have produced relevant online safety material (see Appendix A).

Prevalence of domestic and family violence

According to ANROWS, 25% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women experienced some violence in the previous year compared to 10% of non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women (ANROWS, 2014). Estimates of prevalence rates vary considerably. Some notable statistics were quoted by the COAG (2016) national summit. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women were:

- 34 times more likely to be hospitalised because of family violence than non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women
- five times more likely to be victims of homicide than non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women

- three times more likely to experience sexual violence than non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women.
(COAG, 2016)

Henry et al. (2017) found that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experienced image-based abuse at over twice the rate of other Australians (50% compared with 22%) but few studies have examined how technology-facilitated abuse is experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women. Prentice et al. (2017) referred to a general lack of awareness about types of abuse apart from physical abuse.

The prevalence and nature of technology-facilitated abuse

The use of technology to abuse women is a common safety issue (Office of the eSafety Commissioner, 2019a). Technology-facilitated abuse is a term for abusive behaviours that occur through phones and other devices, on social media and using online accounts, such as email and banking. Although technology-facilitated abuse can be perpetrated by strangers, it is also a common component of domestic and family violence, which is a common experience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women as noted above.

There has been very little research specifically about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women's experiences of technology-facilitated abuse. Given the high prevalence of domestic and family violence experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and the high use of devices by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people we can assume that technology-facilitated abuse is also highly prevalent. This hypothesis has been confirmed by other research. Almost all (98%) of domestic violence practitioners in Australia surveyed in one study, for example, stated they had clients (of any background) who had experienced technology-facilitated stalking and abuse (Women's Legal Service NSW, Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria and WESNET, 2015). Also, almost a third of clients who had experienced domestic violence had been tracked using digital technology (Women's Legal Service NSW, Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria and WESNET, 2015).

‘For the majority, a mobile phone is considered a necessity, rather than a luxury... Connections with family and friends take on far greater importance in Aboriginal culture than in most other sections of the population for cultural reasons.’

Tangentery Council Research Hub and CLC, Ingerrekenhe Antirrkweme, 2007, p.6

‘Most community members think of physical abuse when discussing family violence. They don’t always realize that there are varying forms of violence, for example, isolation, financial, and even emotional abuse’ (Community Worker).

Source: Quote from Prentice et al. (2017) p. 246

Why focus on women living in urban areas?

This report focuses on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women living in urban areas. We note that the needs of people living in rural and remote areas may be very different and requires focussed research. An urban area is defined by the ABS as population clusters of at least 1,000 usual residents. By this definition, the majority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women live in urban and regional areas. According to the ABS there are over 300,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in Australia. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities are very diverse in location, language spoken and socio-economic factors.

The greatest number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women live in New South Wales, followed by Queensland (see Table 1). Where people live is an important social determinant, especially given the disparity between urban and rural/remote living conditions for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Location has an impact on service access, needs and health and welfare outcomes. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women living in remote communities may have different online experiences to those living in urban areas, including capital cities, for a number of reasons — socioeconomic, cultural, family, and individual reasons (Zannettino, 2012). While other research is also required to focus on the needs of people living in remote communities, this report focuses on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women who live in urban areas.

Table 1: Total Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australian population and proportion of population by state

State	NSW	Vic.	Qld.	SA	WA	Tas.	NT	ACT	Total
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women	132,977	28,962	111,285	21,338	50,295	14,373	36,878	3,711	399,952
Total Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people	265,685	57,767	221,276	42,265	100,512	28,537	74,546	7,513	798,365

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics (2018a)

'[Non-Aboriginal people] picture red dust, bare feet, dark skin, out on a reserve. But it's just not the reality. Most Aboriginals are like us, urbanised blackfellas...'

Des Headland, AFL premiership player and Noongar man quoted in 'The Noongar Warriors', SMH Good Weekend 2/7/2016

Source: www.creativespirits.info/aboriginalculture/people/aboriginal-population-in-australia#ixzz5JVT0dsLV

Across Australia just over a third (35%) of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people live in capital city areas and, according to the ABS, this population is becoming more urbanised. Census data shows that since 1996 the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in urban areas (populations of more than 1,000 people) has increased from 73% to 79%. This is predominantly due to larger numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in capital cities — moving from 30% to 35% over a ten year period 1996–2016 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2017a,b) .

Table 2 shows the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women living in greater capital cities in each state. The proportion living in greater capital cities varies from 19.8% in the Northern Territory to 54.5% in South Australia.

Table 2: Estimated total Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women living in greater capital cities

State	Greater Sydney	Greater Melbourne	Greater Brisbane	Greater Adelaide	Greater Perth	Greater Hobart	Greater Darwin	ACT	Total
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in greater capital	35,416	12,135	27,350	9,429	15,516	4,309	5,770	3,220	113,147

city areas									
Total Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in the state	108,811	24,165	94,312	17,295	37,958	11,993	29,116	3,233	326,996
Proportion Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women living in greater capital city (%)	32.5	50.2	29.0	54.5	40.9	35.9	19.8	99.6	34.6

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics (2018)²

Internet access also varies by location. The proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander households that are able to access the internet from their dwelling is highest in urban areas (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2017a).

² Calculated using census table builder, not adjusted for undercount (people who did not complete the census), which was estimated by the ABS to be 17.5% for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (equivalent to 137,750 people).

Methodology

The qualitative research summarised in this report³ comprised in-depth interviews and a discussion group with 27 service providers who support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women experiencing technology-facilitated abuse. Five of the service provider organisations offered support specifically to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (domestic and family violence services, and legal services). Victims of technology-facilitated abuse were not interviewed directly due to timing, ethics considerations and resource constraints. For more detailed information about the methodology see Appendix B. The following questions were used as discussion guides in interviews:

1. What online safety issues do service providers encounter when supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women living in urban areas?
2. What is the impact of technology-facilitated abuse on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australian women?
3. What are the barriers to accessing support for technology-facilitated abuse?
4. What needs to happen in future to improve online safety for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women living in urban areas?

³ Fieldwork and a written report were commissioned by eSafety from the Social Research Centre, Australian National University in June to August 2018.

Research findings

The findings are grouped into themes on the nature of technology-facilitated abuse experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women living in urban areas, the support systems available to them, barriers to accessing support, and recommendations from service providers for improving supports.

The nature of technology-facilitated abuse

Service providers identified six types of technology-facilitated abuse. These were (in order of prevalence based on the interview data):

1. abusive phone calls and text messages
2. destroying devices or restricting technology access
3. abuse by third-parties via social media
4. monitoring and stalking
5. image-based abuse
6. making and distributing fight videos.

Participants' feedback about each type of technology-facilitated abuse is summarised below, with illustrative quotes from service providers and some vignettes. To protect privacy and confidentiality, each vignette is a composite of several stories provided by service providers about the lived experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in urban areas. These stories are useful to understand the complexity of women's experiences of technology-facilitated abuse, and how this intersects with responses, support pathways, barriers and the impacts of the abuse.

1. Abusive phone calls and text messages

Vignette⁴: Jacinda

Jacinda married her childhood boyfriend and they had multiple children. As their relationship progressed he became physically violent toward her. Jacinda tried, multiple times, to leave him but always went back. Jacinda's husband always seemed to have a way of finding her — by looking at Facebook posts and seeing the location of photos she was tagged in, or by harassing and threatening her on the phone until she 'gave in'.

Jacinda was hesitant to report the abuse to police as she had a history of drug abuse. She was worried the police would also report to child protection authorities, resulting in her losing custody of the children. This had happened to a friend in similar circumstances.

At one point the violence from Jacinda's husband was severe and she feared for her life. Jacinda spoke to her Auntie about the abuse who then urged her to go to the local domestic violence service. The service helped Jacinda to leave her husband — providing crisis accommodation and giving her a new safe phone. After thinking it through, Jacinda decided not to change to the new phone because she felt her partner still had the right to see their children. She was also so worn out from the abuse and the emotional effort of leaving her husband, that she also found it overwhelming to change her phone number. Instead Jacinda opted to be careful and not to disclose her location. She moved suburbs and put the kids in a new school, so her husband couldn't track her, and was careful not to post her activities on Facebook.

The domestic violence service recommended Jacinda file for an intervention order. She faced her fears of engaging with the police and the justice system and sought an intervention order which was granted based on the evidence of physical abuse. Her husband broke the order by sending Jacinda many harassing messages. In return, Jacinda sent a text message asking him to stop sending messages which was, unfortunately, also a breach of the intervention order.

The most common form of technology-facilitated abuse reported in interviews was the sending of harassing and threatening messages by abusive partners. The

⁴ Vignette composed from several stories provided by service providers.

content of these messages varied. In many cases, the content in and of itself was not particularly threatening, but the high frequency of the messages meant that the woman felt constantly harassed and reminded that the perpetrator was ‘out there’ trying to control her, using the messages and phone calls to disrupt her day and monitor her activities. The frequency of messages ranged from 20 to 70 a day, with one court case citing 7,000 text messages sent over an extended period.

‘They use that mobile phone as a weapon against the victim. One of the most simplistic things that I’ve heard is that continuous harassing — calling them, calling them, calling them, until they pick them up on the phone, then they’ll talk to them all night, and keep them up all night.

You tend to find that’s a bit of a form of control, even if the perpetrator is not there physically, they’ve managed to actually manipulate and control through the use of their phone.’

[Interview 12, Legal Service]

A few service providers described how women had received serious threats via text message and phone calls, including threats to harm or take children away, or threats to harm or kill the woman.

‘It really frightens them, and that keeps them anxious which sometimes makes them feel like they have to go back... [The perpetrators say] things like ‘I’ll take the children away from you’ or ‘I’ll kill you’, that sort of extreme stuff... and the name calling, calling them whores and sluts and things like that.’

[Interview 9, Counselling Service]

2. Destroying phones or restricting technology access

Several service providers reported high frequency of perpetrators restricting access to or destroying women's mobile phones.

'Some of this is about the women actually having their phone taken away from them and the access to technology and support. Because they no longer can access Facebook and communicate with family and friends.'

[Interview 13, Legal Service]

Service providers described how the act of destroying technology gave power and control to the perpetrator and severely limited the victim's ability to access support. Without a working phone, women were unable to call friends and family for support and were unable to access formal support services. In a couple of instances service providers explained that this was used as a tactic to disrupt women's attempts to pursue legal action against the perpetrator.

'The current client that I've had for six months, I think, has had four telephones smashed by the perpetrator. He's not interested in attempting to find her location, or anything like that. He's just interested in isolating her by ensuring that her phone gets smashed every single time he sees her. And then, she can't contact friends and family.'

[Interview 21, Domestic and Family Violence Service]

3. Social media and third-party abuse

Vignette⁵: Kylie

Kylie had experienced physical abuse from her partner for many years. When she said she would leave him, he posted negative things on Facebook, saying she was ‘a home-wrecker’ and didn’t ‘deserve to be a mum’.

Kylie’s family were unaware about the physical violence, so they were surprised by the comments her partner made on Facebook. His family joined the Facebook discussion, adding further negative comments. Some started abusing her for wanting to leave the family. It was as though everyone in the community had something to say about it. Within a few weeks there were close to 100 comments about Kylie on the site, each increasingly aggressive. In one comment, her partners’ cousins threatened to physically hurt her.

Kylie internalised the victim-blaming comments, felt guilty for threatening to break up the family and for suggesting she would take her children away from their father and his culture. She felt ashamed. As a result, Kylie stayed with her partner and did not seek any formal support for the abuse.

⁵ Vignette composed from several stories provided by service providers.

Most service providers discussed cases where a perpetrator had posted public messages on social media denigrating their victim — accusing the woman of being a ‘home wrecker’, for example, for leaving her abusive partner. They reported that extended family and community members often took the side of the perpetrator and responded to the messages on social media, particularly where the woman had been silent about the domestic violence. Like in the case study above, it was reported that abusive messages often escalated with numerous family and community members participating. In all cases, Facebook was cited as the social media platform used for this type of abuse.

‘There is such a disconnection from culture and family because of the extenuating issues for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people... It really depends on [how] they [the victim] stand within that community... they usually have quite a lot of friends on their social media page. A lot of those friends can be friends with the ex-partner or family members of the ex-partner... family is also very, very important to us... some of us come from very, very large families... You’ve got to think, you are dealing with larger groups of people, and larger groups of personalities at the end of the day.’

[Interview 12, Legal Service]

This provides an opportunity for many people to enter the abusive discussion and exacerbate the abuse.

One service noted how social media provided a new platform for lateral violence which is violence from peers rather than adversaries (Clark & Augoustinos, 2015). In this instance, lateral violence facilitated by technology was such that victim-blaming and abuse could escalate quickly and extend to community networks across Australia.

'Lateral violence is a consequence of colonisation ... it happens a lot in Aboriginal communities. Now, if there's a domestic violence situation between intimate partners, the repercussion for that is ... the rest of the family being involved ... getting on social media and different things and actually abusing the victim.'

And because we have this network now and a lot of Aboriginal communities are connected, it's just not isolated to [our urban location] ... it gets out to country [locations also] and everyone gets involved ... it becomes a whole community victimising that victim ... it escalates so quickly through social media and that platform.'

[Interview 14, Legal Service]

4. Using technology for monitoring and stalking

Service providers shared their experiences and knowledge of a range of monitoring, tracking and stalking behaviours that formed part of domestic violence.

Several service providers discussed how perpetrators tracked their former partner through social media. Where women had blocked the perpetrator on social media, they could still follow comments and photos uploaded by mutual friends, impersonate someone else and 'friend' the woman on Facebook in order to regain access, or simply ask friends and family members on Facebook where the woman was located.

'... you have abusive partners actually trying to track down their whereabouts through Facebook or being on Twitter. So that puts the women in a very vulnerable state of being terrified of actually being located by their partners.'

[Interview 13, Legal Service]

A couple of service providers discussed examples of couples having a shared mobile phone contract (i.e. two phones under the one provider with a deal for cheaper phone calls) and how this had been used as a way to monitor the woman once the couple separated. It was explained that depending on who the phone was registered to, the perpetrator may be able to limit the woman's access to technology or accrue bills that impact on her finances.

A key issue is that women may be so overwhelmed as a result of the abuse that they may not arrange with telecommunication providers to leave the contract, or they may not be aware that this is even possible.

'The phone may be registered under their partner's name ... then they can see what phone calls they're making, kind of that controlling behaviour. But I guess it's also a safety issue, can put the client at risk as well ... if the phone is under somebody else's name and they're paying for the bills, they stop paying it. Then it kind of leaves the client out anyway.'

[Interview 10, Domestic and Family Violence Service]

Some service providers gave examples where perpetrators had installed tracking devices on women's phones and their children's devices. This meant that perpetrators could track the woman's movements even after they had left the family home and were in crisis accommodation.

5. Image-based abuse

Vignette⁶: Tayla

Soon after finishing school, Tayla sent her boyfriend a nude photo of herself. He sent it on to his mates. When Tayla found out she became angry and ended their relationship. As retribution, he posted the nude photo on Facebook, sharing it with all his friends and family. The photo was also shared with all of Tayla's friends on Facebook, including her parents, immediate and extended family.

Tayla's parents and the Elders in her community blamed her for taking the photo in the first place. They didn't really understand how common it is for young people to take and share intimate pictures of themselves, and they didn't know how to advise her.

Tayla went to the police about the abuse but the officer she spoke with was dismissive, saying she shouldn't have taken the photo, and there was not much the police could do about it.

Feeling let down and ashamed, Tayla disengaged from the community. Her ex-boyfriend was not reprimanded by the community. The discussion on Facebook around her image continued and while Tayla tried not to read the posts, it was difficult. She felt like everyone was commenting.

Tayla reported feeling like she was to blame, and she also felt alone.

While service providers reported that image-based abuse was highly prevalent among young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, most did not have examples from their experience working in family violence. Two service providers described cases of young women still in school who had taken nude photos of themselves to send to their boyfriends who had then distributed the image to their friends. In both cases the young women felt they had been shamed by their family and friends, and the perpetrator of that abuse was not reprimanded.

⁶ Vignette composed from several stories provided by service providers.

'At the time they're thinking they're sending [the intimate photo] to someone that they love and that they trust ... but then it's backfired ... [I know of] instances where ex-partners have actually created profiles in their ex-partner's name and used those [intimate] photos ... to pretty much denigrate [the woman].'

[Interview 12, Domestic and Family Violence, Legal Service]

6. Sharing fight videos

There has been some research on fight videos posted online as technology-facilitated conflict between individuals or groups (Carlson & Frazer, 2018; Rennie et al, 2018). Media attention has also raised the profile of fight videos as an issue for some communities that may be affected by the racial discrimination act⁷. Most conflicts that are posted online occur between young men in rural settings (Rennie et al, 2018). However one service provider discussed fight videos and their role in exacerbating abuse of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in the present research. The *Be Deadly Online* resource was created to highlight the potential damage of such online conflict. It was recognised in the above research that fight videos in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, as with family violence, need to be understood in the context of intergenerational trauma and lateral violence.

⁷ <https://www.sbs.com.au/news/aboriginal-fighting-page-could-be-allowed-under-new-racial-discrimination-act>

'... it's either a video of two Aboriginal people or women full smashing on, like having a full-on brawl and then in the comments, you know, a fight starts in the comments and it's — yes, it's crazy. And that's rural [parts of the state] as well [as urban] ...

They take videos...and then they post them on Facebook and then everyone then has a big online fight about them and they egg it on, or they laugh about family members getting hurt.'

[Interview 24, Legal Service]

Impacts of technology-facilitated abuse and help-seeking behaviour

In the domestic and family violence literature, violence has been reported as having wide-ranging impacts on family life, children, physical health, mental health and work (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2018). Yet many women do not seek help. Help-seeking behaviour can be defined as a request for assistance from either informal or formal supports in order to address emotional, behavioural or health problems (Rickwood & Thomas, 2012). Help can come from professional service providers, informal social supports, or self-help resources such as a website. Research by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare shows that almost half of women who experienced violence from a current partner did not seek advice or support after the incident (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2018).

Among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, rates of non-disclosure may be even higher. Some studies have shown that up to 90% of violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women may not be reported (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2018). In previous research conducted by eSafety, one-quarter of adults who had experienced image-based abuse had taken some

kind of action in response, and among those who took action, 44% identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander⁸.

Reasons for not seeking support include feeling that the issue can be dealt with by themselves, thinking the incident was not serious enough, or feeling shame or embarrassment (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2018). Among people who do seek support, two thirds seek support from informal sources, a friend or family member. The next most likely sources of support are professional service providers such as general practitioners, counsellors and other health professionals.

The impacts of domestic and family violence and technology-facilitated abuse are likely to be very significant for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women. The impact may be further exacerbated by high background levels of stress. In general, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have higher rates of psychological distress and mental ill health than non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (Hepworth et al., 2015). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people also have very low access to mental health services.

Blagg et al. (2018) indicated that the help-seeking response of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australian women who experience violence is often impacted by their historical experiences of government policies and suspicion of authorities such as the police and correctional services.

In the primary research summarised here, the impacts for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women experiencing technology-facilitated abuse did not differ substantially from those other women face i.e. heightened levels of stress, anxiety and depression, self-doubt, negative impacts on relationships and financial impacts (such as moving home to avoid the perpetrator).

⁸ Source: Unpublished national survey commissioned 2017 by the Office of the eSafety Commissioner, n=81 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australian women of a total 3,216 women surveyed.

'Aboriginal community is so connected with family and kin and friends and stuff like that, telling people to disconnect or block or change their phone numbers and stuff like that, that's a big deal. It's a big upheaval.'

[Interview 14, Legal Service]

Some impacts, however, appeared to be amplified for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women: the risk of being socially isolated from kinship networks; fear of shaming and family retribution. Social isolation combined with financial difficulties and the emotional pressure from extended family, was such that some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women returned to the perpetrator of abuse.

'... she mainly used it [social media], she would say, to keep in touch and see photographs of her nieces and nephews and keep in touch with her cousins and things like that. So that's all cut off now.'

[Interview 11, Domestic and Family Violence Service]

Service providers discussed how women experiencing technology-facilitated abuse were often reluctant to change their technology usage (such as changing to a safe mobile phone or deleting their social media profiles) as they wanted to maintain social connectivity with friends and family. This meant that some women remained highly vulnerable to technology-facilitated abuse by using unsafe mobile phones. They also experienced high levels of anxiety as they continued to receive unwanted phone calls or social media activity, and in some cases were not answering important phone calls from formal support services because they feared it was the perpetrator.

‘So, they were both arguing and she [family member] was kind of just abusing her over Facebook and it was really quite heavily abuse. Like it got to a point where my client was actually feeling pretty suicidal, her mental health deteriorated because of it, she was really scared to leave her house.’

[Interview 24, Legal Service]

Support pathways

Informal supports — Elders, family, friends

There was mixed awareness among service providers about the sources of support for technology-facilitated abuse. Some indicated that they were aware that, in the first instance, women reached out to Elders, family and close friends as trusted sources of support. Others thought that women would initially reach out to those closest to them in their community, and that they would likely be reaching out to other females.

‘It would be older people in the community that are well respected, perhaps assisting and supporting a victim. I think if that extended to technology-facilitated abuse then that would also be applicable, but I haven’t been made personally aware of it.’

[Interview 11, Domestic and Family Violence Service]

While it was positive that the women had reached out to Elders in their community or older, trusted female friends, these support people often could not provide help with technology-facilitated abuse related issues because they were not ‘tech-savvy’.

‘I think certainly women turn to their Aunties or their mums or grandmas or older friends in the community. I think the limitation with that is though the Elders are probably less tech savvy than themselves. So I think probably they’d be their first point of contact and they would say, ‘Go off to see this mob or go see the police’. But yes, again the limitation there would be that any Elders or Aunties or grandmothers, as I said, are less tech savvy.’

[Interview 19, Legal Service]

Of those service providers who had observed women reaching out to their community of Elders, female relatives or close friends, it was often these community support networks who would suggest they contact a domestic violence or legal support service, or the police, for further help and advice.

‘You confide in a friend or confide in a relative or maybe an Elder and from there I think it depends on that first bit of support that you seek as to how it’s going to play out. So, from there you discuss it and might decide to go to the police or access support through a service like [organisation name] or to domestic violence services or something like that.’

[Interview 22, Domestic and Family Violence Service]

Formal supports — police, domestic and family violence services, legal services

Women tended to go to police during a crisis, often related to physical and sexual violence, rather than for technology-facilitated abuse alone. Overall, feedback from service providers suggested that police handling of technology-facilitated abuse could be improved. That said, some positive experiences were mentioned.

Service providers discussed how women tend to contact domestic and family violence or legal services as a result of being referred by a friend, family member or someone else they trust in their community. In urban areas, local domestic and family violence services and legal services seem to have mostly good rapport with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities i.e. attending community events to have visibility and building trust with potential clients.

'I feel like a lot of Aboriginal people don't trust straight away. You really have to build that relationship with them to gain that trust because I mean a lot of them have gone through like serious trauma throughout their lives.'

[Interview 24, Legal Service]

One service provider suggested there was a need for walk-in services where women could speak with a support worker face-to-face and build the trust needed to disclose their abuse then get the support they require. While not mentioned by service providers, this could also be seen as important given the high rate of perpetrators destroying women's phones.

'I think it's very rare to see those crisis services as a walk-in service ... [women] don't want to talk to someone over the phone all the time, they actually want to talk to someone face-to-face. But in this day and age, we are so limited in being able to provide that kind of service.

While I get that we're in a technology driven world, we forget the importance of that non-technology aspect.'

[Interview 12, Legal Service]

However, another service provider highlighted that shame was associated with domestic violence, particularly in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, and that this meant that women often wanted to avoid being seen entering a domestic violence support organisation or a legal service for fear that someone in their community would see them.

'The Aboriginal women, or a lot of women, don't want to be seen going into a domestic violence [support organisation] because there's a lot of shame around it. People in [urban location] everyone knows everyone or knows of someone being seen to walk into services like that.'

[Interview 19, Legal Service]

Assisting women to be able to anonymously access domestic and family violence and legal services is therefore important. Co-location of domestic violence support organisations and legal services alongside health services was discussed by a couple of service providers as a good approach in supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women to access support. Co-location allows women to use the support services, for example under the pretext of having a doctor's appointment.

'In my experience, we've had a few [women] that have come to a resource centre ... and they've contacted us for support and they were able to [get] that more anonymously ... It could be a women's health centre or a resource centre where maybe they're just going for another purpose. So then, inadvertently, they get what they need but it's not as obvious.'

[Interview 8, Domestic and Family Violence Service]

A couple of service providers mentioned that women in rural/remote areas are not able to access domestic and family violence and legal services with the same level of anonymity as they can in urban settings. In rural areas there are fewer services available, such that perpetrators know where victims may be accessing support, including the location of crisis accommodation. Because of this, women may be more reluctant to seek support in remote areas. One service provider mentioned how they offered childcare as part of their service as a way to make it easier for women to access support.

'We've also got childcare available for those appointments, so it makes it a little bit easier because a lot of the time it's what they've been through and they've got children that are a little bit older. It's obviously not good for them to have to hear all that again. So, we provide childcare.'

[Interview 10, Domestic and Family Violence Service]

Many of the service providers came from organisations with specific Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander support workers. In all cases service providers felt that it was important to offer this as workers could build trust and rapport with women and bring a deeper understanding of the cultural barriers that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women may face.

'If [a woman is] accessing Aboriginal services, there's a shared understanding of what that means for us and how things like this impact on our relationship with community and why that's so important. But if [a woman is] accessing mainstream services it's very difficult to explain how important that community aspect is and that community recognition and acceptance.'

[Interview 22, Domestic and Family Violence Service]

While having the option to speak to an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander worker is important, several service providers noted that sometimes Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women preferred to speak with a non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander support worker as they had concerns about confidentiality and their community finding out that they were seeking support.

'A lot of Aboriginal people here don't like going to other certain Aboriginal-specific places for counselling and support because I think a lot of them find that the [Aboriginal community] grapevine, the confidentiality won't be kept because everyone knows everyone in the [Aboriginal community].'

[Interview 24, Legal Service]

Social barriers to seeking support for technology-facilitated abuse

While there are informal and formal supports available to some women experiencing technology-facilitated abuse, there are numerous barriers to seeking support from either. This section reports on social barriers that service providers identified as preventing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women from seeking support. System barriers are discussed later.

Many factors identified were not specific to technology-facilitated abuse but were related to broader barriers affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women who seek support for domestic and family violence, such as fear of escalating perpetrator violence, and fear of engaging with the justice system.

Digital literacy

Service providers reported that low digital literacy was the most common problem they had identified in helping women overcome technology-facilitated abuse. They suggested that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in urban areas use their mobile phones and Facebook extensively to keep in contact with extended family and friends, and few have home computers or tablets. However, while mobile phone uptake and usage were high, women's awareness of privacy settings and how to protect themselves from technology-facilitated abuse when using devices seemed fairly low.

Service providers explained that they frequently advised women to update the privacy settings on their smartphones to ensure their location could not be identified and tracked.

'We're on the phone talking to them about turning off their location settings, social media, not posting photos that say a specific location that you're in. So, we do advise that, however some people don't know how to do that, some people just aren't aware, so we have had women who have been found through tracking through social media, or something on their phone.'

[Interview 20, Domestic and Family Violence Service]

Also, service providers reported instances of women and children being gifted devices where the perpetrator had installed monitoring and tracking apps that could be accessed remotely by them to view messages or learn where they were without their knowledge.

'Oh, he gave the kid a tablet for Christmas', and everything like that. And 'I just feel really strange because he seems to know stuff that he really shouldn't. He seems to know where we are.' It's like, okay, we need to have a very frank conversation here ... there's still not a really, really good understanding at that basic level of what these kinds of hidden apps look like, how they can download your conversations, have a look at your messages.'

[Interview 12, Legal Service]

Women were receiving unwanted mobile phone calls and text messages. While they were able to block phone numbers and stop unwanted calls, they were often unaware of how to block messages. One service provider highlighted that they had given advice to women about how to block unwanted text messages as well as calls.

'It's like, 'Do you realise you can actually call your phone service provider and they can block that number, so you don't get messages or anything?' Nine times out of ten, they don't actually realise that.'

[Interview 12, Legal Service]

Community attitudes and awareness

Many service providers felt that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities had a low awareness of technology-facilitated abuse and this meant that many women were not aware of their rights, or that they could seek support. This seems to be a significant barrier for women seeking support for technology-facilitated abuse in urban areas.

'There'd be a big majority of them that probably have all this [technology-facilitated abuse] stuff happening for them ... and not realising that it's an actual issue. I see [abusive messages and videos] on my Facebook feed all the time and it's just such a norm. I don't think anyone thinks there's anything wrong with that ... a lot of Aboriginal women aren't aware of their rights.'

[Interview 14, Legal Service]

'A lot of women are still kind of in the mindset of domestic violence is face to face, it's verbal abuse, it's physical abuse, it's emotional abuse [not technology-facilitated abuse].'

[Interview 13, Legal Service]

One service provider linked this lack of awareness with under-reporting of technology-facilitated abuse, such that it made it more difficult for their organisation to identify and address the abuse within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

'We're hampered by under reporting ... It's a bit of a catch 22, people don't know their rights, so they don't access services and if they're not accessing services it's not — there's no statistics or it's under reported in the statistics, so people don't consider it a problem because there doesn't seem to be much of it happening.'

[Interview 22, Domestic and Family Violence Service]

A few service providers discussed how the lack of awareness of technology-facilitated abuse was particularly acute for older generations. This is problematic given that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls experiencing this abuse may seek advice from Elders and close Aunties who do not understand technology-facilitated abuse and so may not give appropriate advice. In a couple of cases, service providers discussed cases in which young women who were victims of image-based abuse (where their boyfriends had distributed nude photos of them) had been blamed by Elders for taking a nude photo of themselves rather than blaming the perpetrator for distributing the image. Elders may not be aware of the prevalence of sexting, and may not be sure how to advise young women in their community. This may act as a barrier for women seeking support for technology-facilitated abuse, for fear of victim blaming.

'The Elders are still struggling with getting a grasp of the whole lot of it, you know? So, like you're teaching them [about abuse on Facebook] and they still don't understand what it is. Some do and the Elders, if they don't like something ... they don't like [and blame] their kids or their family.'

[Interview 24, Legal Service]

Sharing devices

Another barrier to seeking support was associated with the common practice of sharing devices. Several service providers mentioned that women were sharing mobile phones with family members, or gave the service provider multiple contact numbers of family members who would then be able to contact the woman. This indicates that women may be sharing passwords for their devices and allowing other people access to their mobile phones in ways that might increase their vulnerability to technology-facilitated abuse.

‘We have lots of clients who are like elderly — they’re probably like grandparents, I wouldn’t say elderly — that heavily rely on their children’s phones. So, we will get new clients who will be like this is my number, but it’s actually my daughter’s number so if you call her I will be with her. So, there is a lot of that, that I find that they are sharing the phone. Yes, there’s heaps of clients actually now that I can think of it that is like that.’

[Interview 24, Legal Service]

This sharing of devices caused several problems for service providers in terms of being able to give support and check-in with the victim. For instance, the provider called the number given by the woman and inadvertently contacted someone in their circle who was unaware of the situation or that the woman had reached out to a support service.

‘They give you all these different numbers that you sometimes have to try just to get a hold of them for whatever reason. Or they’re constantly calling from different numbers, and they’re like, ‘Oh yeah, just call me back on this number.’ So, there’s no understanding of — we’ve also got to be careful when we’re calling a number that we know is not the client’s number, and not giving out information, at the end of the day.’

[Interview 12, Legal Service]

In some cases, the provider left a message for the woman with the person who had the phone at the time, but the message was not passed on to her. She then believed that the provider had not bothered to return her call or contacted her with advice or information she needed.

‘You just don’t know if this person is going to get this message, they don’t realise that you’re actually trying to get in contact with them all this time and they just think you’re ignoring them. But you’ve been stopped at that point in your work, and you’ve just got to rely on the client to give you a call back.’

[Interview 12, Legal Service]

Changing phones regularly

Another theme to emerge as a barrier to seeking and receiving support was that women regularly changed their phone numbers and mobile phone models/brands. Service providers attributed this in part to the socioeconomic situation of many women, preferring to use low-cost mobile phone options and potentially sharing it with other family members, or initially signing on to a high-cost contract which they then cannot maintain, leading them to switch to a cheaper option. This contributed to a lack of application of security and privacy settings on their phone

and had the potential to increase their vulnerability to technology-facilitated abuse.

'A lot of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people will usually have the more cheaper phones, or the cheaper smartphones as well ... they're like, 'Oh, I just got a new phone.' It takes you quite a few months to even work out some of the basics ... so I think that plays a part, that continuous changing of phones, so there's no kind of continuity with these services. Sometimes it's like they know [the security settings are] there, they have so much trouble finding it out on these phones that they're just like, 'Oh yeah, I'll work it out eventually.'

[Interview 12, Legal Service]

In response to this issue of changing phones regularly, some service providers were using Facebook and Messenger as a way to maintain contact instead of relying on phone contact.

'Aboriginal families here change their numbers quite a bit and people move, so Facebook is a really good way to constantly keep connected to family because you know someone is always going to log into their Facebook or whatever.'

[Interview 24, Legal Service]

Lateral violence and the normalisation of abuse

Viewing abuse as 'normal' was another barrier to seeking support. Intergenerational trauma and lateral violence were discussed in several interviews as a lens within which to understand technology-facilitated abuse and domestic and family violence occurring in urban Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Lateral violence, sometimes termed 'internalised colonialism', refers to acts of

violence, such as bullying, shaming, social exclusion, physical violence, which are perpetrated by members of marginalised communities to other members of that community. The violence is understood as displaced violence, reflecting the community's history of being discriminated against and disempowered.

'When you talk to a client and explain about healthy relationships within a family network, you come to the conclusion that there's a whole heap of dysfunctionality amongst the whole immediate family ... It'd be lateral violence. It'd be intergenerational — years of oppression. Having their culture stripped from them, being marginalised from society.'

[Interview 21, Domestic and Family Violence Service]

Service providers felt that intergenerational trauma and lateral violence impacted greatly on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and that this displaced violence manifested in the use of technology to control and abuse women in the community. Women's exposure to unhealthy relationships throughout their lives meant that many women did not recognise that they were in an abusive relationship.

'A lot of time we get clients that they don't see that it's domestic violence or abuse ... I guess when that's all you've been around your whole life, it's hard to understand or even accept, be able to accept that. Being that you've been living through trauma the majority of your childhood and up to adulthood.'

[Interview 10, Domestic and Family Violence Service]

Part of the unhealthy relationship that was particularly specific to technology-facilitated abuse was the control exercised by the perpetrator. This included

emotional manipulation, financial control, mental abuse and controlling behaviours such as tracking and monitoring relationships with others.

'He owns her ... controls where she's been, will check in, she has to answer all the calls, if there's a behaviour that he's allowed to do whatever he wants, but he's always very suspicious about her movements and what she's done and who she has spoken to and if you need money you can have a bit of money for dinner or for the kids, or you know, like how much you should spend, there's this financial control, there's this mental control, isolation and then you end up with no friends.'

[Interview 24, Legal Service]

Fear of escalating perpetrator abuse

Another barrier to seeking support was the fear of escalating perpetrator abuse. Service providers described how many women fear that the perpetrator will escalate the abuse if they find out they have been seeking formal support and are planning on leaving. This fear is so acute that many women do not seek, or cease pursuing formal support. Service providers discussed how technology-facilitated abuse escalates after a woman has left the perpetrator, as technology provides a medium for the perpetrator to remotely exert control over the woman.

'[Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander] people are reluctant to go to the police with these matters because they feel that if they do and there is an investigation, that it will amplify the abuse and it makes them more vulnerable. So, there is a reluctance to go to the police with these matters. That happens very frequently.'

[Interview 23, Counselling Service]

In light of these experiences, service providers discussed how they went to great lengths to help women access their service without the perpetrator finding out.

'Say there's an app on your phone and we can look at the phone and turn it off or do something. Well, he's certainly going to find out about that, I would say. That might risk [the perpetrator finding out that the woman is seeking support], and they [the women] would know that. So what might appear on the surface as there's no kind of safety planning going on [i.e., keeping tracking apps active on a phone rather than deleting them] some of the behaviours that women might exhibit are actually them safely planning their exit.'

[Interview 26, Domestic and Family Violence Service]

Shame and victim blaming

Many service providers noted that the deep shame women felt as victims of abuse was a barrier to seeking support. This shame was around image-based abuse and women whose partners were sending public abusive messages on social media. Non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women are likely to feel shame and embarrassment from technology-facilitated abuse also, however service providers felt that this was amplified for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women due to cultural norms.

'In the Aboriginal community there's a strong sense of privacy and also a strong cultural concept of shame and being singled out, whether that's for something good or for something bad and I think how technology works and particularly social media, just really butts up against that in a really big way.'

[Interview 14, Legal Service]

Many service providers indicated that women had been blamed within their communities for the abuse they had faced or for the impact that going to police would have on the perpetrator (such as being charged and imprisoned). Victim blaming appears to be a significant barrier preventing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women from seeking support for technology-facilitated abuse.

‘Often the family members, the mother and the sister and the auntie going, ‘This is your fault. If he goes to prison, it’s your fault ... You need to get rid of the intervention order. It’ll be on you if he goes away. It’ll be on you if your son doesn’t have a father because you’ve put him in prison.’ And that stuff often happens over Facebook and text message ...’

[Interview 19, Legal Service]

Community retaliation

Another noted barrier to women seeking support was the perception that her community would retaliate. Many service providers outlined third party abuse — where extended community members sent further abusive messages to the victim of technology-facilitated abuse. This abuse was mostly through public Facebook comments which triggered further abusive comments as other members of the community responded and escalated the discussion. Fear of this community retaliation (usually from family members) was raised by some service providers as a barrier for seeking support for technology-facilitated abuse. The service providers discussed this retaliation in the context of lateral violence and cultural norms.

‘... the uncertainty of what might happen if they reach out for help and their partner or ex-partner gets in trouble, the repercussions. The threat of get back at. There’s a lot of that in the Aboriginal community, a lot of getting back at the other person. ‘If you do this then I’ll do this to you’ ... That the family are going to bash her. If she doesn’t drop the charges they’ll come around and beat her up ...’

[Interview 19, Legal Service]

Other barriers

A lack of crisis accommodation was discussed by a few service providers as a barrier to women who are impacted by domestic and family violence leaving perpetrators. A couple of service providers had examples where women had become homeless after leaving their perpetrator.

'She became homeless due to DV. So, then [the Department of] Housing had contacted us to see if we were able to provide some support for her.'

[Interview 10, Domestic and Family Violence Service]

Drug and alcohol usage was discussed by some service providers as a barrier to seeking support for technology-facilitated abuse. In a couple of instances, service providers felt that the victim of technology-facilitated abuse was making poor decisions and putting herself at greater risk while on drugs (for example, disclosing her location to the perpetrator).

'She had disclosed her location to him ... that goes back to the drugs that she was on and her mental health, not coping. She disclosed her location and he came to her and found her and he'd wait outside the hotel for her and just stalking, intimidation.'

[Interview 10, Domestic and Family Violence Service]

System barriers to seeking support for technology-facilitated abuse

Many service providers highlighted that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women experiencing technology-facilitated abuse faced multiple and overlapping pressures — such as housing, financial and drug and alcohol issues. They needed support for these difficulties, yet barriers within the support and service systems prevented them from seeking assistance.

Government and justice system barriers

Service providers expressed the view that most Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders distrust government institutions and the justice system.

‘So, the [technology-facilitated abuse] experiences I’ve had so far, no-one yet has attempted to take it to court or take it to the police ... It’s always a daunting process ...’

[Interview 13, Legal Service]

Police and technology-facilitated abuse

The majority of service providers expressed views that women felt discouraged by the reaction of police to report technology-facilitated abuse. Service providers felt that police were not very sensitive or responsive to women experiencing domestic and family violence, and that responsiveness for technology-facilitated abuse was even lower, with many police officers advising women to simply block the phone number of the perpetrator.

'... some of them refuse to, they refuse to do a statement or they — I think it's just a lack of knowledge that they don't see it [technology-facilitated abuse] as domestic violence.'

[Interview 10, Domestic and Family Violence Service]

Several service providers had examples where women disengaged from the police after a negative experience, often staying with, or returning to, the perpetrator.

'We're talking about women who are already listed as a protected person, and they have that no contact orders, they're reporting to police, 'He's contacting me,' and nothing's being done around that ... [the police are] saying, 'It's not enough,' even though he is threatening, or — you know, calling someone 50 times a day ... we see [it] as a significant breach, because it's an escalation, they're not realising that, they're like, 'Oh yeah, but he's just messaging or calling you, why don't you get a new phone number?''

[Interview 20, Domestic and Family Violence Service]

Service providers also gave examples where they considered that police officers had been insensitive to their clients' needs.

'Unfortunately, I have been there on an occasion where they have minimised it and in a very subtle way going, 'Well, you really shouldn't have done that in the first place.' Well, okay, where's the accountability on the man of actually how he's used these photos?'

[Interview 12, Legal Service]

The impact of these inappropriate comments could be that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women perceived that the police were not taking them seriously, so they disengaged from the police and stayed in abusive relationships.

Challenges in providing sufficient evidence

There were two examples given in the research where police successfully charged a perpetrator or placed an Intervention Order based on evidence from technology-facilitated abuse (such as abusive Facebook posts, emails, and text messages). However, in the majority of cases service providers described significant challenges in providing sufficient evidence for police action.

'If we can get a text message or a phone call that shows his number, that makes it really easy [to prove], but if it's just through Facebook or an email from a random account or someone hacked her Google account ... they'll often dismiss it because it's just too hard to prove ... [and] the one thing I don't want is a client being turned away [because of insufficient proof]. The risk you run is that they never report again because of the shame of being turned away and not believed.'

[Interview 19, Legal Service]

One service provider perceived that police favoured evidence of physical abuse rather than technology-facilitated abuse as they felt that this was more effective in getting a conviction through the courts.

Racial prejudice and fear of police brutality

Many service providers gave examples where they felt police had not responded appropriately to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women who had experienced technology-facilitated abuse. These were provided in the context of technology-facilitated abuse, however they applied to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women who were victims of domestic and family violence more broadly.

A couple of service providers felt that women may be reluctant to report technology-facilitated abuse to the police for fear that their partner may face police brutality if taken into custody, or that they themselves might somehow end up incarcerated.

Barriers related to child protection

Several service providers discussed how women were reluctant to report technology-facilitated abuse related to domestic and family violence because they were concerned that Child Protection would become involved and they could risk losing their children. This fear relates to domestic and family violence broadly, not just to technology-facilitated abuse. It needs to be considered in the context of Australia's history of the Stolen Generation but also current experiences. These service providers felt that police need to be tougher on perpetrators and Child Protection needs to work alongside women to help them keep custody of their children.

'There's a lot of concern about reporting violence to the police because of concerns about children being removed and stolen generation being repeated.'

[Interview 14, Legal Service]

Barriers related to courts

Few service providers had examples of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women pursuing convictions of their technology-facilitated abuse perpetrator. Most examples reported here related to women's applications for intervention orders which are decided by Court Magistrates. Similar to the barriers in engaging with the police, service providers described a lack of trust in the court system, a sense that technology-facilitated abuse was dismissed, and that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women were discriminated against.

'I actually don't think they take technology abuse seriously ... [For one client] we tried to get the violent restraining order but they turned her away because they said that he hadn't contacted her directly [but only on Facebook] ... and then she was violently assaulted ... The magistrates, don't take that stuff seriously at all here. It's just a slap on the wrist. It's just Facebook, what's a few words, it's not going to hurt you. But I think it's like it's what comes after those words.'

[Interview 24, Legal Service]

Similar to the findings of barriers in accessing police services, service providers felt that the courts were dismissive of technology-facilitated abuse. Their perception was that police need evidence of physical abuse for the technology-facilitated abuse to be treated seriously.

'I think there's kind of an attitude in the Court that there needs to be a threat to their safety, their physical safety, to get an intervention order ... Even though the legislation does say abuse can just be verbal abuse or just general abuse over Facebook or whatever ... persistent weeks and weeks and weeks of calling someone a slut or the c word over Facebook ... threats to bash or saying, 'I'm going to come and bash you' type of things over Facebook ... they [the courts] kind of tend to view it as an empty threat.'

[Interview 19, Legal Service]

Service providers found this dismissiveness of technology-facilitated abuse highly frustrating because they felt there was a lack of perpetrator accountability.

'The thing I find extraordinary is the lack of accountability of society for the perpetrators of the abuse. We do so much work with the victims and it's always the victims that have to leave their home, it's just so unjust.'

[Interview 23, Counselling Service]

Legislation issues

Only a few service providers felt able to comment on legislation related to technology-facilitated abuse and whether it was a barrier to seeking support.

Two service providers discussed support services being unaware or confused about image-based abuse legislation. In one example the police dismissed a case of image-based abuse based on the extent of nudity displayed. In another, a young woman was advised that if she proceeded with charging the perpetrator, she herself could be charged with transmission of child pornography.

'In this instance [the intimate image] was sent out to friends and family, her family included, and her friends, but of course then it came down to [the police officer saying] 'Oh, but it wasn't showing the exact privates [her nipples and genitalia were not shown] ... ' Unfortunately, this is the way the law works at the moment. Because you're not showing specific parts, technically, we can't really do anything.'

[Interview 12, Legal Service]

A couple of service providers discussed the challenges in working on legislation across various jurisdictions. These relate to perpetrators or victims moving between states and territories where intervention orders may differ, a lack of recognition about technology-facilitated abuse victim compensation in some states, and inconsistency in the legal age of sexual consent in some states — compared to the age victims are considered a ‘child’ under pornography legislation at the Commonwealth level.

One service provider felt that the existing technology-facilitated abuse legislation was overly-complex and piecemeal rather than coordinated, preferring instead the New Zealand approach.

‘[I] was impressed by New Zealand’s harmful digital technology legislation or whatever it was called and I just thought that was a good way of dealing with it, because it’s one piece of legislation about using technology in a harmful way, so it’s really covered a whole gamut of different sorts of scenarios ... rather than trying to amend millions of different pieces of legislation whether it’s your AVO legislation or your Crimes Act or your Commonwealth Act.’

[Interview 14, Legal Service]

Moving forward — service provider recommendations

Blagg et al. (2018) indicated that when designing responses to domestic and family violence, good practice combined the responses of community leaders and place-based community groups with relevant agency responses, such as police and courts. However they also noted that strategies run by police and correctional services are often viewed with suspicion by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women. Empowering Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women is considered particularly important for this group rather than extending the power of mainstream services. In line with this, the following suggestions were made by service providers interviewed in this research as effective ways to address technology-facilitated abuse for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women.

Provide different types of media to get the message across

Many service providers highlighted the need to raise awareness of technology-facilitated abuse and to strengthen awareness of the link between technology-facilitated abuse and domestic violence. Suggestions included putting up posters in relevant public spaces (such as court waiting rooms, domestic violence organisations, hospitals and doctors' offices etc.) and developing short videos that can be circulated on Facebook. The responsibility for these activities was seen to rest mainly with eSafety, as it was acknowledged that service provider organisations were often pressed for resources.

'Advertising is a big one, because a lot of women don't know about the services that are available. So even if it's just like, ads or posters, signs in places where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander or non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women would be accessing like medical centres, the doctors, hospitals or even at the supermarket. Everybody goes to the supermarket ... Get that information out, because a lot of the time we don't know about these services.'

[Interview 10, Domestic and Family Violence Service]

Videos were the favoured format for sharing technology-facilitated abuse information for most service providers. Although service providers saw the value in flyers and posters, videos were seen to be more accessible. Making these available on social media was seen as important as technology-facilitated abuse victims would be more likely to view them.

'The videos would be good if they were circulated on Facebook or somewhere that people would see it. Putting it up on the eSafety website, I don't know how many people would go on it and access that. If it was social-media based, and that's really the target group that we're looking at, young people that are using Facebook.'

[Interview 26, Domestic and Family Violence Service]

Face-to-face contact in which people can build trust and rapport was something seen to be important, particularly for older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders who need to learn about technology-facilitated abuse.

'It comes back to that generational side of things ... we forget the importance of that face to face contact ... people don't want to use an app to find out where to go. They don't want to talk to someone over the phone all the time, they actually want to talk to someone face to face. But in this day and age, we are so limited in being able to provide that kind of service.'

[Interview 12, Legal Service]

Use plain English

Many participants also commented on the cultural appropriateness of the language and terminology used in information currently available for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women. Although materials were not outwardly criticised as being inappropriate, many felt that plain English needed to be used with an emphasis on simple, accessible wording. Service providers also noted that, due to great diversity in the languages spoken by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, translated materials would be difficult and not necessarily accessible to many people. Plain language was therefore considered the most suitable suggestion.

'I think the language thing would be hard ... There's just so many different ones, even just within [our state]. But certainly simple, plain English. If there were any apps or anything like that it just needs to be user friendly ... I think simple plain language as opposed to any sort of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander specific would be good.'

[Interview 11, Domestic and Family Violence Service]

'I don't think necessarily in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language ... not many people actually speak or read it anymore ... I think it's more about Aboriginal lingo.'

[Interview 14, Legal Service]

On the cultural appropriateness of terminology, one participant highlighted that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities tend to use 'yarns' to communicate information more informally. Service providers suggested that materials should adopt yarning (Leeson, Smith & Rynne, 2016), storytelling to educate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

'Just yarning about it, so that it is a conversation rather than real fact-based stuff, because I find that that's probably more culturally-appropriate ... '

[Interview 26, Domestic and Family Violence Service]

Having specialist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services capable of dealing with technology-facilitated abuse in a culturally appropriate manner was also recommended by some service providers. It was suggested that eSafety could have

a specialist range of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-specific resources, and that these could be disseminated to key Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander service providers, such as teachers and community workers.

'I can see a role for the eSafety Commissioner in terms of ... having Aboriginal staff members ... having identified positions within that office, an Aboriginal-specific line ... as well as Aboriginal specific resources and stuff like that.'

[Interview 14, Legal Service]

Use the right images

A couple of service providers suggested a greater use of images appropriate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander audiences in education materials.

'For our own brochure ... it seems to have been successful where we don't overload with a lot of text, but we do use a lot of images — like hand-drawn pictures that are more soft ... Maybe things that are a little bit more skewed to the Aboriginal colours and flags and maybe even like the dreamtime stories and things like that, maybe just so it sits a little bit more comfortably.'

[Interview 8, Domestic and Family Violence Service]

'I find that a lot of times we're sent resources for Aboriginal-specific programs and services and they have dot painting on them because that's traditional Aboriginal imagery, not for [our location] it's not ... It's really important to have local or even state-based imagery on those resources.'

[Interview 22, Domestic and Family Violence Service]

Raise awareness

Beyond the media, language and image considerations, the findings throughout this report highlight a range of factors that also need to be considered to provide culturally appropriate resources for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women who experience technology-facilitated abuse. These fall into two areas: improving digital literacy and improving awareness.

Improving digital literacy

- Provide information on how to change privacy settings on various phone types and social media (addressing barrier of digital literacy).
- Provide information on how it is possible for perpetrators to track someone's location using technology, e.g. tracing photos on Facebook, and what steps can be taken to prevent this, such as limiting photo uploads.
- Recognise that women may share devices but advise that this compromises their privacy protection.

Improving awareness

- Provide information about technology-facilitated abuse to older and younger generations: what it is, how it links with domestic and family violence, and the penalties.
- Target information specifically to Elders:
 - Provide information on the available supports for women who may have taken and shared intimate photos of themselves and inform Elders that they have a role to play in encouraging women to seek support.
 - Advise Elders that they have an important role to play in minimising third-party abuse and countering victim blaming on social media platforms.
- Provide information that is sensitive to the cultural importance of maintaining family connections, and the challenges in leaving abusive relationships:

- Women need information which encourages them to maintain contact with support services and how to focus to improve their safety within abusive relationships (for example, protecting privacy, building support networks, keeping a record of abuse to build evidence base).

'We need school education programs about healthy relationships but also about respect for people and culture and women. Family violence is everybody's business — a community issue. We need to raise awareness of this as a priority.'
(Community Member)

Source: Quote from Prentice et al., 2017 p. 246-7

Conclusion

This research identified six types of technology-facilitated abuse of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women living in urban areas: abusive phone calls and text messages, destroying or restricting technology access, social media and third-party abuse, monitoring and stalking, image-based abuse, and circulation of fight videos. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women did not experience substantially different impacts of technology-facilitated abuse from those felt by other women. However some impacts appeared to be amplified due to cultural or community factors.

Service providers had mixed awareness about resources and women's sources of support for technology-facilitated abuse. They noted that some women reach out to Elders, family and closer friends as trusted supports though sometimes these people could not provide help due to their lack of technological expertise.

These findings highlighted a number of possible directions for further work in this area:

1. Capitalising on yarning and storytelling to raise awareness of technology-facilitated abuse. Future research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities should recognise that, for these communities, there may be greater emphasis on shared understanding than on scientific objectivity or neutrality (Blagg et al, 2018). Yarning and storytelling (as used in the Be Deadly project) are favoured styles of research, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women need to be considered as a source of knowledge rather than 'objects of inquiry' (Blagg et al, 2018). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are the best people to know about their challenges in this area.
2. Conducting better evaluation of interventions. A number of reports have acknowledged that there are data gaps that need to be filled to provide a comprehensive understanding of family, domestic and sexual violence experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2018). At the same time, few evaluations of

interventions to reduce domestic and family violence in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities have been published (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2018). This includes a lack of evaluation of existing resources designed to raise awareness about online safety issues. While a number of resources have been developed to raise awareness of online safety (see Appendix A), it is difficult to access the few evaluations where they have been carried out.

3. There is also a gap in research and more work to be done with people living in rural and remote areas. Little research has been carried out on the differences in levels of online violence between jurisdictions or communities, or the success of prevention programs (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2018).

There is still much to be understood about the impacts, outcomes and pathways for support required for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australian women who experience domestic and family violence of any type including technology-facilitated abuse. Knowing more about how technology-facilitated abuse is experienced and managed and how best to support people experiencing such abuse will help to empower Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women to lead safer lives.

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Appendix A

Sample of resources that address online safety for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Program	Year	Description	Source
B2M Strong Choices film clips and songs	2012	Video — campaign aimed to strengthen Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities by reducing incidence of cyberbullying, cyber-payback, sexting and distribution of inappropriate images through technology. The YouTube clip campaign used football and music to communicate messages about cyberbullying, teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people to respect themselves and others online.	www.nacchocommunique.com/tag/cyber-bullying/ www.youtube.com/watch?v=nPrJ3ngblYY

Program	Year	Description	Source
Think b4U Click	2012	Developed by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Legal Program in 2012 to provide information about cyberbullying for young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in secondary schools in regional and rural NSW.	www.wlsnsw.org.au/training/projects/cyber-bullying/
Internet Safety Awareness Presentation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities (ISAPI)	2013	Modified version of Cybersmart's Internet Safety Awareness Presentation that focused on specific social media issues identified within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.	ACMA/ Cybersmart presentation evaluated by Australian Catholic University (Chesterton, Appo & Frawley, 2013)
Be Deadly Online	2013	Cybersmart/ACM A program taken over by the Office of the eSafety Commissioner.	www.esafety.gov.au/education-resources/classroom-resources/be-deadly-online
CAYLUS Central Australian	2012 - 2015	CAYLUS provided cybersafety	www.caylus.org.au/cyber-safety

Program	Year	Description	Source
cyber safety project		workshops to NT communities helping young people to use technology safety.	
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Hip Hop Project Song and film clip	2012 - 2015	Song about the impact of saying mean things.	www.youtube.com/watch?v=R950qk-8SNU
Phunktional Youth issues performance group	2012 - 2015	Theatre Performance that explored cyberbullying, safety, sexting and physical violence	
NPY Women's Council Mental health literacy project	2012 - 2015	A project to strengthen mental health literacy for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal health professionals.	www.npywc.org.au/ngangkari/uti-kulintjaku
Behind the Mulga Curtain essay by Eleanor Hogan	2014	Essay on strength and weakness of social media.	www.insidestory.org.au/behind-the-mulga-curtain
Posters highlighting cybersafety:(i) We are Cybersmart	2014 - 2015	Posters available for download.	www.caylus.org.au/cyber-safety/#

Program	Year	Description	Source
Girls (ii) Who to turn to when there's trouble (ii) Hacking (iv) Cyber Bullying.			
Videos on cybersafety themes e.g. aggression, how to share online safely.	2012 - 2015	Videos targeted at Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth and women.	www.caylus.org.au/cyber-safety/#
Shallequa and Estella, East side girls	2012 - 2015	Storybook created by and for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females, featuring exclusively female characters; available to download as PowerPoint or book.	www.caylus.org.au/cyber-safety/#
IndigiMOB	2016	Technical, training and infrastructure support to establish local digital mentors in the remote Northern Territory, 'to improve digital	www.irca.net.au/projects/indigimob

Program	Year	Description	Source
		literacy through workshops and training, support connectivity solutions, provide technical advice and develop appropriate and relevant learning tools' — workshops include education about online safety: digital footprints, passwords, online scams and fraud, internet purchases, social media and other online dangers.	
Fact sheets on sexting and cyberbullying	2016	Produced by Wirringa Baiya Aboriginal Women's Legal Service.	www.wirringabaiya.org.au/info-sheets/
Quick guide	2017	A quick guide for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people about image-based abuse shows how to connect with support	www.esafety.gov.au/image-based-abuse/support/quick-guides/Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

Program	Year	Description	Source
		services, how to request removal of images, and some legal options.	
Your online journey app	2018	An upcoming app to raise digital literacy, awareness of online skills and cybersafety information for Aboriginal people living in remote communities.	To be released 2019

Appendix B

Methodology

The qualitative research summarised in this report comprised in-depth interviews and a discussion group with 27 service providers who support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women experiencing technology-facilitated abuse. Five of the service provider organisations offer support specifically to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (domestic and family violence services, and legal services). As noted above, victims of technology-facilitated abuse were not interviewed directly due to timing, ethics considerations and resource constraints. However, several of the service providers who were interviewed (from mainstream and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-specific organisations) identified as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders themselves and discussed this type of abuse not only in their professional capacity but from their experience within their own communities. Hearing the stories of other women who have been victims of

technology-facilitated abuse would further develop eSafety's understanding of issues in this area.

The Social Research Centre conducted fieldwork for this project in July and August 2018. Using an analytical framework, the resulting anonymised transcripts and detailed notes were coded using NVivo, a software program designed to support thematic analysis of qualitative data. This resulted in identifying themes in the data, and quotes which have been included within the report to illustrate the main findings. Three case studies were compiled using composites of the information provided, to illustrate key issues, without identifying individual clients.

Research conducted by eSafety follows Australian ethical guidelines for research involving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies and the Lowitja Institute, 2013).

For this project, the research team followed the ethical guidance and processes recommended by the Australian Market and Social Research Society of Australia's Code of Professional Behaviour. This included ensuring informed consent, confidentiality of data, secure data storage, and sensitive reporting of the data.

Participants themselves were not offered an incentive as they participated in a professional capacity. However, in recognition of the sensitive nature of the research and the valuable staff time that organisations contributed, service provider organisations were offered \$200 for their participation. Table 4 shows the geographical distribution and service sector of participants in the interviews.

Table 4: Interviewees by state and service sector.

Service providers interviewed by type of organisation	NSW	Qld.	SA	Tas.	WA	Total
Domestic and family violence services	4		1	1	1	11
Legal services	2		3			8
Counselling services	1				1	2
Aged care service		1				1

Police (from discussion group)		1				1
Undisclosed (from discussion group)						4
<i>(Included above are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-specific services)</i>	<i>(2)</i>		<i>(2)</i>		<i>(1)</i>	<i>(5)</i>
TOTAL		7	2	4	1	3
						27

