

Chapter 27

Technology-Facilitated Domestic Abuse and Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Women in Victoria, Australia

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Abstract

The rapid advancement of technology poses many social challenges including the emerging issue of Technology-Facilitated abuse (TFA) and violence. In Australia, women from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds are found to be more vulnerable to domestic violence (DV) and abuse, including TFA. This chapter presents a snapshot of CALD women's Technology-Facilitated domestic abuse (TFDA) experiences in Melbourne through the eyes of a small group of DV practitioners. Findings show CALD women experience TFA similar to that of the mainstream, with tracking and monitoring through the use of smartphone and social media most common. Their migration and financial status, and language and digital literacy can increase their vulnerability to TFDA, making their experience more complicated. Appropriate digital services and resources together with face-to-face support services can be a way forward. Further research should focus on better understanding CALD women's perceptions of and responses to TFDA and explore ways to improve engagement with and use of community media channels/platforms.


Keywords: Domestic violence; coercive control; migrant women; social policy; digital technologies; cyberstalking intimate partner

Introduction¹

Domestic violence (DV²) is the most common form of violence against women and is often perpetrated by women's current or former intimate partners (Cox,

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2016). As technology advances and changes, so do the methods and tactics for committing DV. Technology has changed all of our lives, sometimes for better and sometimes for worse. Women who are victim-survivors of DV are no exception. In recent years, perpetrators increasingly use a range of internet-connected devices such as smartphones, smart cameras, watches, toys, and tablets to carry out abusive acts against their (ex-)partners (Southworth, Finn, Dawson, Fraser, & Tucker, 2007; Women's Health East, 2018; Woodlock, 2013, 2015). In addition, women from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD³) backgrounds have been identified as a vulnerable group to this new form of abuse. In this chapter, I refer to this form of Technology-Facilitated abuse (TFA) in the context of DV as Technology-Facilitated domestic abuse (TFDA). TFDA denotes the use of digital technologies to control, coerce, intimidate, humiliate, stalk, or harass an intimate partner (usually a female) both during a relationship and after separation (Hand, Chung, & Peters, 2009; Maher, McCulloch, & Fitz-Gibbon, 2017).

In many ways, the advancement of communications technology has disrupted the restrictions of time and space in our everyday interactions with others. For DV victim-survivors, the seemingly boundless spatial and temporal dimensions of ubiquitous computing⁴ extend coercive control and significantly impact victim-survivor experiences of and response to DV (Harris, 2018; Mason & Magnet, 2012; Stark, 2007). Moreover, the impact of emotional and psychological abuse caused by TFDA is equally, if not more, damaging than physical violence (Hand et al., 2009; Sackett & Saunders, 1999), sometimes affecting victim-survivors long after they have left their abusive relationships.

Amid the emerging issue of TFDA, we are also witnessing the increased use of digital technologies for prevention of and intervention in DV (Meurn, 2012; Tarzia, Iyer, Thrower, & Hegarty, 2017). For example, the installation of internet-connected surveillance devices or duress alarms, or the use of smartphone safety apps that purport to keep women safer (Davenport, Richey, & Westbrook, 2008; Mason & Magnet, 2012). Seemingly, online platforms can also provide positive information for advocacy purposes, while social media can offer victim-survivors a safe place to discuss their experiences and to seek help (United Nations, 2005). The use of technology in fighting DV is particularly relevant at the time of writing this chapter, since many parts of the world are in lockdown during the COVID-19 outbreak, and the risk of DV is escalating (Foster & Fletcher, 2020; Peterman et al., 2020; UN Women, 2020). In my hometown of Melbourne, many DV agencies have suspended their face-to-face services to exercise social distancing, but are tapping into innovative ways of working online so women can continue to access services and be supported safely⁵ (UN Women, 2020).

However, reliance on technology raises a number of concerns for DV victim-survivors. For example, the trading off of privacy for safety (Mason & Magnet, 2012); putting the onus on women to keep themselves safe (Freed et al., 2018; Mason & Magnet, 2012); and barriers to accessibility, usability, and visibility of online resources (Davenport et al., 2008; Hand et al., 2009) especially for women from minority and Indigenous groups (WESNET The Women's Services Network, 2019).

So, on one hand, perpetrators can use internet-enabled devices to extend surveillance and coercive control on their intimate (ex-)partner, while on the other, victim-survivors can use digital technology for information and support to help them find safety, and immediate access to emergency services. The relationship between technology and DV is indeed complex and intriguing. Could technology be both friend and foe for women who are experiencing or have experienced DV?

Emerging research continues to expand our understanding of the nature, impact, theoretical frameworks, and women's experiences of TFDA. There is evidence suggesting that women from CALD backgrounds are one of the groups most at risk of TFDA (Douglas, Harris, & Dragiewicz, 2019; WESNET The Women's Services Network, 2019; Woodlock, 2015) and that they face particular barriers in seeking support for TFDA (Office of the eSafety Commissioner, 2019; WESNET The Women's Services Network, 2019). While there is a growing literature that reflects the complexity facing this group of women, CALD women with limited or no English are in general under-represented in DV studies and support services but overrepresented in the DV crisis system (Crenshaw, 1991; George & Harris, 2014; InTouch, 2010).

Much remains unknown about CALD women's experiences of DV in the digital age. How is technology being used against them? How is it being used to assist them? What are some of the challenges? Identifying and addressing the experiences of DV, including this new form of abuse, and CALD women's needs (particularly those who seldom seek help) is therefore essential. This chapter contributes toward responding to these questions by drawing on research findings from a small-scale qualitative study I conducted in 2018 with DV practitioners in Melbourne, Australia. It begins by providing the research context and background, including an overview of the limited existing research on TFDA in Australia. It then presents the methodology used in the study before turning to discuss my findings. It concludes by emphasizing the need for further studies relating to the role of technology both in facilitating and responding to CALD women's experiences of DV.

Background

Domestic Violence: The Australian Context

DV came into the public limelight in Australia following political activist work by radical feminists in the 1970s (Theobald, Murray, & Smart, 2017). Prior to that, DV was treated as a private family matter between husband and wife, and physical violence, mostly perpetrated by husbands, was treated as acceptable and warranting little external intervention (Dobash & Dobash, 1980; Murray & Powell, 2009). This second wave of feminism foregrounded gender-inequality as the core of the problem, and we saw the emergence of community-based refuges providing women's crisis accommodation (Murray, 2002). The ethos of many of these refuges was for women to take control and to leave their abusive relationship. In the 1980s, concerns over the specific needs of women from different cultural and

linguistic backgrounds not being met led to the establishment of a number of CALD-specific refuges and social services in Victoria (Theobald et al., 2017). In recent years, state and national governments in Australia undertook several significant policy initiatives, including the *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010–2022* (COAG, 2011), to tackle DV in a more coordinated way. Prior to this, DV was not recognized as a significant social issue warranting significant funding for primary prevention campaigns, research evaluation, and national amelioration efforts.

In the state of Victoria, where my research took place, the first ever Minister for Prevention of Domestic Violence was appointed in 2014, who then oversaw the Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence (VRCFV)⁶ in 2015 (Richardson, 2014). The VRCFV made a total of 227 recommendations with a number of them directly concerning people from CALD communities (e.g., recommendation no. 157 on improving the use of interpreters in family violence-related matters [State of Victoria, 2016b, p. 87]).

With the changing landscapes of DV due to the rise of online coercive control perpetrated by intimate partner abusers, TFDA further complicates policy and legal responses (Douglas & Burdon, 2018). For example, the Victorian criminal justice system has expanded several policies and laws to protect women who are harmed by TFA behaviors such as matters concerning image-based abuse.⁷ The VRCFV recommendations and other policy and law developments offered a welcome change, but whether they fully address the unique, diverse, and complex lived experiences of women from CALD communities without essentializing CALD women's experiences is debatable (Ghafournia & Easteal, 2018).

The Nature and Prevalence of Technology-Facilitated Domestic Abuse in Australia

TFA comes in many forms, which includes harassment, threats, stalking, monitoring, hate speech, hacking, identify theft, online stalking, and image-based sexual abuse through digital technologies and can occur between strangers or between intimate (ex-)partners (Henry & Powell, 2014; Women's Health East, 2018). This chapter, however, focuses on TFA between intimate (ex-)partners – TFDA, which centers on coercive control and power dynamics, and a sustained pattern of abuse and threat. TFDA extends offline domestic abusive behaviors into online spaces (Harris, 2018), and in some instances (e.g., covert monitoring) affected women may not even know that it is occurring (WESNET The Women's Services Network, 2019). It thus causes women to feel powerless and unable to be completely free from the perpetrators' presence (Dimond, Fiesler, & Bruckman, 2011), making this form of abuse more pervasive, relentless, and damaging (Hand et al., 2009).

National data capturing the prevalence of TFDA is not currently available, but there are indicators that it is very common. The Personal Safety Survey (PSS) provides the most up-to-date prevalence estimates of all forms of interpersonal violence in Australia at a national level, including an in-depth look at intimate

(ex-)partner emotional abuse⁸ (ABS, 2017a; DVRCV, 2019). The latest PSS found approximately one in four (23%, or 2.2 million) women have experienced emotional abuse from an intimate (ex-)partner (ABS, 2017a). Many of these women were subjected to socially controlling and isolating behaviors including restrictions on phone or internet use, tracking via GPS, and monitoring through social media (DVRCV, 2019), which resemble TFDA behaviors.

The landmark Australian SmartSafe research (SmartSafe) was the first study investigating TFDA. It found TFDA is a significant emerging issue in Victoria, with women⁹ reporting their abusers were using a range of mobile technologies to stalk, control, and monitor them from a distance, both during relationships and after separation (Woodlock, 2013). The second SmartSafe survey of DV practitioners from around Australia found nearly every respondent had had clients who had experienced TFDA (Woodlock, 2015). In addition, the trend of perpetrators using smartphones, mobile phones, and Facebook for TFDA continued, with the use of GPS for tracking on the rise (Woodlock, 2015).

The PSS, the two SmartSafe studies, and other international studies indicate TFDA is prevalent and a worldwide phenomenon (Laxton, 2014; Southworth et al., 2007; United Nations Broadband Commission, 2015). However, few studies have been conducted among different or specific CALD communities, and the true extent of TFDA among CALD women remains unknown.

Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Women and Technology-Facilitated Domestic Abuse

Although CALD women have been identified as more vulnerable to experiencing TFDA (Douglas et al., 2019; Woodlock, 2015), there is very little published research on their lived experience. The Office of the eSafety Commissioner's 2019 qualitative study was the first published research to address this gap. It found CALD women share similar experiences of TFDA with other women including being harassed; having their physical movement, phone usage, and other online activity closely monitored and tracked via internet-enabled devices such as smartphones; gaslighting; and having limiting access to technology. CALD women reported being blackmailed or punished by perpetrators sharing or threatening to share with their family sexual, degrading, or hysterical images or videos of them (Office of the eSafety Commissioner, 2019). There were several cases of CALD women who were subjected to culturally specific threats. For example, perpetrators threatened women with deportation to keep them quiet about the abuse, mobilizing extended family overseas and in Australia to harass and send death threats to coerce them to stay. Some of the threats made by the perpetrators and other family members were in the targeted women's first language, creating additional hurdles to prosecution (Office of the eSafety Commissioner, 2019).

The Women's Services Network (WESNET) (2019) conducted a study with DV practitioners to explore how TFDA occurs among Aboriginal and Torres

Strait Islander (ATSI) and CALD women survivors of DV. The study found the type of TFDA experienced by CALD women tends to involve basic technologies; however, technology exacerbated social isolation and limited their help-seeking options (WESNET The Women's Services Network, 2019). The study also found that TFDA is not often recognized as abuse by survivors, and addressing it is often not a priority for them or practitioners (WESNET The Women's Services Network, 2019).

Existing research adds important information about an under-researched group and emerging issue. It suggests CALD women's experiences of TFDA are more complex (Office of the eSafety Commissioner, 2019; WESNET The Women's Services Network, 2019). This could be due to a wide range of intersecting factors such as a lack of technology skills and access, low English literacy, and barriers to accessing information and services (WESNET The Women's Services Network, 2019).

Technology-Based Responses to Domestic Violence

Australian governments and DV support services increasingly recognize the role played by digital technologies in supporting and empowering DV victim-survivors (Carter, 2015; Dragiewicz et al., 2019; State of Victoria, 2016a; Tarzia et al., 2017). A recent review of technology-assisted services showed every year thousands of Australians access telephone and online communications (e.g., helplines, websites, and mobile applications) to seek support relating to DV, family, and sexual violence (Australian Institute Health and Welfare, 2019). For example, mobile web apps such as "Ask Izzy" enable users to search and find support services, and online and phone counseling services like "1800RESPECT" (AIHW, 2019, pp. 39–40). Additionally, free phone apps like "Arc" enables women to collect evidence of family violence by keeping track of perpetrators' abusive behaviors (DVRVCV, 2019).

The Social Shaping Technology (SST) field posits that technology is socially shaped by the way society adopts and uses it to achieve desired outcomes (Dixon et al., 2014). With our everyday lives increasingly mediated by digital technologies, it is not surprising then to see suggested uses of communication technologies such as social media overcome language and literacy barriers that exist in some CALD communities, and ethnic radio and other multicultural media being used to reinforce anti-violence against women campaign messages (Department of Social Services, 2015). Indeed, one international study found women living in households with multiple information and communications technology (ICT) ownership (particularly mobile phones or computers) were more likely to reject justifications for wife beating (Cardoso & Sorenson, 2017, p. 1179). Furthermore, having access to affordable internet service with the ability to perform a range of activities online confidently is integral to digital inclusion, and ultimately social and economic participation (Thomas et al., 2019). However, household ownership does not necessarily equate to access (Cardoso & Sorenson, 2017) and available digital resources may not be linguistically or readily accessible for CALD women. In addition, those who are nonusers of the internet are more likely

to miss out on the advantages and assistance that digital technology can offer (Thomas et al., 2019). This is particularly so for CALD women who have their access and usage controlled, restricted or monitored due to TFDA.

Methodology

This chapter discusses findings from stage one of a two-stage research project. The first stage of the research examined DV practitioners' perspectives of TFDA and CALD women, and the use of digital technologies for prevention and intervention. The second stage explored the lived experience of DV victim-survivors who are of Chinese descent. The overall project aims to investigate how digital technologies affect the experiences of, and responses to, DV among Chinese immigrant women living in Melbourne, Victoria.

Sampling Technique

Stage one harnessed the experiences and knowledge of DV practitioners who have worked or are working closely with CALD women, including women of Chinese descent. They were recruited via purposive sampling as my goal was to sample participants who have the relevant experience and are informed about the emerging issue of TFDA (Bryman, 2012; Neuman, 1997). I also used snowball sampling techniques to help overcome the difficulties that can arise when conducting research on sensitive issues such as DV (Bryman, 2012). It begins small, with one or a few people, and then spreads out based on links to the initial recruits (Neuman, 1997). However, the downside of using a non-probability sampling approach means findings from the research will not likely be representative of all DV practitioners (Bryman, 2012).

The research received ethics approval from RMIT Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) in 2018 for stage one and in 2019 for stage two.

Recruitment

All stage one participants were drawn from a database of specialized DV agencies in Victoria, which was composed by searching the internet and through personal knowledge of existing services. Cold calls were made to these agencies to ascertain their interests and to explain the purpose of the study. When interest was shown, the agency was sent a Plain Language Statement and Consent (PLSC) via email for their further consideration. When they could not be reached via phone, an email invitation was sent to their advertised contact email together with a copy of the PLSC. Further contacts were added to the database by word-of-mouth either through agency staff whom I spoke with on the phone or from recruited participants.

In total, 42 agencies were contacted either via email or phone calls. The initial interaction with agencies revealed that not many of them had supported a lot of Chinese or CALD women, therefore they kindly declined. Some declined citing lack of time or resources, or that they were already involved, or had been asked to

participate in other research. Ultimately, out of the 13 DV practitioners from seven agencies, five participated in a group interview, and eight were individually interviewed in phase one of the research. They included 12 women and one man, with six working in refuges, two working in specialist family violence services, one from a counseling and health care service, one from a social welfare service, two from a women's health service, and one from a statewide anti-violence agency. Between them, they provided a range of support service including but not limited to intake and assessment, crisis and outreach response, intensive case management, prevention and promotion, and counseling.

All interviewees had experience working with CALD women, and eight of them had worked directly with victim-survivors of Chinese descent. Seven of the 13 DV practitioners are bi-lingual, speaking either Mandarin or Cantonese or both, and two are bi-cultural practitioners employed to work specifically with Chinese communities with whom they share similar cultural experiences and understandings.

All the participants were informed about the aim of the study, and the relevance of their participation for the study. All participants provided written or verbal informed consent. On average, each semi-structured interview lasted approximately 52 minutes and was audio-recorded. Interview transcripts were imported to the NVivo software program for content and thematic data analysis. Data collected included the agency's services, participants' perspectives of CALD women's experiences of DV including the occurrence of TFA, and implications of technology on their clients' lives. The participant names used in this chapter are pseudonyms.

Since only DV practitioners were engaged in stage one and not victim-survivors, this is a noted limitation of this chapter. Moreover, the outcome of my research cannot be generalized due to the small sample size, and by focusing on a specific ethnic group I acknowledge the research excludes many women from diverse backgrounds. People of Chinese ancestry are heterogenous, and Chinese migration and settlement in Australia has a long history and is growing. Nonetheless, the study generated richer in-depth qualitative data relating to a hard-to-reach and under-researched group.

Results and Discussion

Technology-Facilitated Domestic Abuse and Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Women in Victoria

TFDA is an emerging and rising issue among Australian women (Cox, 2016; Hand et al., 2009; Woodlock, 2013, 2015). In my interviews with DV practitioners, they told me most CALD women they worked with experienced physical, financial, emotional, and sexual abuse, and some of the abusive behaviors concerned the misuse of technology. The most common TFDA my participants reported CALD women having experienced was tracking and monitoring through the use of digital communication media.

Surveillance and Stalking

One of the practitioners described some of the TFDA activities she had seen in her clients from CALD backgrounds:

So, well going through the phone pretty much to check her, cos some women [are] probably a new migrant here, the perp will sign up the phone plan for her, essentially the phone is under his name, so he has access to all the history records, who she's been talking to, how much time she spent on the phone today, what is in [it,] you know like calling who, who she called and then he has all the access to that so he can log on [and ask], "why [do] you spend so much time talking to blah blah"... Or some of them, they think, the other common things that stop her from seeing [or] calling the family overseas or you know, yeah it could be like physically stop [ping] her from going home or pretty much like [being] verbally aggressive after she made the contact [and] all [this] stuff, argu[ing] and all that. (Alex, Specialist family violence service)

Many practitioners revealed cases of CALD women either being monitored or stalked by smartphone, GPS, social media, or email. For example, Anna, who worked at a specialist family violence service, told me one of her clients was convinced that her ex had been physically stalking her, or he had someone tracking her. However, upon examining the woman's iPhone she found all the location services were turned on and believed the tracking was most likely through the "Find my iPhone" application via the linked iCloud account. She also reported another case where a camera was installed and linked to a perpetrator's mobile phone and on a router. However, in the majority of the cases reported by my participants perpetrators tended to use low tech:

... it's actually less likely that there'll be spyware or [a] hidden app on someone's phone [and more likely perpetrators using details from]... say geo-tagging on a photo [posted on Facebook for example] or if you have find my iPhone on your phone. So, things like that, they're actually... more likely to occur rather than... [a] bug on their phone. (Grace, Statewide anti-violence agency)

Most participants reported CALD women they worked with experienced TFDA through smartphones and their applications. This included perpetrators who had installed tracking apps on the women's mobile phones, switching on the location services of the mobile, or other installed social media apps. Other times legitimate software such as "Find my iPhone" or other location services were switched on by the women themselves, without thinking of the potential consequences. These findings are in keeping with previous research that has shown by far the most popular way of tracking by perpetrators are through low-tech techniques like smartphone tracking and social media (Freed et al., 2018;

Mason & Magnet, 2012; Woodlock, 2015). The use of children's digital devices to do the spying, monitoring, and tracking (Southworth et al., 2007; Women's Health East, 2018) was less common, with only one participant citing a case she had worked on where the abuser located the woman via their children's iPad:

[k]ids were playing [on] their iPad and the iPad location was also on and you know [the] family photo-sharing iCloud is there as well, so [the] perpetrator actually found the mum in a caravan.... [The] mum [was] being supported by one of the women's refuge[s], and ah she was hiding basically overnight with the kids in the caravan, but the perpetrator found her. (Claire, Refuge)

Harassment and Threats

Mobile communication technology allows instant messaging and contact with others, permitting TFDA perpetrators to extend their coercive control beyond spatial and temporal dimensions, further terrorizing and disempowering DV victim-survivors (Harris, 2018; Mason & Magnet, 2012; Stark, 2007). My research participants reported that social media, messaging platforms, and emails were commonly used by perpetrators to harm, humiliate, and threaten their CALD clients. Jack, a bilingual and bi-cultural practitioner, reported a few cases involving social media and phone technology harassment of his clients both during and after the abusive relationships. His account below illustrated how gaslighting increased his client's anxiety:

The abuses were mainly through all sort[s] of technology, electronic technology. So, she was concerned about [her] email getting monitored, strange things happened on email like change[s to] settings that she was not aware of. And things like she can't send email[s] and things like that. Email, phone... I think she was creating [a] new account every now and then. (Jack, Social welfare services)

Bethany, also a bilingual and bi-cultural practitioner, shared with me how damaging persistent abusive messages had made her client feel powerless:

[Perpetrators] try to send messages or threatening messages through WeChat or SMS, yeah to make the victims feel very unsafe.... I have come across a client who... just kept receiving the messages from the perpetrator. She tried to block him, but she couldn't do it because she's worried that if she blocks him, he'd [take] revenge.... "If I block him, he might try to find me and or [have] some other people find me, and I will be in danger so I cannot." (Bethany, Counseling & health care service)

Some abusers wrote threatening messages in a language other than English to disguise the seriousness. Eva, a refuge worker, shared a disturbing case where her client's abuser "would write [threatening text] in Vietnamese" and sent visual images of "dead babies" saying he was worried "this would be our baby" and accusing her client of being "a bad mother."

These findings are in keeping with other research showing how TFDA erodes women's sense of safety (Hand et al., 2009; Harris, 2018), and instils in them fear and pressure, amplifying emotional and psychological abuse through the omnipresence of abusers even when a woman has left the relationship (Mason & Magnet, 2012; Sackett & Saunders, 1999; Stark, 2007). The impact of absolute control and power, in the most extreme case, can result in total submission, rendering use of digital surveillance tools unnecessary, as Eva observed:

But they haven't generally said that [being stalked by technology has] been their experience. I mean yeah, it's more messages and things, checking where she is or he always know where she is, is the other thing, it's often not much of a social life happening for the woman. So, perhaps that hasn't even been necessary a lot of the time. (Eva, Refuge)

Vulnerability to Technology-Facilitated Domestic Abuse

Prior research has shown perpetrators deliberately restricting CALD women's access to technology to further isolate them (WESNET The Women's Services Network, 2019; Woodlock, 2015), and many of my participants noted similar tactics. Participants said perpetrators would manipulate their CALD clients' social location such as their migration and financial status, gender role beliefs, English language proficiency, and digital literacy skills. As Grace succinctly put it:

I think what can make it harder for migrant women is that... you could have your phone taken off you or monitored and controlled by the perpetrator. So for example one client, she has come from an Asian country, married an Australian man, she didn't have fluent English, she wasn't well connected, she didn't have her bank account so [she was] financially dependent on the perpetrator, ... he wouldn't provide her a phone, he wouldn't allow her to have a phone. So, it's very hard for her then to contact anyone or be connected at all. (Grace, Statewide anti-violence agency)

Many participants also said women tended to minimize their DV experience. One participant explained for newly arrived women this could be due to juggling multiple priorities in their new life in Australia:

I think a lot of the women from, well the one[s] I've seen, they are usually trying to settling down in Australia. So, I think at that stage they are also working on, you know, stabilizing their

financial income, trying to find a house or if they are trying to develop further in their career.... I think they don't have time to, you know, and sometime[s] there're also conflicts going on so there is living stress and there's also family stress or I guess relationship stress, and it really takes out a lot of their attention. (Jack, Social welfare services)

Others reported that abusers would threaten women with deportation or cancellation of immigration sponsorship. This added pressure for them to stay, especially if they had children. As Mei, a refuge worker, said, women's migration status gave perpetrators one more tactic to control them through threats. Citizenship status aside, Anna said some women are willing to give up everything for their children: "... you can have a very well-educated person, [but] I think at the end of the day, it also comes down to that sort of traditional belief of what a mother's role is." Participants reported that many women would sacrifice their own safety and well-being in exchange for their children's.

Joan, also a worker from a refuge, explained that many CALD women at her refuge did not have ownership of their smartphones and phone accounts. These phones and accounts were often given to them by their partners who owned and set up both the account and device. This was very challenging, especially for new migrants:

So then for someone who maybe doesn't have any English... who doesn't actually maybe know the country or the area they're living in, doesn't have friends maybe, doesn't know... who to go to for help. Thinking about how that person might then get her own phone, or access the computer, it's such an insurmountable challenge. (Grace, Statewide anti-violence agency)

Technology-Based Responses to Domestic Violence

Most of my participants agreed that technology has the potential to assist and to empower CALD women DV victim-survivors. Many of my participants saw the benefits of using technology for educating the community about DV. For example, Claire (a refuge worker) who had worked closely with CALD women from Sri Lanka, India and East Asia noted:

I found particularly there are barriers as well because women are restricted to make or go to those information sessions or mix with the people.... So, there is a big difference for the CALD women and the Australian culture of domestic violence through self-regulation. But to me it would be the best option [for] media, television, [and] radio [to] talk about more and more with the different language(s) like (the) Chinese language, Mandarin, or any [other non-English] languages. So that might be... helpful to reach that information to the woman.

In keeping with findings in prior research (Cardoso & Sorenson, 2017; Department of Social Services, 2015), the use of traditional communication channels and online platforms could complement each other to promote agencies' services and establish rapport with the target community:

Yeah, technology, hm so the main way we engage with our clients is by WeChat, also we use... radio, we use radio, we use newspaper, ... we send email, email is also technology. Basically, if you want to promote your service everything is about technology. (Bethany, Counseling & health care service)

Tapping into what the CALD communities use in terms of communication and media platforms can also be crucial to promote change and raise awareness of DV (Dixon et al., 2014). Many CALD women, especially newly arrived migrant women or those who have little English, prefer to communicate in their own language according to many participants. They use digital platforms that they are familiar with; as pointed out by Anna: "it's always through like whatever that, the community uses." In my participants' experience, remaining online is particularly important to women as the digital platform can be the only channel for them to maintain contact with their friends and families in other countries.

Having a support network can also break the social isolation so often experienced by CALD women DV victim-survivors. Some of my participants advocate the use of online forums or online peer support groups for information sharing, social connection, and support. For example, WeChat can be utilized when services work with the Chinese community:

So when... family violence happens they don't know where and how to seek help. But I reckon even for these women, WeChat would be a platform they have daily access to. I, I can't think [of] any people who don't have access to the platform these days...as long as she has [a] smart phone, I think WeChat would be the platform... (Martha, Women's health service)

Besides social connection and support, there is potential for online forums to be utilized for prevention and early intervention. Many of my participants agreed that if women can access relevant resources and support to identify DV earlier, it might actually help to prevent a situation before it is too late:

... if the woman... can find a way to communicate even... [if] it's like an online chatroom they can just access that and then talk to someone in their language and then they can sort of identify the family violence earlier than later, that might actually help overall to prevent, [or] stop them in the middle way, ... not just, until like wait, escalate, and then incident happen. (Alex, Special family violence service)

The use of a tech-based response to DV can also reach women who otherwise cannot be reached. It may be more sustainable, allowing service providers and clients to stay connected without much managed space and resources. Some participants also suggested that women may be able to interact with workers via phone or Skype calls when they cannot access services in person.

Technology also has the potential to keep women and their children safe from violence in their own home, if it is safe to do so, as Eva postulated:

We see how hard it is for women to start all over again. We absolutely would like them to be able to return home if that's an option [installing CCTV, personal alarms, locks and security doors] [N]ot every perpetrator would abide the order obviously, if, however, he does have a fear of the police [and] then would abide by the order... then yes, because we do want the kids to stay in their schools and women to keep their support network. (Eva, Refuge)

Opportunity also exists to use smartphones to document evidence of DV (DVRVC, 2019). Some of my participants reported CALD women using their smartphones to capture breaches of court orders and incidents of DV.

Overall, from my participants' perspectives, digital technologies can be a lifeline for CALD women TFDA victim-survivors and can potentially help them to obtain information and/or help maintain a social support/network, and lessen social isolation. Nonetheless, all participants stressed that face-to-face service delivery remains critical when working with DV victim-survivors.

Challenges for Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Women re: Technology-Based Responses to Domestic Violence

Although using technology to combat DV seems promising, previous research has found barriers to accessibility, usability, and visibility of online resources (Davenport et al., 2008; Hand et al., 2009). Many participants suggested CALD women face some challenges in this regard.

English Proficiency. My participants identified language barriers as the number one issue affecting CALD women's experience of TFDA, both in terms of being targeted by technology and in terms of using technology to respond to abuse. Many participants explained that when English is not your first language, life-saving actions such as calling triple zero (000) or communicating with workers can become a daunting task. As such, a few participants said some clients are more willing to disclose to them because they speak the same language. But when women's phone settings were in a language other than English, some participants found it difficult to conduct safety checks. Below is Anna's experience helping Chinese speaking clients:

And then adding to that is... everything [video on how to perform safety check] is in English.... [S]ometimes I struggle with that too because if I were to explain how to turn off certain settings to a client, the client wants to speak Mandarin, I don't know how to explain in Mandarin either because my phone is in English, I know the settings in English, I don't know the settings in Mandarin. (Anna, Specialist family service)

Even assisting clients to transfer data to a safer phone can be a difficult task as Joan (a refuge worker) explained:

[y]ou know, you have to know how to set it up, even if it's the CALD woman who doesn't speak the language so that's another barrier because you know, you need to go through their, her phone to transfer the number. Maybe those numbers are not even in English they are in another language so you can see the multiple layers of the barriers of assisting....

Further, some observed that due to language barriers many of their CALD clients did not access mainstream services, and therefore were unaware of mainstream DV campaigns. Some also noted that even if technology could be used to capture evidence of abusive acts, if they were not in English, such recordings might not be accepted as admissible evidence in court. Such recordings could be translated, but translation costs may deter victim-survivors and/or agencies working with them from doing so:

...they have evidence on their phone... but the problem is a lot of these are in Mandarin. And to submit it to the police, they would have to have it translated. Cos sometimes the police kind of go "It's all in Mandarin I don't know." They're not supposed to know, they [are] supposed to kind of go "what is this?" But they don't always take that as evidence because it's all in Mandarin... they do run into the trouble of everything being Mandarin. And then to have it translated it would cost money. (Anna, Specialist family service)

Digital Literacy. Another challenge noted by some of my participants related to women's lack of confidence in using IT or their low level of IT skills:

Some [CALD women] often... don't, they don't even know where to find the location setting. They don't even know how to turn it off on their phones.... [A]t every intake we do a safety planning with the women.... We always tell them to turn it off, the location, tell them how to get it, how to go to the setting[s] and turn [it] off.... (Alex, Specialist family violence service)

Most participants observed that many of their CALD clients did not know how to access resources online. Even when women were aware of online resources or safety apps, some participants expressed concern that some clients would not be able to utilize them. None of my participants noted or recalled their CALD clients ever using any existing safety apps when they came to their services. Mei explained the fact that a majority of these apps are in English could be a deterrent since “they don’t have the language skills to access it.” Di, another refuge worker believed “it’s beyond them” since they would not have the knowledge and digital skills to search for and download these sorts of safety apps. From my participants’ perspectives, when women experience TFDA, having the confidence and skills to use their smartphones could help to ensure safety and facilitate access to support services, and take advantage of being digitally included (Thomas et al., 2019).

Conclusion

This chapter provides a very basic snapshot of TFDA and CALD women based on the experiences of several DV practitioners in Victoria, Australia. In my participants’ experience, CALD women commonly experience tracking and monitoring through the use of smartphones and social media. Further, CALD women’s migration and financial status, and language and digital literacy can impact and increase their vulnerability to TFDA, making their experience of TFDA more complicated. Coercive control of a woman’s use of and access to a smartphone and other mobile communication technology can limit their capacity to seek help or leave and prevent them from being digitally included.

Findings from stage one of my research are consistent with the literature that notes the complexity of the issue of TFDA. Technology can compound the coercive nature of DV to exacerbate risk and further disempower CALD women victim-survivors of TFDA. Yet, despite the devastating impact of TFDA on its victim-survivors, many participants revealed technology can also have positive effects for their CALD clients. Technology-based responses such as safety apps, online resources, and social online counseling services provide vital information, social connection, and emotional support, which can be a critical lifeline for many.

Based on my participants’ experiences, for CALD women, providing culturally and linguistically appropriate digital services and resources to complement existing face-to-face mainstream and CALD-specific support services can be a way forward. To succeed it would require collaboration and coordination of the entire community, including CALD women victim-survivors, and all levels of government to ameliorate the immense issue of DV. Furthermore, policy and service delivery need to be equitable and meet the needs of all victim-survivors, including those who are underrepresented and more marginalized. Many participants acknowledged building rapport with CALD women victim-survivors and establishing long-term relationships with the community as crucial.

There is an urgent need to better understand how women experience TFDA and their responses to it, including their access to, use, and ownership of technology. This is especially so for women from CALD backgrounds. Far too often, their voices,

their wisdom, and their agency are not being heard in responding to and recovering from DV. If we are to achieve the vision of the VRCFV of a more responsive and culturally appropriate mainstream universal/specialist service, identifying and addressing the needs and lived realities of CALD women is critical. Research on the areas of TFDA and the CALD community is sparse. Future research should focus on better understanding CALD women's perceptions of and responses to TFDA, their relationship with digital communication media, and on exploring ways to improve engagement and utilize community media channels/platforms. The full potential of utilizing digital technologies in the intricate prevention and intervention space is yet to be realized. It is hoped that the results of my study will contribute toward satisfying some of that need.

Notes

1. The author acknowledges her research participants and all those who have worked and are working tirelessly in their effort to eradicate all forms of violence against women.
2. Also known as intimate partner violence (IPV) and family violence (FV) in Australia. DV and FV are the terms that tend to be used most by professionals working in the VAW fields and the broader community.
3. The term CALD is frequently used to distinguish ethnic minority communities from the mainstream community. The CALD population in Australia is mainly defined by country of birth, language spoken, and cultural diversity ([Sawrikar & Katz, 2009](#)).
4. Also known as "ubiquomp," ubiquitous computing "embeds computer technology in our everyday environment, providing a human with information services and applications through any device over different kinds of networks" and "can be seen as prerequisite for pervasive computing that emphasizes mobile data access and the mechanisms needed for supporting a community of nomadic users" ([Niemelä & Latvakoski, 2004](#), p. 71).
5. See [Saferfamilies.org](#) (n.d.) for some examples of online resources during the COVID-19 pandemic and the government announcement of \$5M toward new technology for family violence organizations in Victoria ([Premier of Victoria, 2020](#)).
6. The final VRCFV report was tabled into the Victorian Parliament in 2016, and the Victorian government has committed to implement all 227 recommendations. As of December 31, 2019, the Victorian government has implemented 154 recommendations (see [vic.gov](#), n.d.).
7. See [Summary Offences Act 1966 \(Vic\)](#) section 41DV: distribution of intimate image intentionally without consent carries a maximum penalty of seven years imprisonment.
8. The PSS refers to emotional abuse caused by a set of behaviors or actions characterized in nature by their intent to manipulate, control, isolate, or intimidate the person they are aimed at (see the [ABS \(2017b\)](#) Personal Safety Survey, Australia: User Guide, 2016 for detailed background to the Survey).
9. The majority of the SmartSafe online survey victim-survivor participants self-identified as Anglo.

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