# Technology-facilitated abuse:

## Interviews with victims and survivors and perpetrators

ASHER FLYNN

SOPHIE HINDES

ANASTASIA POWELL

**ANROWS**

AUSTRALIA'S NATIONAL RESEARCH
ORGANISATION FOR WOMEN'S SAFETY
*to Reduce Violence against Women & their Children*

RESEARCH REPORT
ISSUE 11 | JULY 2022

# Technology-facilitated abuse:
## Interviews with victims and survivors and perpetrators

**ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR ASHER FLYNN**
Criminology, School of Social Sciences, Monash University

**SOPHIE HINDES**
Research Assistant, Criminology, School of Social Sciences, Monash University

**ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR ANASTASIA POWELL**
Criminology & Justice Studies, RMIT University

# Contents

# Acronyms

| | |
|---|---|
| **ABS:** | Australian Bureau of Statistics |
| **GPS:** | Global positioning system |
| **IBSA:** | Image-based sexual abuse |
| **IRSD:** | Index of Relative Socio-economic Disadvantage |
| **LGB+:** | Lesbian, gay, bisexual and additional self-described sexualities. |
| **LGBTQ+ and intersex:** | Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and additional self-described sexualities, including intersex |
| **LOTE:** | Languages other than English |
| **NCAS:** | National Community Attitudes towards Violence against Women Survey |
| **PAG:** | Project advisory group |
| **TFA:** | Technology-facilitated abuse |

# Glossary

| | |
|---|---|
| **Cissexism:** | A form of sexism based on gender identity and expression. It refers to discrimination against people whose gender is different to the gender they were assigned at birth, and the privileging of cisgender people over trans and gender-diverse people. |
| **Coercive control:** | A course of conduct aimed at dominating and controlling another person. It can be viewed as an assault on autonomy, with the use of both physical and non-physical tactics to gain control over every aspect of a victim's life. The term captures the ongoing, repetitive and cumulative nature of domestic and family violence. |
| **Dick pics:** | A photograph of a penis sent through the internet, often as a form of "sexting" to entice sexual relations. However, dick pics in the context of TFA are often unsolicited and sent without consent of the receiver. |
| **Doxxing:** | The act of revealing private information about someone online without the consent of that person, usually with the intent to harass, threaten or seek revenge. |
| **Gaslighting:** | A form of emotional abuse and manipulation where someone causes a victim to question their own thoughts, memories and perception of reality. It can lead a victim to a loss in confidence and self-esteem, make them question their mental and emotional stability, and make them dependent on the perpetrator. |
| **Global positioning system (GPS):** | The network of satellites that provide location information on a variety of devices including phones, computers and cars. |
| **Image-based sexual abuse (IBSA):** | The non-consensual creation, distribution or threatened distribution of nude and sexual images. |
| **Index of Relative Socio-economic Disadvantage (IRSD):** | A general socio-economic index that summarises a range of information about the economic and social conditions of people and households within an area. Unlike the other indexes, this index includes only measures of relative disadvantage. |
| **Perpetrators:** | Those who have engaged in technology-facilitated abuse (TFA). We recognise that the victim and survivor and perpetrator dichotomy is not always clear, and some perpetrators we spoke with were also victims and survivors of TFA. We do not seek to contribute to the othering of those who engage in TFA; rather we seek to better understand the complex drivers of TFA perpetration. |
| **LGBTQ+ and intersex:** | An inclusive term to refer to sexuality- and gender-diverse communities. In some places, the shorter acronym LGB+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual and additional self-described sexualities) is used, where reporting on research focused on sexuality separately from gender-diverse populations. |
| **NCAS:** | National Community Attitudes towards Violence against Women Survey, administered to the Australian population (16+) every four years to gauge community knowledge and attitudes towards violence against women and gender equality. |

**Technology-facilitated abuse (TFA):** The use of mobile and digital technologies in interpersonal harms such as online sexual harassment, stalking and image-based abuse.

**Victims and survivors:** We use the term "victims and survivors" when we refer to those who have experienced TFA. We use this to recognise the harm experienced by those we spoke to, but also their resilience. We recognise that not all people who experience TFA will use these terms for themselves, but it allows us to recognise the complexity and non-linear nature of many of our participants' experiences.

# Executive summary

## Background

Technology-facilitated abuse (TFA) is a growing social, legal and economic problem, with research suggesting perpetrators are commonly engaging in this form of abuse to harass, monitor, stalk, and emotionally and psychologically harm victims and survivors. The term TFA is wide ranging, but generally refers to the use of mobile and digital technologies in perpetrating interpersonal harms (Commonwealth of Australia, 2019). This may include various forms of online harassment, monitoring and control, emotional abuse and threats, and sexual and image-based abuse.

This report presents findings from Stage II of a national project examining the extent, nature and responses to TFA within the Australian community. The project focuses on the gendered nature of TFA, consistent with the current Australian policy focus of the *National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children 2010–2022* (Council of Australian Governments, 2011). By "gendered nature", we refer to the ways in which the impacts on victims and survivors, the relationships in which TFA occurs, and the extent of differing types of abuse can vary according to the gender of the perpetrator and/or victim and survivor. Stage I of the project reported on a survey of 338 sector workers, including domestic and family violence, sexual assault, health, legal services and specialist diversity services, who work directly with clients experiencing or perpetrating TFA. The Stage I report described the nature and impacts of TFA, the adequacy of current responses to TFA, and the need for further development in both responses to and prevention of TFA (Flynn, Powell & Hindes, 2021). Stage II of the project, the focus of this report, seeks to represent the lived experiences of victims and survivors of TFA, and identify the nature of TFA perpetration, by reporting on 30 semi-structured qualitative interviews with victims and survivors and perpetrators of TFA. Stage III reports on national prevalence rates for the victimisation and perpetration of key behavioural subtypes of TFA (Powell, Flynn & Hindes, 2022).

We use the term "victim and survivor" when we refer to those who have experienced TFA. We use this to recognise the harm experienced by those we spoke to, but also their resilience. We recognise that not all people who experience TFA will use this term for themselves, but it allows us to recognise the complexity and non-linear nature of many of our participants' experiences (Kelly et al., 1996). We use the term "perpetrator" when we refer to those who have engaged in TFA. We recognise that the victim and survivor and perpetrator dichotomy is not always clear, and some perpetrators we spoke with were also victims and survivors of TFA. We do not seek to contribute to the othering of those who engage in TFA; rather we seek to better understand the complex drivers of TFA perpetration.

## Aim and objectives

This report has three primary aims: 1) to understand the lived experiences and help-seeking patterns of victims and survivors of TFA; 2) to understand the nature and characteristics of TFA perpetration; and 3) to contribute to an evidence base that could inform practice innovation and further development of prevention and responses to TFA. In order to achieve these aims, the report responds to three key research questions:

1. What are the nature and contexts of victims' and survivors' experiences of TFA and what help-seeking remedies currently exist?
2. What are the nature and characteristics of TFA perpetration?
3. How can we more effectively disrupt, prevent and respond to TFA?

Collecting data from those who report experiencing TFA, and from those who report engaging in TFA, is notoriously difficult at many practical and ethical levels. TFA is a rapidly emerging form of abuse that is not well understood by researchers, policymakers and practitioners on the ground. This report aims to contribute to filling this gap in knowledge.

## Methods

Between April and June 2021, 30 semi-structured, qualitative interviews of approximately one hour were conducted with adult victims and survivors (*n*=20) and adult perpetrators (*n*=10) of TFA across Australia, using Zoom. Participants

were given the opportunity to participate via audio-only interviews (*n*=10), audiovisual interviews (*n*=13), or the chat function (written responses only; *n*=7). Ethical approval was sought and received from the Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee prior to commencing the fieldwork (project no: 26770).

The interviews followed an interview schedule to enable consistency among questions and topics, but with sufficient flexibility for participant voices and experiences to guide the discussion. The questions were designed to investigate:

- victims' and survivors' and perpetrators' lived experiences
- the types of harms experienced/engaged in
- the way such harms are conceptualised by victims and survivors, perpetrators and those around them
- any support or other help services sought (or known about)
- responses (if any) of criminal justice agencies
- challenges in reporting or accessing support or other services.

We also gathered basic demographic information about the participants, including their age, sexuality, cultural identities and preferred pronouns. The transcripts were de-identified and exported into the qualitative data analysis software NVivo. To ensure confidentiality, pseudonyms using a letter (P for perpetrator, VS for survivor) and a number (1 to 20) have been assigned. Participants are referred to by these throughout the report, for example, P10 and VS4.

## Key findings

The study found a range of different types of TFA being experienced and perpetrated across four broad areas: harassment, monitoring and control, emotional abuse and threats, and sexual and image-based abuse. Participants described various ways in which they experienced abuse, with perpetrators using new technologies to both enact harms and to inventively commit the abuse. Participants reported both overt and low-tech ways the TFA was carried out, such as abusive or threatening messages, through to more sophisticated or high-tech behaviours, such as surreptitiously installing malicious software on a victim's and survivor's mobile device to monitor their communications with others.

We found a range of motivations and drivers underpinning TFA perpetration, but gaining and/or maintaining control over the victim and survivor was the primary motivation that emerged from both victim and survivor and perpetrator interviews. This motivation was prevalent in intimate partner or former intimate partner perpetration contexts, but also in relation to family member and friend/acquaintance perpetration contexts.

We found the range of harms experienced by victims and survivors to be lasting, complex and wide ranging, including physical, emotional and mental health harms, as well as feelings of fear, paranoia and hypervigilance. There was also a common theme of surveillance – a sense of always being watched and being unable to escape the gaze and control of the perpetrator, reflective of the broader literature in this space.

There was a gendered component to the abuse evident across the interviews. For example, around two thirds of the most recent experience of TFA perpetration committed by a male was against a current or former intimate partner. Outside of intimate partner relationships, gendered violence was also present, with victims and survivors experiencing TFA primarily due to their departure from heterosexual, cisgendered norms. Overall, the study findings shine light on the lived experiences of TFA victims and survivors and perpetrators, and provide an important avenue to identify gaps in our knowledge of TFA, and to discuss tangible ways in which we can more effectively prevent, detect and respond to TFA.

## Implications for policy and practice

The key implications for policy and practice arising from the report include the following:

- Victims and survivors reported that their TFA experiences were not always treated seriously by first and frontline responders, particularly by police and the courts. This suggests improved, up-to-date training and development is needed for frontline responders (including police, courts, support workers) on how to recognise TFA, the seriousness of TFA, which laws apply to TFA, and how to respond to disclosures of TFA. This is particularly relevant in rural areas where victims and survivors reported a

lack of accessible support options.

- Victims and survivors reported numerous difficulties trying to separate or delink their service accounts from abusive ex-partners and found a range of roadblocks to being able to make basic changes, such as to phone numbers or contact addresses (email and physical). Mechanisms and policies need to be put in place by service providers (internet platforms, banks, telecommunications, gas/electricity etc.) to make the process of separation or delinking accounts easier (whether in the context of an abusive relationship or not) and improve the safety-by-design approach of all policies.

- Internet platforms and providers should consider how to make the reporting process of TFA experiences simpler for victims and survivors and for bystanders.

- AI technologies should be explored to consider whether there are ways to prevent or detect abusive patterns and behaviours *before* they occur.

- There is the scope and need to expand co-badged partnerships across technology and service providers, government agencies and frontline support service sectors in the design and delivery of education and training resources on TFA.

## Conclusion

This report provides a summary of the findings of 30 semi-structured, qualitative interviews with victims and survivors (*n*=20) and perpetrators (*n*=10) of TFA. It reports on their views and reflections regarding the forms of TFA experienced/engaged in; the motivations and aims of perpetrators in committing the abuse – self-reported by perpetrators and as perceived by victims and survivors; the harms experienced by victims and survivors; and what actions were taken in response to the abuse, including whether the abuse was reported to the police and platform providers, and what help-seeking patterns emerged.

The report finds that TFA is a serious, growing problem that has significant harms and implications. Much of the abuse was committed in the context of intimate partner and former intimate partner relationships, but there was also a degree of abuse based on discriminatory attitudes, such as homophobia and misogyny, which highlights the importance

of comprehensive and inclusive primary and secondary education and prevention to address TFA. Improved training of frontline responders to TFA, including police and support workers, as well as those most likely to have TFA experiences disclosed to them, such as basic service providers and internet platforms, was also recognised as key to help supporting victims, and to provide ways to better understand, prevent and identify TFA.

While there have been some recent changes to improve responses and legal frameworks, there was a common perception that police, internet platforms and other basic service providers (such as banks, telecommunication companies and gas/electricity providers) have inconsistent approaches and can be highly ineffective in meeting the needs of victims and survivors. This suggests there is an urgent need for improved resources, education, training and responses to TFA, not solely in relation to legal responses, but also relating to improved policy responses within organisations that may encounter disclosures and perpetration of TFA.

While this report has provided an insight into TFA victimisation and perpetration, further research is needed to develop a deeper understanding of TFA perpetration and to consider how technology can be harnessed in positive ways to address, prevent and detect TFA.

# Introduction

Technology-facilitated abuse (TFA) refers to the use of mobile and digital technologies in perpetrating interpersonal harms such as online sexual harassment, stalking and image-based sexual abuse (Commonwealth of Australia, 2019). Research has found that TFA is a growing social, legal and economic problem with clear gendered dimensions. In particular, it is a tool used by perpetrators in committing violence against women (Flynn, Powell & Hindes, 2021). In the case of family violence, perpetrators are using technologies to monitor, threaten and restrict partners or ex-partners – a digital extension of coercive control behaviours (Dragiewicz et al., 2019). Women are also more likely to experience image-based sexual abuse (IBSA) perpetration committed by partners or ex-partners, and more likely to experience repeated behaviours with greater impacts on their mental health and feelings of safety (Powell et al., 2019; Powell, Scott, Flynn & Henry, 2020). In addition to disproportionately impacting women, it is also increasingly apparent that TFA presents greater impacts and barriers to support for those in Australia who experience multiple intersecting identities, such as those with diverse gender and sexualities, those with disability, and culturally and/or linguistically diverse women (Flynn, Powell & Hindes, 2021; Henry, Vasil et al., 2021).

## Nature of TFA

The expansion and accessibility of technologies has allowed perpetrators of abuse greater access to victims' and survivors' lives, extending the reach and amplifying the impacts of abuse (Henry et al., 2020). The use of technologies is increasingly being recognised as playing a key role in the perpetration of sexual assault, sexual harassment, domestic violence, stalking, IBSA, coercive control and bullying (Dragiewicz et al., 2019; Fiolet et al., 2020; Henry, McGlynn et al., 2021; Juvonen & Gross, 2008; Messing et al., 2020; Powell, Scott, Flynn, & McCook, 2022). The tools perpetrators may use include mobile phones, social media and networking websites, GPS trackers and loggers, video cameras, microphones and spyware (Woodlock, McKenzie et al., 2020; Fiolet et al., 2020; Eterovic-Soric et al., 2017). While in some instances, the use of technology can make the abuse easier to identify and prosecute, technology can also be used to evade detection and can pose greater challenges for those trying to support

victims and survivors (Eterovic-Soric et al., 2017; Flynn, Powell & Hindes, 2021; Woodlock, Bentley et al., 2020).

TFA has been found to be a common experience among the general population, particularly in relation to online harassment and bullying (Juvonen & Gross, 2008; Powell & Henry, 2015), but research is also finding there are distinct gendered and intersectional dimensions. Women have been found to experience higher levels of specific forms of TFA, including online sexual harassment and stalking (Flynn, Powell & Hindes, 2021; Lenhart et al., 2016; Powell & Henry, 2015; Pew Research Centre, 2021), and have reported experiencing greater adverse impacts because of TFA (Flynn, Powell & Hindes, 2021; Flynn & Henry, 2021; Lindsay et al., 2016; Powell & Henry, 2015; Powell et al., 2018). TFA has consistently been shown to be a more common experience for LGBTQ+ and intersex people, who experience overall higher rates of online harassment and abuse as well as specific and targeted forms of abuse directed towards their gender or sexuality (Flynn, Powell, Scott & Cama, 2021; Henry, McGlynn et al., 2021; Powell et al., 2020; Powell & Henry, 2015; Pew Research Centre, 2021; Ruvalcaba & Eaton, 2020). While other intersecting identities have had less attention in the literature, research has also shown that TFA disproportionately impacts those who speak a language other than English at home and women from non-English speaking backgrounds (Douglas et al., 2019; eSafety, 2017; Henry, Vasil et al., 2021; Woodlock, Bentley et al., 2020). TFA has also been found to be a common experience for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women from regional and remote areas (eSafety, 2021b), and Indigenous peoples have been found to experience high levels of racist abuse online and widespread cyberbullying (Carlson & Frazer, 2018). Research also suggests is TFA is commonly experienced by those with chronic conditions and disability (eSafety, 2021a; Alhaboby et al., 2019; Henry, McGlynn et al., 2021; Heiman & Olenik-Shemesh, 2015).

The increased levels of TFA experienced by minority groups in Australia could be attributed to online spaces being an avenue for these groups to connect with communities, express their identities, seek help, and find a space of belonging that may not be available in the offline world (Bailey, 2012; Carlson, 2021; Lucero, 2017). Research also suggests that TFA is a more

common experience for younger people (Henry, McGlynn et al., 2021; Henry, Flynn & Powell, 2019a; Lenhart et al., 2016; Pew Research Centre, 2021), which may be unsurprising as the internet is increasingly being used as a place to connect and socialise, and younger people are spending greater amounts of time online (Lindsay & Krysik, 2012).

There is also a growing body of literature on TFA in intimate partner contexts, with technology allowing perpetrators of domestic violence increased ability to monitor, control and abuse their partners (Douglas et al., 2019; Dragiewicz, Woodlock et al., 2018; Fiolet et al., 2020; Henry et al., 2020). Scholars have argued that TFA in intimate relationships is an extension of other commonly recognised forms of domestic violence including physical, sexual and emotional abuse, and coercive control (Fiolet et al., 2020; Henry et al., 2020). The use of technology allows perpetrators to place victims and survivors under constant surveillance and control, making it more difficult for them to escape, and compounds the serious risks already faced by victims and survivors (Dragiewicz, Woodlock et al., 2018; Flynn, Powell & Hindes, 2021; Woodlock, 2017). Rapid advancements in technologies used by perpetrators also mean it is difficult for support services to keep up with the changing nature of TFA, making it challenging for them to identify and respond to abusive behaviours (Fiolet et al., 2020; Flynn, Clough & Cooke, 2021; Flynn & Henry, 2019; Powell & Henry, 2018; Woodlock, Bentley et al., 2020).

Research demonstrates that there has been an increase in experiences, frequency and severity of intimate partner violence during the COVID-19 pandemic in Australia (Boxall & Morgan, 2021; Carrington et al., 2021; Morgan & Boxall, 2020). Morgan and Boxall (2020) found that financial stress and social isolation were major contributors to the increase in intimate partner violence. Research has also found increased experiences of TFA during the pandemic (Carrington et al., 2021; Flynn, Powell & Hindes, 2021; Morgan & Boxall, 2020). In Stage I of this project, in which we surveyed support workers, we found victims and survivors who were stuck at home with their abuser reported an increase in their technology being monitored and controlled (Flynn, Powell & Hindes, 2021). Regarding victims and survivors who lived separately from their abuser, workers reported that they had physical access cut off due to COVID-19 movement restrictions, with abusers

finding new ways to reach victims and survivors through technology. Support workers also reported an increase in TFA perpetrated by strangers, suggesting this was due to people spending more time online (Flynn, Powell & Hindes, 2021).

## Victims and survivors of TFA: Experiences, impacts and harms

Studies have begun to document victims' and survivors' experiences of TFA, and the wide-ranging impacts and harms experienced as a result. A common theme documented among studies is what is commonly referred to as "omnipresence" – that the use of technology allows perpetrators the capacity to constantly monitor victims and survivors, making it feel as though they are always being watched and cannot escape the abuse. This omnipresence can make victims and survivors feel constantly unsafe and hypervigilant (Harris, 2018; McGlynn et al., 2021; Rackley et al., 2021; Woodlock, 2017). Living under these stressful conditions can have severe mental health impacts including anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress and suicidality (Bates, 2017; Pashang et al., 2018; Powell et al., 2018; Reed et al., 2019). Other secondary emotional responses have also been documented following TFA, including sadness, fear, anger, humiliation and annoyance (Lindsay et al., 2016, eSafety, 2017; Powell & Henry, 2015; Worsley et al., 2017).

Most of the research analysing the impacts of TFA has focused on medicalised trauma-based frameworks that primarily document mental health and emotional implications. However, as McGlynn et al. (2021) have argued, the harms are far wider reaching. In their study interviewing 75 victims and survivors of IBSA in Australia, the United Kingdom and New Zealand, they reported the harms to include a rupture of personal, digital and professional social worlds; constant intrusions on everyday life; isolation and withdrawal from social and family relationships; and constrained liberty with victims and survivors limiting their movements due to feeling unsafe. Isolation is increasingly being recognised as a significant impact of various forms of TFA, with victims and survivors having to change their phone numbers, close social media accounts and relocate. This causes them to become disconnected from their support networks and makes it more difficult to seek help (Douglas et al., 2019; Woodlock, 2017).

TFA can have particularly devastating impacts in the context of domestic and family violence. Woodlock, Burgess et al.'s (2020) study of domestic violence practitioners in Australia reported that victims and survivors were experiencing high levels of fear and terror because of TFA, and they would often return to their abuser feeling as though they could not escape their control. Douglas et al.'s (2019) study, which analysed 65 interviews with victims and survivors of domestic and family violence, found that victims and survivors often could not reach out for help from police or support networks when they were in danger due to the perpetrator's tight control over their use of technology. Alarmingly, research has begun to demonstrate that the increased reliance on technology during the COVID-19 pandemic for work, school and staying in contact with family and friends has opened further opportunities for perpetrators to monitor and control their partners (Woodlock, McKenzie et al., 2020). Practitioners working in the domestic and family violence sector in Australia also note that victims' and survivors' ability to seek help during the pandemic was further limited due to the move from face-to-face to online service provision, with victims and survivors having limited access to technology as well as a fear of being overheard or monitored (Carrington et al., 2021; Flynn, Powell & Hindes, 2021; Pfitzner et al., 2020).

Studies have found that migrant and refugee women can be at particular risk of TFA due to their migration and visa status, often being separated from support networks overseas and having limited access to finances and resources (Henry, Vasil et al., 2021). Perpetrators may also have dual control of their finances and technology use, exacerbating their risk of isolation and harm (Douglas et al., 2019, Louie, 2021). The eSafety Commissioner (2021b) found Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in remote areas face increased risks of TFA for a range of reasons including low digital literacy rates, close social networks that made it easier for the perpetrator to target individual women, and lack of culturally appropriate and accessible services. Carlson and Frazer (2018) also suggest that broader political forces such as racism and disadvantage brought through colonisation need to be examined when considering the higher rates of cyberbullying experienced by Indigenous peoples.

Another recent report from eSafety (2021a) found that women with cognitive and intellectual disability are particularly susceptible to TFA and almost anyone can be a perpetrator including partners, family members, carers and service providers (eSafety 2021a; see also Henry et al., 2019b; Henry et al., 2020). eSafety (2021a) also found perpetrators can target women with disability in unique ways, such as putting a tracking device on their wheelchairs, tampering with hearing aids and threatening to disclose health information.

While these studies give insights into victims' and survivors' experiences of TFA, much of the research is quantitative or draws on the perspectives of practitioners. There are limited qualitative studies from the perspectives of victims and survivors of TFA that allow a more in-depth understanding of their experiences. Of those studies that exist, most are focused on one specific form of TFA, such as digital coercive control or IBSA, as opposed to examining the broader spectrum of TFA experiences. A key knowledge gap is qualitative research that analyses the unique impacts and harms experienced by people from cultural and ethnic minorities, with diverse genders and sexualities, and people living with disability.

## Legal responses

In Australia, there are some legal responses available for those experiencing TFA. Some forms of harassment and abuse using technology may constitute a criminal offence – as in the *Criminal Code Act 1995* (Cth) s 474.17: "using a carriage service to menace, harass or cause offence" – which could be used to prosecute cases of IBSA, harassment and technology-facilitated domestic and family violence. In some cases, behaviour may also meet the legal threshold for stalking where there are proven multiple instances of the same course of conduct by the same perpetrator (see for e.g. *Criminal Code 1899* (Qld) s 359A-E). Specific criminal and civil laws and legislation have also been introduced to respond to IBSA in all states and territories, except Tasmania, as well as at the federal level (Flynn & Henry, 2019, 2021). In the case of domestic and family violence situations, TFA may also constitute a breach of an intervention order (Woodlock, Bentley et al., 2020). While these legal avenues do provide some recourse, studies indicate that legal responses are still largely inadequate in dealing with TFA (Flynn, Clough & Cooke, 2021; Flynn & Henry, 2021; Henry et al., 2019a; McGlynn et al., 2019).

One of the key problems identified in research on TFA is the persistent issue of police not taking the abuse seriously. Studies report a lack of understanding among police in how technology is used in domestic and family violence, as well as the trivialising of virtual forms of harm and victim-blaming attitudes (Flynn, Powell, Scott & Cama, 2021; Henry, Flynn & Powell, 2018; Powell & Henry, 2018; Woodlock, Bentley et al., 2020, 2020b). As Powell and Henry (2018) argue, the fixation on physical forms of harms may minimise digital forms of abuse which are structural, social, psychological or emotional. This minimisation means that police may fail to collect evidence of TFA, particularly as one incident may not seem serious enough – but taken collectively, it can add to the overall case (Dragiewicz, Woodlock et al., 2018).

TFA also poses unique challenges for police investigations. Police have reported a lack of cooperation from internet and telecommunication service providers in providing evidence and cross-jurisdictional barriers to detecting, apprehending and prosecuting offenders (Powell & Henry, 2018). Ascertaining the identity of perpetrators online can also be particularly challenging, as the way they use technology often allows them to remain anonymous (Dragiewicz, Woodlock et al., 2018; Henry & Flynn, 2019). Research also indicates that even when police have conducted their investigation, having the offences prosecuted in court proves to be difficult with evidentiary limitations and challenges in proving intent to cause harm (Henry, Flynn & Powell, 2018; Henry, McGlynn et al., 2021; Woodlock, McKenzie et al., 2020). There is also a lack of resources for investigating TFA, with police in Powell and Henry's (2018) study identifying a need for additional resources to forensically analyse electronic hardware. Rapid technological change has made it difficult for police and the court system to keep up with the changing landscape of technology being used to abuse. Dragiewicz et al. (2018a) note that forms of TFA are effectively decriminalised because the law has not caught up to the technology that perpetrators are using. Other studies have identified that there are often simply no adequate legal avenues available (Flynn & Henry, 2019, 2021; Henry et al., 2018).

While research suggests that there are significant challenges for victims and survivors seeking safety and justice through the police and court systems, stronger powers have been given to the eSafety Commissioner to protect Australians from online harm. Under the *Online Safety Act 2021* (Cth), the Commissioner has authority to compel online service providers to remove seriously harmful content within 24 hours (s 65). The Commissioner has also updated its Image-Based Abuse Scheme in which service providers can now be publicly exposed for failing to comply with orders to remove IBSA material, and heavy penalties can be imposed on anyone who posts or threatens to post intimate images without the consent of the person shown. The Commissioner also has stronger information-gathering powers under the Act to help reveal the identities of those engaging in online abuse (s 194). The Act also sets out "basic online safety expectations" for technology companies who operate online services (s 45). Additionally, the Act requires the technology industry to develop new codes to regulate illegal and restricted content, and the Commissioner is working with the industry to develop these (s 137(1)). This Act sets out a clear set of expectations for online service providers and enables the Commissioner to hold them legally accountable for the safety of their users.

## Platform responses

Social media platforms have some mechanisms in place to prevent and respond to TFA. Most social media websites have community standards that users must adhere to and reporting mechanisms for abusive and harassing behaviours (Mugway & Jones, 2020). Online platforms including Microsoft, Google, Facebook, Twitter, Reddit, Tumblr, Instagram, Snapchat and Pornhub have introduced reporting mechanisms for IBSA to have images removed or excluded from search platforms (Henry, McGlynn et al., 2021). In 2019, Facebook launched a new AI tool which can proactively detect and flag intimate images and videos posted without someone's consent (Flynn, Clough & Cooke, 2021). Facebook is also trialling a tool where people who suspect an intimate image of them may be uploaded can proactively send that image to Facebook, who will then create a "digital fingerprint" of the image, preventing that image being uploaded in the future (Facebook, 2019). Online dating sites such as Tinder have also started introducing safety features to curb abuse such as photo verification, automatically detecting messages that may be abusive, and a safety centre that provides tools and resources (Gillett, 2020). Some companies have dedicated teams to assist clients experiencing TFA, such as the Telstra

SAFE team and the Commonwealth Bank's Community Wellbeing team (Woodlock, McKenzie et al., 2020).

While larger companies are beginning to put mechanisms in place, these responses have been criticised as being slow in responding to TFA, and there is a lack of transparency from platforms on how they are applying these mechanisms (Dragiewicz, Burgess et al., 2018). There is also a lack of research investigating the use and effectiveness of these responses, so it is unclear how well they are working to combat TFA. Additionally, abusers still have access to a huge variety of online applications such as stalking apps and spyware which go largely unregulated. While Google has taken some actions by removing apps that violate their Play Store policies, many apps are "dual-use" – meaning they have legitimate uses but are being repurposed by abusers (Chatterjee et al., 2018). Most of these measures are also reactionary and put the onus on victims and survivors to report abusers, rather than proactively working to stop the violence before it starts.

## Non-legal responses

Domestic and family violence practitioners working in Australia have a greater awareness of TFA and are increasingly assisting clients who are experiencing this type of abuse (Woodlock, Bentley et al., 2020). However, studies consistently demonstrate that support service workers feel ill-equipped in terms of resources and training to help victims and survivors (Flynn, Powell & Hindes, 2021). A major challenge identified across the research is keeping up with the ever-changing landscape of technologies that are being used to abuse and practitioners feeling as though they are falling behind (Flynn, Powell & Hindes, 2021; Powell & Henry, 2018; Woodlock, Bentley et al., 2020; Woodlock, McKenzie et al., 2020). Practitioners in Woodlock, McKenzie et al.'s (2020) study reported that technology was increasing the complexity of their work, making it difficult to assist victims and survivors in staying safe, as perpetrators had greater reach and control. They also reported that these challenges are exacerbated by police, courts and legal services not taking TFA seriously.

Support workers in Stage I of this project identified other key areas where additional training is needed to better help their clients experiencing TFA. This included how to respond to perpetrators, how to meet the needs of diverse clients, and the development of strategies for preventing TFA (Flynn, Powell & Hindes, 2021). Organisations such as WESNET and eSafety are seeking to bridge this gap through training and resources for frontline workers in identifying TFA and supporting victims and survivors to regain control over their use of technology.

eSafety also has a suite of non-legal initiatives to address and prevent TFA. This includes the eSafety Women program, a national initiative aiming to empower women to use technology safely and confidently. It offers direct and indirect support to women most at risk of online abuse by providing evidence-based resources and professional development to upskill frontline workers who support people experiencing tech abuse. eSafety also delivers primary prevention programs that support parents and educators to teach children about cyberbullying, respectful online relationships, online consent, building good online habits and having open communication about online safety. eSafety also encourages technology companies to implement a safety-by-design approach, which allows them to anticipate, detect and eliminate online risks, improving the experiences of platform users and making digital spaces safer and more inclusive for those at risk of online harm.

## Policy context

Australian studies have overwhelmingly recognised the need for additional training and education for police, legal and judicial professionals in recognising the seriousness and harm of TFA (Flynn, Powell & Hindes, 2021; Powell & Henry 2018; Woodlock, Bentley et al., 2020; 2020b). Woodlock, Bentley et al. (2020) urge that training needs to be developed and conducted with domestic and family violence specialists to position TFA within the broader context of coercive control. However, as Henry et al. (2021) argue, civil and criminal responses are not always the most appropriate, and we need to also increase the reach of and support for non-legal services.

As outlined above, domestic and family violence practitioners and support service workers have identified the need for additional training and resources to support victims and survivors experiencing TFA. eSafety (2021a) also identified

the need for a more integrated approach between service providers in different sectors to improve service provision for those with disability. Telecommunications companies also need to have dedicated teams who can assist clients experiencing TFA (Woodlock, McKenzie et al., 2020). Internet companies and social media platforms need to continue to develop robust policies and reporting mechanisms for TFA (Henry, McGlynn et al., 2021), however more clarity and transparency is needed from platforms in the application and success of these mechanisms (Dragiewicz, Burgess et al., 2018).

Studies have also identified the need for more educational resources to improve awareness of TFA among the general public (Henry, McGlynn et al., 2021). In particular, there is a need for targeted campaigns for particular groups who are more at risk of TFA. This includes programs targeting new arrivals to Australia (Douglas et al., 2019); culturally and contextually appropriate, community-driven campaigns to reach Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women (Carlson, 2018; eSafety, 2021b); and accessible information for people with disability (eSafety, 2021a). Henry et al. (2021) also suggest policy initiatives and campaigns should target bystander action to provide people with the tools to safely take action and call out TFA behaviours.

There is also the need for greater prevention work. This includes age-appropriate digital literacy and online safety initiatives in school curricula (eSafety, 2021a), programs to improve digital literacy for women and girls, and prevention training for boys and men on the ethical use of technology (Woodlock, Bentley et al., 2020). Finally, primary prevention campaigns need to be situated in the larger framework of gendered violence to challenge rigid gender roles and gender inequality, which create the structural conditions underlying TFA (eSafety, 2021a; Henry, McGlynn et al., 2021; Woodlock, Bentley et al., 2020).

# Aims of the study

Although the research both nationally and internationally is rapidly developing (DeKeseredy & Schwartz, 2016; Fraser et al., 2010; Reyns et al., 2012; Scott & Gavin, 2018), there is little qualitative research into women's experiences of multiple forms of TFA in different relational contexts and across the diverse Australian community. There is also very little qualitative research with perpetrators of TFA. This report presents findings that directly respond to this gap, drawing on interviews conducted with both victims and survivors (*n*=20) and perpetrators of TFA (*n*=10).

The report is drawn from a larger national study which examines the extent of, nature of and responses to TFA within the Australian community. The broader project comprised three discrete research stages conducted between 2020 and 2022. Stage I reported on a survey of 338 sector workers, shining light on the nature and impacts of TFA, the adequacy of current responses to TFA, and the need for further development in both responses to and prevention of TFA (Flynn, Powell & Hindes, 2021). Stage II, the focus of this report, sought to represent the lived experiences of victims and survivors of TFA, and identify the nature of TFA perpetration, through semi-structured, qualitative interviews with victims and survivors and perpetrators. Stage III sought to establish reliable national prevalence rates for the victimisation and perpetration of key behavioural subtypes of TFA, namely, technology-facilitated emotional and psychological abuse and threats; stalking, monitoring and controlling behaviours; sexual abuse and image-based abuse; and harassment (Powell, Flynn & Hindes, 2022).

This report has three primary aims:
1. To understand the lived experiences and help-seeking patterns of victims and survivors of TFA.
2. To understand the nature and characteristics of TFA perpetration.
3. To contribute to an evidence base that could inform practice innovation and further development of prevention and responses to TFA.

In order to achieve these, it responds to three key research questions:
1. What are the nature and contexts of victims' and survivors' experiences of TFA and what help-seeking remedies currently exist?
2. What are the nature and characteristics of TFA perpetration?
3. How can we more effectively disrupt, prevent and respond to TFA?

# Methods

Between April and June 2021, 30 semi-structured, qualitative interviews were conducted with adult victims and survivors (*n*=20) and perpetrators of TFA (*n*=10) across Australia, using Zoom. A modest sample size was identified, based on comparative research with a similar target group of victims and survivors (Clark & Quadara, 2010). Ethical approval was sought and received from the Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee prior to commencing the fieldwork (Project no.: 26770).

## Recruitment

Participants were recruited via opt-in, opportunity sampling using paid Facebook advertising, the researchers' professional networks, and advertisements through relevant stakeholder organisations, including victim and survivor support groups and the project advisory group (see Appendix A). Due to some difficulties in identifying perpetrators, a specialist recruitment service was also used to recruit participants. This involved the service sending a series of invitations to participate in the project, to Australians who have agreed to be contacted for research purposes. The invitations included details of the project, the type of interview and content that would be discussed and a series of eligibility requirements. Requirements included that the participant must be over the age of 18 and have engaged in TFA behaviours. All participants were provided with an honorarium to recognise their time and commitment to the project.

## Sample

Of the 20 victims and survivors, 11 preferred she/her (female pronouns), four preferred he/him (male pronouns), and five preferred either they/them pronouns or preferred not to specify. We refer to this group as "other" to signify them as discreet from those who identified as male or female, but we do not make any assumptions about their sex or gender, nor do we view them as a homogeneous group. The ages of victim and survivor participants ranged from 18 to 55 years with an average age of 38.2 years. Of the 10 perpetrators, six identified as she/her (female pronouns) and four identified as he/him (male pronouns). Their ages ranged from 19 to 38 years, with an average age of 27.3 years.

Across the 30 interviews, participants were asked to describe their experiences of TFA either as victim and survivor or perpetrator. In some interviews, multiple experiences of TFA were described; for victims and survivors, sometimes this abuse was by multiple perpetrators, and sometimes by the same perpetrator. Based on the participants' most recent experience of TFA or engaging in TFA, we identified the following demographic information.

Again, using the data provided from both the victim and survivor interviews and the perpetrator interviews relating to their most recent experience of TFA, the gendered breakdown of the perpetration is shown in Figures 2 through 4.

## Interview design

The interviews were semi-structured and followed an interview schedule to enable consistency among questions and topics, but with sufficient flexibility for participant voices and experiences to guide the discussion. The questions were designed to investigate victim and survivor and perpetrator lived experiences including:

- the types of harms experienced/engaged in (e.g. "Can you tell me about your experience of engaging in or being accused of unwanted or harassing behaviours involving digital or mobile technologies?")
- the way such harms are conceptualised by victims and survivors, perpetrators and those around them (e.g. "What do you think prompted or motivated you to engage in this behaviour?")
- any support or other help services sought (or known about; e.g. "Did you know that the behaviour could have legal ramifications or was against the law?")
- responses (if any) of criminal justice agencies (e.g. "Did any authorities become involved? If so, what happened then?")
- challenges in reporting or accessing support or other services (e.g. "Did you know that support or help could be available for this behaviour?").

We also gathered basic demographic information about the participants, including their age, sexuality, cultural identities and preferred pronouns.

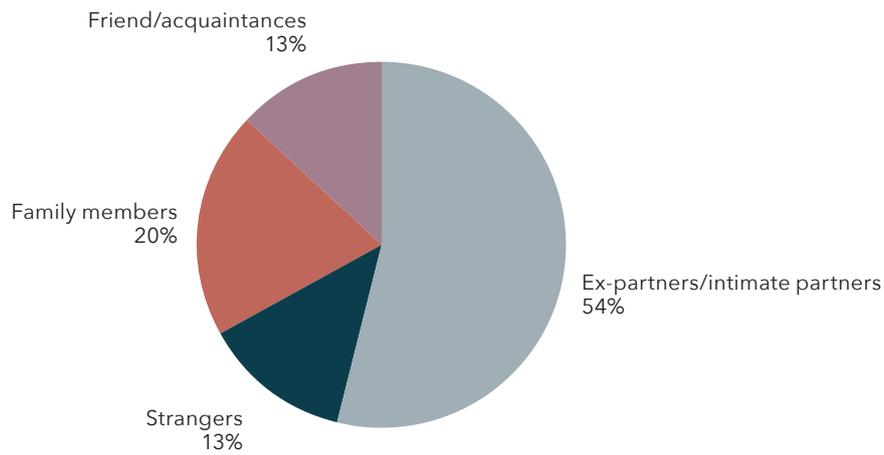**Figure 1:** Who was the perpetration committed against?



**Figure 2:** Gendered relationships of victims and survivors with male perpetrator
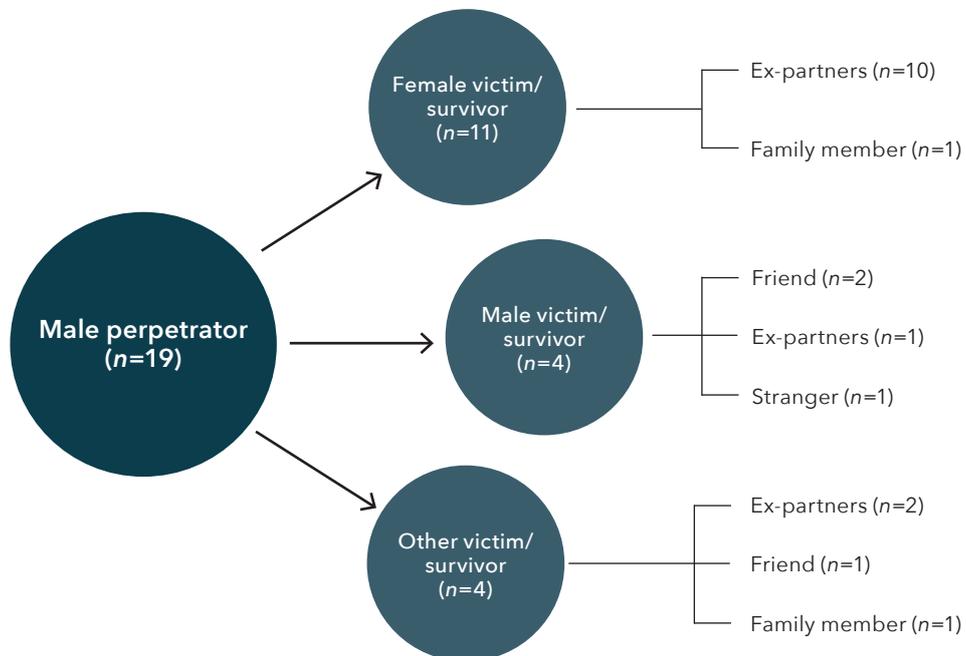


**Figure 3:** Gendered relationships of victims and survivors with female perpetrator
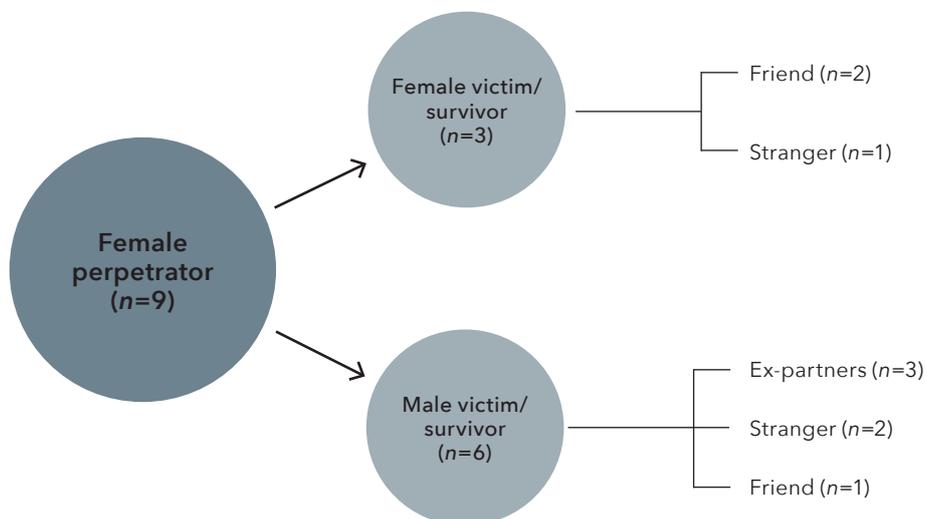
**Figure 4:** Gendered relationships of victims and survivors with other perpetrator
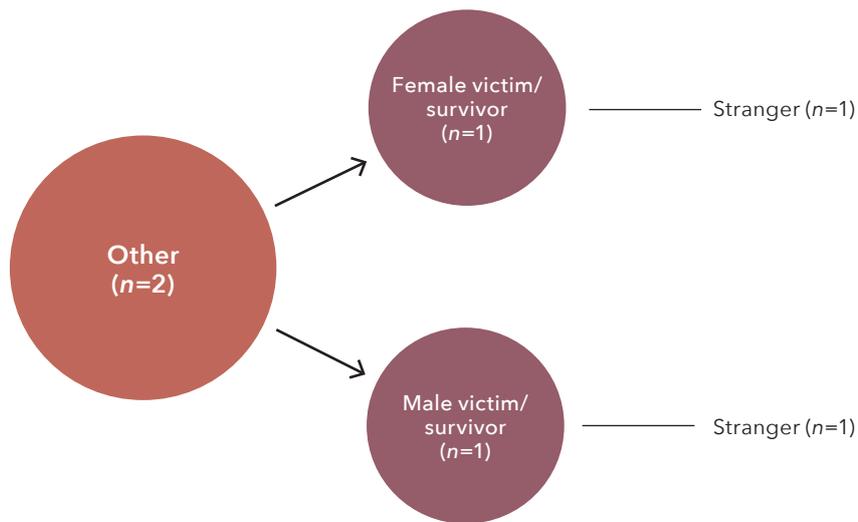


The interviews lasted around one hour. Participants were given the opportunity to participate via audio only, audio and video, or the chat function (written only) on the Zoom platform. Allowing the participants to decide how they wished to participate provided them with an additional level of comfort and improved rapport with the interviewee, allowing for greater richness in the detail of the information disclosed, and offering capacity for elaboration and clarification of responses. The audio-only (*n*=10) and audio and video interviews (*n*=13) were recorded with participants' permission and transcribed by an external transcription company. Only the audio component of the interview was downloaded; all videos were destroyed upon completion of the interview. The transcript of the chat-only interviews (*n*=7) was downloaded at the conclusion of each interview.

Given the interviews were taking place on Zoom, there were some additional ethical considerations. For those who had experienced TFA, there was a potential risk that the participant was not safe at home to talk or that their technology use was being monitored. To mitigate this, before the interview commenced, we checked in with the participant on the Zoom chat asking them if they felt safe to talk before any cameras or microphones were switched on or recording began. We also let participants know that they were free to pause or stop the interview at any time and exit the Zoom meeting if they needed to. We let participants know that if they did leave the Zoom interview suddenly, that we would send them a follow-up message to check in with them on their preferred method of contact.

## Data analysis

The transcripts were de-identified and exported into the qualitative data analysis software NVivo. A coding tool developed by the team was then used to analyse the transcripts, based on key emerging themes and existing literature. At the commencement of the coding stage, two of the researchers coded several of the same transcripts to test reliability of the tool. The lead author undertook the majority of the coding. To ensure confidentiality, pseudonyms using a letter (P for perpetrator, VS for victim and survivor) and a number (1 to 20) have been assigned. Participants are referred to by these throughout the report – for example, P10 and VS4. Participants were assigned a pseudonym that only included a generic name or number would be attributed, not their gender identity. As a result, we do not include specific gender identity for each quotation, however we do refer to the participant by their preferred pronoun if this is contained in the quote or provides specific context to their comments.

# Findings

This section of the report details key findings from the interviews, including:

- the forms of TFA behaviours identified by victims and survivors and perpetrators
- perpetrator motivations and aims in committing the abuse (perceived by victims and survivors and self-reported by perpetrators)
- the harms experienced by victims and survivors
- what actions were taken in response to the abuse, including reporting the abuse to police and platform providers and/ or seeking support.

Where relevant, we cross-reference the nationally representative victimisation and perpetration survey findings from Stage III of the project (Powell, Flynn & Hindes, 2022) to provide further context for the experiences described.

## Forms of TFA

Across the 30 interviews, there were four types of TFA notable in both victims' and survivors' and perpetrators' experiences: harassing behaviours, monitoring and controlling behaviours, emotional abuse and threats, and sexual and/or image-based abuse. We examine each individually in the following sections and briefly describe the lifetime prevalence rates from Stage III of the project, which involved a nationally representative survey of 4,562 people (women: n=2,499; men: n=2,063) to provide some additional context to the findings.

### Harassment

In the interviews, one of the most common forms of harassment that both victims and survivors and perpetrators described was experiencing or engaging in repetitive, unwanted contact. In describing the perpetration of TFA against an ex-partner, P10 stated:

> I wanted an answer from her, and so I just called her about 150 times in, I don't know, a two-hour period. And she didn't pick up, but I just kept doing that. And that was, I don't know, it was probably to stress her out or something. I don't know. But yeah, I wanted her to fix the problem, and I was angry about it as well, I think.

This abuse was often undertaken through multiple channels and platforms – particularly when the perpetrator had been blocked on one platform, and they would find other ways to contact the victim and survivor. P2 described this in the context of an ex-partner:

> If they blocked me on Facebook messages, then I would even go on Grindr and see whether they're there and then text them on Grindr. Or even look them up on LinkedIn and then text them on LinkedIn and things like that.

VS20's experience demonstrates how pervasive this repetitive unwanted contact could be, reporting that her ex-partner would text and call her up to 50 times per day. When she would block his number, he would reach her using new telephone numbers or by contacting her on different platforms, such as through her work's Facebook account. He also harassed her through other means, including making shrines dedicated to her on social media and by contacting her friends over social media to gain her attention. He also set up a business using her ABN so she would be forced to contact him to close the fake business. She explained:

> Every form of media I blocked him on, he'd find another way to contact me or make a new identity to contact me. Some of it was to tell me I'm a horrible person, I destroyed his life. The next one will be, "You're my soulmate, I love you, the love of my life, can we please just talk, can we please just …?" (VS20).

Victims and survivors also reported being harassed in ways that did not always involve direct contact from the perpetrator. For example, VS13 reported that their ex-partner would sign their email address up to mailing lists, including porn and dating websites, so they would be inundated with unwanted emails:

> It was around about the time that he was doing all the stuff with the kids, and I'm now getting all these dating websites, porn stuff, you name it … daily. I'm getting them daily and I'm being avalanched by them.

Another victim and survivor reported that a family member hacked into one of their social media accounts in order to harass them and get their attention:

> He got into my Reddit account, and this account had been going for a couple of years. He deleted every single

one of my posts. He changed my bio to something really creepy … (VS4)

Reflecting on his perpetration of TFA, P10 described some of his actions as not being traditional harassment, for example, by directly calling or messaging the victim and survivor (an ex-partner); instead, he used technology to continually engage with the victim's and survivor's online content to purposely let them know he was there:

> There'd be examples where myself, and maybe others, would just continually comment on every piece of activity that someone else does online, on Facebook. That's kind of one of the main things that I can think about as what I engaged in, it's just repetitive … letting someone know that you're there.

Some perpetrators described harassing others by posting defamatory content about a person or spreading false information about them online. While some did this using their own profile – "I did put a post up calling him a cheating dog … [and] I did have a bit of a rampage on my social media" (P6, describing TFA against an ex-partner) – others described creating fake profiles to obscure their identity, providing them with anonymity to undertake the harassment. As P4 reflected in relation to their self-reported TFA against an acquaintance/friend:

> I just was messaging them and doing stuff and taking screenshots of their photos and putting it all over groups and sharing their photos, making a fake account, doing that … I posted them in groups that they weren't in and groups that they were in, and I went to their friends' [list] as well and bagged them out … I [also] made a fake TikTok account and edited their videos to make it look worse than what it was.

One participant also said that within his peer group they created "two fake profiles, both females" to bully and harass their "friend" (P10).

Victims and survivors also reported perpetrators using fake profiles to harass, both by pretending to be another person and making contact with them, but also by pretending to be the victim and survivor. VS15 described how her ex-partner would create fake profiles using her photos and identity online. As another way to harass her, he would show up in person and hold his phone up as if he was recording her, and she would not know whether that footage was going to end up online or be used for these fake profiles. She explained:

> I'm very sensitive to him taking photos or videos of me, because of the fake profiles he created … It wasn't just sexually explicit photos that he used … On this occasion, again to intimidate and to harass me, and to keep me under surveillance – he had his phone up like he was recording me. And what I believe he's done, and I don't know … [but I think] he's kept me recorded, then I believe he's turned off the recording, so he's not recording me. But he kept holding his phone up like this, as if he was still recording. (VS15)

This experience created a sense of omnipresent threat for VS15, which reflects previous studies where victims and survivors report feeling constantly unsafe and aware of their surroundings after experiencing TFA – whether that be from intimate partners, people from other social relationships, or strangers (McGlynn et al., 2021).

Many of the victims and survivors also commented on how impossible it was to stop the unwanted contact due to the persistence of perpetrators finding new ways to harass them and the ways in which technology allowed them to do this, largely undetected. As VS12 described:

> After our relationship ended, he moved to Brisbane, and he changed his pre-paid SIM card 23 times to harass me, and the police could not track him down … So, that's how easy it is to harass someone for the rest of their life.

The survey also found a high rate of harassing behaviours, with 26.7 per cent (n=1,216) of respondents reporting experiencing this form of TFA, and 8.1 per cent (n=368) reporting perpetrating this form of TFA (see Powell, Flynn & Hindes, 2022).

## Emotional abuse/threats

In the national survey, a high rate of victimisation was recorded for respondents experiencing emotional abuse and threats (30.6%, n=1,394), while 6.1 per cent (n=276) reported

perpetration of this form of TFA (see Powell, Flynn & Hindes, 2022). In the interviews, victims and survivors described how perpetrators would use technology to emotionally abuse and threaten them. In most cases, this was in the context of a current or previous intimate relationship and was achieved through verbally abusive messages or sending threats to hurt themselves or someone they cared about. However, other participants described less direct forms of emotional abuse and threats. In one example, VS7 described how her ex-partner used technology to build a fabricated case for custody of their children. This took the form of constant emails and text messages making false accusations about her being a bad/abusive parent, as well as unsolicited messages describing fake activities that made him look like a good father. She explained:

> When I go through those emails, he looks like a concerned parent. But I know he's fabricating stuff to use against me through the system. So, systems abuse facilitated by emails which are ordered by the Family Court … He knew that if he sent me overtly aggressive and threatening messages that the court would pick that up. So, he would send me tacitly implied threats and bully me through being a good father. "Look at me, I'm just being a good father. I'm just making sure that you've taken him to the doctor." And that is saying, "I'm building up a case against you so that I can take it to the Family Court to have the children removed."

She also described how he would emotionally abuse and manipulate both her and the children through phone calls and text messages:

> They didn't want to talk to him, and he'd make them talk to him. And then he would manipulate them on the phone … "Kids, I really want to see you, but Mummy won't let me see you, and it's causing me so much stress that I've had a heart attack and I nearly died." (VS7)

Another participant described how her ex-partner would persistently emotionally abuse and threaten her by stealing her dogs while she was at work and sending her photos of them alongside threatening messages:

> What he would do every day was go to my house and take either one or both of my dogs and take them somewhere and take a photo of them and … start texting me about

that he might kill them, or he might harm them, or he might let them go where they were. (VS12)

He also sent her photos of her own underwear that he had stolen from her house. When she didn't reply to the photos, he escalated the behaviour: "So then he started sending me videos of him masturbating on the bed with all my underwear." (VS12) VS12 described how this made her feel as though she was constantly in danger and allowed her ex-partner to maintain a sense of threat and control over her. Two perpetrators also reflected on how they would escalate their abusive behaviour if the victim and survivor did not respond to their repetitive, unwanted contact. Describing TFA against an ex-partner, P2 stated,

> If they chose to ignore me or if they didn't respond, then I'd get upset and maybe emotionally agitated and then I would be sending words that are not that nice.

P6 similarly reflected on perpetrating this type of TFA against an ex-partner:

> The first time I sent a message, he just didn't reply, he just left me on read. So that fuelled my anger, and probably I spun out of control in the grief of being hurt and having my heart broken, that – not any physical threats were ever made, probably just not being as ladylike as I should have been with my swearing and stuff like that.

While many of the examples of emotional abuse and threats shared with us were in the context of intimate relationships, some participants also experienced this with family members. For example, VS18 described a sibling posting threats directed towards family members on social media:

> He has at times threatened my mum and myself, and our other brother, on social media – on Facebook, in open posts on the newsfeed. It got particularly bad last year … He's been living with my parents for quite some time, and he was just making all sorts of horrible comments and threats about mum.

Another participant described experiencing emotional abuse and threats from strangers online, including threats to disclose their sexuality to their family, and another instance where they received emotionally abusive comments after disclosing

their experiences of sexual harassment. VS10 explained:

> I had to change my name online because there was a threat to dox and out me to my family … I think the worst experience was when I opened up about my history of being sexually harassed and grown adults were in my Twitter comments mocking me.

## Monitoring and control

In the national survey, monitoring and controlling behaviours were the most common TFA experienced (33.7%, n=1,537) and perpetrated (19.4%, n=886; see Powell, Flynn & Hindes, 2022). In the interviews, perpetrator participants also reported engaging in monitoring and controlling behaviours, primarily in the context of intimate relationships. This included monitoring their current or ex-partner's online interactions, as well as their in-person movements by monitoring their technology use. One participant (P2) described creating "a fake profile" on dating and hook-up platforms such as Grindr to send messages and fake photos to "test" whether his partner would cheat on him "physically or emotionally". This participant would then arrange a date with their partner under the guise of the fake profile, and show up to catch them and let the partner know they had been monitoring their online behaviour:

> So, then I actually show up at the venue and then I say, "What are you doing here? You told me that you're busy meeting with this friend, but what are you doing here?" So, then I confronted him.

Another participant said they monitored their ex-partner's behaviour online for up to two years after their breakup. This included using social media to monitor their behaviour (for example, through status updates and interactions with others), but also having access to their online calendar to see what they had scheduled each day:

> I realised when I got a replacement mobile phone was that we'd actually linked our Google calendars when we were in a relationship together, and whilst we'd unlinked that at the breakup, whenever I get a new phone for some reason his stuff is always … I would suddenly get his calendar all over again … I never would physically stalk him, but it was just this sense of control of being able to

know where they were, what they were doing, who they were with, you know what I mean? (P9)

In describing their experiences of monitoring and control, victims and survivors commonly reflected on actions such as having their social media accounts, emails, Google location services and internet routers hacked, as well as being monitored through CCTV, tracking devices, cameras and audio bugs. Participants also reported having applications put on their phone which allowed the perpetrator to monitor their phone usage, including their location. In some cases, the abuse occurred while the couple was still together, as a way for the perpetrator to track and maintain control over the victim and survivor during the relationship. As VS12 observed:

> After a while of him living with me, he started bringing up strange things to me that I thought was a really odd coincidence that he could know that. It took me quite a long time to realise that he was somehow accessing my emails and Facebook, Facebook Messenger in particular, and text messages, so I changed passwords and all that sort of thing. But he still had this information, and it wasn't until … I'd left him, that he ended up telling me in a heated argument that he had actually downloaded all this stuff on his own device with my passwords and everything. So, unless he logged out of them, he could still access them.

For another participant, monitoring from her violent partner began as the relationship was breaking down, making it even more difficult for her to leave the relationship:

> He took over a Facebook account that I was using at the time. So, I thought, at the time, because things were still quite stressful and we were living in the violence with him at that point in time, I thought it was just me forgetting the password and username combination. But it actually turns out that he had actually changed both of those. And that was probably around the time that I decided that I wanted a divorce. So, he – this is looking back in retrospect – I didn't have a full awareness of what he was up to at the time. He had things in place to make sure that he could then track us for when – because obviously the relationship was failing. So, he wanted to make sure he could keep track of us, for when we did leave. (VS1)

In other cases, participants described ex-partners gaining access to their technology and social media accounts as a way to control and monitor them after they broke up:

> He has tried to claw his way back to having any power over me and he used to invade every facet of my life and control literally everything from my finances to how I walked and dressed, who I spoke to, everything. So, now that he no longer has relevance in my life, he has probably spent a very long time trying to get into that account. He has probably stopped all my social media things like ten times over and this is just a desperate attempt to induce some kind of fear and have relevancy again. (VS4)

Monitoring through technology was also reported to have facilitated in-person stalking, with the perpetrators appearing at locations the victim and survivor went, after using technology to track them. This was particularly dangerous for women who were fleeing violent relationships. As VS12 stated:

> There was some email communication and text message communication around this … But it was within days of moving into this place, he was at the house. Again, out the front of the house.

Monitoring through technology was used to gaslight, emotionally and psychologically abuse, threaten, and stalk the victims and survivors. Indeed, several participants reported that the perpetrators would hack into accounts rather than directly contacting them, as this behaviour was "on the edge of the legal parameters" (VS1) and their identity could not be detected by police. VS1 continued:

> If he was sending messages, that would be a breach [of a domestic violence order], but he's not sending messages. He's not hacking into the accounts and putting up pornographic images or death threats or anything like that. He's not actually doing any of that which the police can act on. So, he's just hacking and stalking and then locking me out of accounts. So, they're not actually able to do anything about that.

## Sexual and image-based abuse

In the national survey, 24.6 per cent (n=1,120) of respondents had experienced sexual and/or image-based abuse and 4.2 per cent (n=190) reported perpetrating this form of TFA (see Powell, Flynn & Hindes, 2022). In the interviews, only one perpetrator and two victims and survivors reported experiencing/engaging in IBA, with one victim and survivor experiencing multiple instances of IBSA. The participant who described engaging in IBSA acts identified themselves as both a victim and survivor and a perpetrator, as the images they would share online were unsolicited dick pics they had been sent by different men. While the participant knew they were engaging in non-consensual sharing of intimate images, they saw this as a form of vigilante justice to shame the person for sending the image initially: "When I am sent unsolicited pictures of men's genitalia, I like to put them online as a means of shaming this person for sending me an unsolicited photo." (P5)

In our interviews with victims and survivors, the abusive behaviours experienced included threats to post intimate images online if they did not stay in the relationship, receiving unsolicited dick pics, and having intimate and non-intimate photos posted to websites without their consent. In some instances, this was in the context of an intimate relationship and an extension of intimate partner violence. In other instances, this was from strangers online. VS15 explained:

> He actually had posted a photo of him and me having sex [on an adult website], on this occasion where he had his phone ready. I didn't know – in the middle of sex, he grabbed it and snapped. And I just froze. And because of the family violence, I was actually too scared to say "What are you doing? Delete that photo."

VS2 described several examples of IBSA, including from strangers – "There was this one guy who was in my DMs [direct messages] on Instagram sending me pictures and asking me to humiliate him and all this stuff" – and also from an abusive partner:

> He said that if I didn't keep sending him nudes, they would end up on the internet. They were going to go everywhere. So, then I kind of got stuck in this relationship for, like I said, a couple of years. Where I sort of had this kind of blackmail over the top of me for about two years. "You can't leave, or I'll send these photos around." "You can't argue with me, or I'll put them here and there or whatever. And you have to keep sending me more as well."

# Perceived and self-reported motivations

The interviews found a range of both harmful motivations from victim and survivor and perpetrator participants, as well as justifications that seemed to attempt to minimise the harm of the abuse among perpetrators, which are further examined in the sections below.

## Anger and control

We asked both perpetrators and victims and survivors what they considered the motivation behind the abuse to be. Perpetrators primarily identified feeling angry and upset as their main motivators for engaging in TFA in the context of intimate partner relationships. They attributed this anger to the ending of a relationship and losing daily contact with the victim and survivor. As P7 reflected, "probably a lot of anger and hurt … I was distressed at the end of the relationship and the way it had ended. And so, there was a lot of negative emotions". P6 described anger as the key motivation, especially as the relationship break-up had been unanticipated:

> Now that I've had time to reflect, I think that impacted on my behaviour, if that makes sense. The hurt and anger made it really hard to just – if it was just a normal breakup, I probably would have been okay. But the fact that I was left with so many unanswered questions, and then [he started] ignoring my messages [which] fuelled the anger even more … So, I think that that played a big factor in me harassing him.

Victims and survivors who experienced TFA in intimate partner relationships identified anger and control as the primary motivators for perpetrators. Anger was also identified by victims and survivors in situations involving family members and friends. For example, VS6 identified anger as the main motivation underpinning the TFA she experienced from her best friend: "She's just a very angry … she's an aggressive, angry person. She's angry at the world."

Controlling ex and current partners was primarily identified as a motivation for male perpetrators who would use technology to generate fear and intimidate. As VS16 described, "He gets off on me being scared. That's what it comes down to. He

knows that I will be in my home, looking out the window, wondering what that noise was." VS1 similarly identified control and intimidation as driving her ex-partner's actions:

> It's just control. Control the system. And he knows full well that – like we've been separated for three and a half years … It's purely 100 per cent about control and then creating or continuing the annoyance and distress and there's intimidation as well.

VS2 also described her experiences of IBA as being about her ex-partner "having the control more than anything … it was purely like a control thing". Only one perpetrator identified the monitoring of their ex-partner's technology and movements as a way to maintain control over their partner once they had lost the physical and emotional access to them. P9 observed:

> I needed to retain hold of that life, and that control of that person I guess, and I felt like if I could just track all that stuff, I could do that somehow. I didn't do it consistently for a long period, but even intermittently – or after tracking down their partner, and randomly going into a Facebook wormhole of ending up on the partner's brother's friend's [page] … just wanting to know everything about that person.

Related to control was the use of technology to isolate victims and survivors from their support networks. For VS12, the perpetrator would constantly harass them when they were out with friends or family, eventually leading them to be isolated from these people:

> Eventually no one could come. The only way I could socialise with anyone was to leave the house and go and meet someone somewhere, and then the text messages would start and abuse, and "You're doing this" and "You're doing that", which was probably the furthest thing from the truth, because I had no energy by then to be thinking about it.

In VS22's experience, the perpetrator would access her calendar and change appointment times she had booked with

friends and in a work context, leading to her losing friends and employment opportunities. They explained:

> I'd make appointments to meet people and then I realised he was going in my calendar and changing them. So, I'd meet a friend and then people were just sick of seeing me because I was so unreliable, but I didn't know he was doing that.

Victims and survivors also described experiences akin to gaslighting, and how this was a tool of control, where perpetrators would convince them that the TFA they were experiencing was not happening, or was not a problem, making it difficult for them to seek help or leave the relationship. As VS3 observed:

> I didn't tell anyone because he made me feel like it was my fault, and nothing was wrong. This was my first serious boyfriend and he made me feel like this was normal.

## Revenge

Two perpetrators identified revenge as their motivator for engaging in TFA. In describing their TFA against an acquaintance/friend, P4 observed:

> They went around social media saying stuff about me and then I went – and then about three or four weeks after they did that I went and did it back to them because I thought no, they've got to see what they have done to me, it's like revenge. Because they did it to me, I want to show them what they have done.

P5 also reflected on their experiences of non-consensually sharing images in response to receiving unsolicited dick pics as "revenge in a sense … [because] these men have done something pretty disgusting".

## Online hate, trolling, flaming for fun or self-aggrandisement

For those participants who experienced TFA as part of broader abuse in relation to being trans or non-binary and/or having a diverse sexuality, they identified the abuse as being a way for the perpetrator to attack their identity. VS4 described how a family member would comment on their social media posts "whenever there was a photo of me looking

particularly masculine" and say things like, "'Just don't come home looking like a boy' … and starting this guilt-trippy type discussion". VS10 and VS17 described the abuse regarding their identity as both hurtful and confusing. As VS10 said, "Some of them are trolls, and I suppose some of them feel good about harassing others online." VS17 similarly observed, "I don't know why anyone is transphobic to anyone. It's not like me wanting to grow a beard will affect their life in any way."

For one perpetrator who engaged in TFA against peers and strangers, it was the social capital gained from their abusive behaviour that provided a motivation. In his words: "I remember wearing it with a bit of a badge of honour. So, I would then be able to talk about it with mates at school." (P10) This participant also described engaging in abusive behaviour as a social thing, something their group of friends did for a prank and a laugh:

> We were just constantly doing this ribbing and trying to annoy people, harass people. That probably lasted a week of back-and-forth messaging and whatever. And that one was more on our end. We were laughing about it. We found it hilarious.

P10 reflected that the anonymous nature of engaging in this behaviour "especially online where you don't see them or anything like that", meant they didn't take note of the potential harms to the victims and survivors: "I think it was just arrogance, and a total lack of regard for other people."

# Motivations

**(Powell, Flynn & Hindes 2022)**

The harmful motivations reported by perpetrators in Stage III of the project included to:

- express anger towards the person (one in three, 33.5%, *n*=345)
- annoy the person (one in five, 20.1%, *n*=207)
- hurt the person (one in five, 18.0%, *n*=186)
- humiliate the person (one in 10, 11.3%, *n*=117)
- control the person (one in 10, 10.9%, *n*=112)
- frighten the person (one in 10, 10.0%, *n*=103).

Some perpetrators also minimised the TFA behaviour, saying that they thought the person would be "'okay with it'" (almost one in three, 30.7%, *n*=317), that it was "'funny'" (one in six, 15.9%, *n*=164), or that they thought the person would be "'flattered'" by their behaviour (one in 10, 10.0%, *n*=103).

Access the Stage III findings of this project, Technology-faciliated abuse: National survey of Australian adults' experiences, on the project page: www.anrows.org.au/project/technology-facilitated-abuse-extent-nature-and-responses-in-the-australian-community/

## Harms

### Hypervigilance

Victims and survivors commonly reported becoming hypervigilant because of their experiences of TFA. VS9 described this as feeling "like I was just under attack, and I was highly paranoid. I was always looking over my shoulder when I was out, things like that." VS16 similarly described a sense of paranoia arising from the abuse experienced by an ex-partner:

> You do become a bit paranoid. I thought he was tracking my car. He wasn't, it was an old device that was mine. And so, you have to go through this process of keeping evidence, collecting evidence, being hypervigilant, and then building evidence and finding out what the truth is.

VS12 also reflected on this sense of always feeling like they were being watched as a result of the abuse experienced from an ex-partner, and this impacting on their everyday life both online and offline:

> … always feeling like I need to look around me everywhere I go, everything I do, because I feel like somebody's watching me. Every time I send an email that's got some personal stuff, or every time I post something on Facebook, like second guessing, is there some way someone can find out

about this? … If I start a new job, is someone going to go on a website somewhere [and see] this is my name, this is where I work, is that going to make it easier for someone to find me and get in contact with me? So, I guess it's a feeling of just total lack of privacy. That nothing's private or nothing's sacred. It's like with the use of technology, someone can always find you and always contact you.

Many of the victims and survivors described a hesitance to provide information to other people in case it could be used by the abuser. This extended to feeling hypervigilant in new relationships and finding it difficult to trust a new partner. As VS3 observed, "It's affected the way I am in a relationship as I find it difficult to stay in relationships as I'm scared this will happen again." Other participants also reported trust issues which impacted their ability to have any kind of relationship with others:

> My trust of the human race changed very much, and the way that you see people, I suppose. It's like you live in a world prior where you think there's good in people and there's generally good if you treat people well. You come out of this experience thinking literally it's not, and you feel like utter shit. (VS20)

VS22 also reflected on this absence of trust resulting in them losing friendships: "I've lost a lot of friends just from not trusting that I can tell them things and not get it back to him."

## Health impacts

Mental health impacts were commonly reported by victims and survivors, including anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), self-harm and suicidal thoughts. Victims and survivors often experienced multiple harms in complex ways, impacting their ability to function daily. As VS16 reflected:

> My [health] is so bad now that I barely function, and I can't hold down a full-time job. I have complex PTSD now, which I didn't have before. And this brings about not only PTSD symptoms, but you also get symptoms that are similar to ADHD [attention deficit hyperactivity disorder]. So, I struggled with self-care. I'm not feeding myself. I struggle to clean. I'm alone. I struggle to make friends. I'm not on good terms with my family. It has impacted me so much.

VS17 also described her experience leading to depression, which "makes me want to stay home every day and not socialise with anyone". Some participants also reflected on the abuse having negative mental health impacts on their friends and family. For example, VS1 described her child going through "three periods of not sleeping for two or three months at a time. She becomes very suicidal. She starts self-harming."

Further to the mental health impacts, victims and survivors reported a number of physical and emotional impacts from experiencing TFA. These included having to relocate due to safety concerns, and detrimental physical health consequences due to the stress of dealing with TFA. As VS1 described:

> To stop [TFA] from happening, we have to actually move … [and] because of the ongoing stress, I … had hypertensive blood pressure and was at high risk of a heart attack.

Others reported emotional impacts including a large degree of self-blame and shame which impacted their ability to recognise the abuse and seek help. It also included fear and worry which impacted their ability to feel safe and live their lives in the ways they wanted to. As VS10 stated, "I felt unsafe,

I felt scared and for the first time, I felt the real-life dangers and consequences of technology and social media." VS15 also reflected on an ongoing sense of fear, stating:

> By the time I realised what was happening, I was scared to leave this man. I knew he was dangerous … I felt so scared leaving him, I knew that the abuse would get worse.

## Lack of control and shutting off from online and offline activities

Victims and survivors reported having a lack of control over their lives and/or having to make significant changes to their day-to-day activities. This included victims and survivors reporting that they stayed in abusive relationships (VS2), lost employment (VS8), and were unable to meet friends and attend job interviews (VS22). As VS13 observed:

> I was a prisoner. I had no say in anything. He controlled absolutely everything of my life: what I wore, what I ate, where I went, how long I was allowed out for, no phone calls after 7pm, you name it. And it's just like, how could me, someone who has worked for the biggest [names employer] in the world … be reduced to nothing, like a robot, basically doing what I was told?

Other victims and survivors reported that due to the TFA they became shut out from both online and offline spaces, leading them to be isolated from their families, friends and other support networks. As VS7 observed:

> I didn't feel safe in any space, except for my home. So, I locked my doors and I stopped seeing people. I stopped going out, and it's been that way since 2017. Because I got used to that isolation, that I just didn't feel safe, so I just cut off. I cut off from the whole world.

VS16 described their experiences as follows:

> He convinced me to build the house an hour and a half away from my family in a town that I had nothing to do with, didn't know anything about. He convinced me that all of my friends were horrible people. I ended up not really having friends and being very isolated.

Reflecting on their experiences shutting off from online support networks, VS22 said it was only since the COVID-19

# Harms

**(Powell, Flynn & Hindes 2022)**

Stage III of the project found that there were many harms associated with TFA, and that overall, victims and survivors of TFA scored significantly higher on measures of psychological distress than those without victimisation experiences (Powell, Flynn & Hindes, 2022). The most common impacts victims and survivors attributed to their most recent experience of TFA were feeling:

- annoyed at the perpetrator (two in three, 68.8%, n=1,591)
- angry at the perpetrator (two in three, 61.5%, n=1,421)
- controlled by the perpetrator (one in three, 33.8%, n=781)
- humiliated by the perpetrator (one in three, 31.9%, n=736)
- depressed (almost one in three, 31.9%, n=738)
- afraid (one in four, 24.4%, n=563).

Of those participants experiencing TFA victimisation, many also reported that the same perpetrator had engaged in at least one form of additional abuse against them (46.4%, n=1,075). This represents one in four (23.6%, n=1,075) of the total sample who experienced co-occurring forms of abuse from the same perpetrator of their most recent TFA experience. The national survey further found that women victims and survivors were significantly more likely than men to experience greater emotional impacts, higher levels of psychological distress, and co-occurring types of abuse from the same perpetrator.

Access the Stage III findings of this project, Technology-faciliated abuse: National survey of Australian adults' experiences, on the project page: www.anrows.org.au/project/technology-facilitated-abuse-extent-nature-and-responses-in-the-australian-community/

pandemic started that they had re-engaged with an online social media account. They explained:

> I've started an Instagram account and it's so stupid, but it's so important. I find that now that I have photos and connections, people will think of me and call me and visit me, because it's how people connect now. But for nearly 10 years, I didn't have Facebook, didn't have those things, because it just wasn't safe. (VS22)

Isolating also impacted some victims' and survivors' ability to access work opportunities and other basic needs such as Centrelink payments and Medicare. As VS16 stated:

> Oh, my God. You have no idea. Think of everything you've ever signed up to on your email, all of the things, like government and Centrelink and Medicare. You've got to change absolutely everything.

## Constancy of the harms

One of the common features of the experiences of victims and survivors was that the impacts of TFA were constant and would filter into nearly every aspect of their lives, with them never feeling safe and secure. As VS22 observed, "You just can't underestimate this. This is like – and it [the TFA] doesn't

end when everything else ends." This sense of something never ending was also described by VS8:

> [It's] a hard thing to explain but it's a palpable thing, and you just feel like I'm never going to escape this, this is what I have to live with. If I continue to live – I've got to live with how I'm feeling.

This reflects the experiences of TFA victims and survivors reported in research, where the abuse has led to constant harms and, often, the constant threat of further harm (Henry, McGlynn et al., 2021; Rackley et al., 2021). As VS15 described, even though her abusive partner was no longer living with her, the "fear" always remained:

> I've been prevented from having a life. It's huge – it's destroyed my life. I live in hell on earth. I don't call this living now. I live in fear every day. Yes, the daily hypervigilance of the perpetrator being in the same house has gone, but I live in fear every day.

## Victim and survivor responses

In the interviews, we asked victims and survivors what actions they took in response to the abuse, including whether

they reported the abuse to a platform or the police; whether they told any friends, family or others; and what types of support they sought, if any. Almost all victims and survivors had told a friend or family member at some point about the TFA they were experiencing, which compares with one in three (35.3%, *n*=820) found by the national survey (Powell, Flynn & Hindes, 2022).

In most cases, friends and family supported victims and survivors. Some said that this was instrumental in them eventually seeking help and in reinforcing that what they were experiencing was abuse and, in some cases, illegal. As VS3 described, "It wasn't until I spoke to my friend [name] that he told me it would be important to go to the police. It was a few days after this that I decided to go." VS2 reported a similar experience:

> I had told someone about it, and it was a long-term friend of mine. I guess a family friend. And I don't even know – it just came out in conversation. And it was him who was like, "You can go to the police about this you know." And [they] also said they would have my back and whatever. I think that was the first person I told.

However, some participants reported experiencing victim-blaming or harm minimisation from friends and family, with these friends and family members telling them to just ignore or simply move on from the abuse. As VS17 reflected, "I've told family and friends, but they all just tell me to block them and move on."

Around half of the 20 victim and survivor participants (n=11) reported their experiences of TFA to online platforms and to other services, such as banks or telecommunication companies, as compared with one in 10 (10.1%, *n*=235) found in the national survey (Powell, Flynn & Hindes, 2022). A small number of these participants (30%, *n*=6/20) described having positive or mixed (semi-positive/semi-negative) experiences, particularly when reporting to online platforms, where the platforms were proactive in removing content and warning perpetrators. As VS10 explained:

> I reported their accounts, and they were taken down … I was satisfied with it. It made me feel more comfortable and safe knowing that there were consequences for their behaviour.

Most of the participants however, reported having negative experiences with reporting to services. As VS1 described:

> He was stalking us and found our location twice through [our IP address], and Telstra were being very unhelpful, even though they're supposed to be linked to domestic violence services … They were being very unhelpful, and it took me over 12 months, and we had to get the Telecommunications [Industry] Ombudsman in twice to help me close an account down, because they wanted to try and fine me for breaking the contract.

Others, such as VS16, reported getting no action: "Every time I would jump on there [social media platform] to flag that something was wrong or I thought my account was hacked, there were no real solutions." Some identified a lack of timely responses, or the services being ineffective in allowing changes that would take into account the delicate nature of the situation. As VS16 continued:

> Every company I would contact, even the bank, they just won't let you discreetly change your details in such a way that it doesn't notify your old accounts [that the perpetrator has access to].

Other participants reflected that there was "no point" reporting it to social media platforms because there are no consequences. As VS1 described, "If I report it, what's the point? What's the outcome? They ban this person? … What are you going to achieve? … I just think that it won't resolve anything." VS16 also reflected on the barriers some platforms put up as preventing them from reporting it:

> I never bothered contacting them because the amount of strife I went through with their security … Maybe if they simplified [it] and they made alerts for when things seemed abnormal? … Maybe if they just have a separate section for people when it comes to domestic violence, because there's not just one way that people use these services to abuse.

About half of the 20 victims and survivors in our interviews (n=11) said they reported their experiences to the police, with the overwhelming majority of these (n=10) having negative experiences. This was not reflected in the findings of our survey, in which the large majority of respondents (97.6%)

did not report to police (see Powell, Flynn & Hindes, 2022). In the interviews, however, there was also evidence that some victims and survivors were failed by the system on multiple levels, with the police, courts and support services unable to stop the TFA and protect victims and survivors. VS7 explained:

> So, there's the Family Court, there's the Magistrates Court where the domestic violence orders were supposed to be made; then you've got the domestic violence services of the police – they have all let me down.

Other negative police responses included telling victims and survivors there were no laws to respond to the behaviour, that they did not have enough evidence to proceed with charges, not serving the perpetrator with a domestic violence order in a timely manner, dropping charges because they were too difficult to investigate, police not taking TFA or the victim and survivor seriously, and blaming the victim and survivor for the abuse:

> Some of them are so rude and dismissive, especially really at the station (VS20).

> The police were absolutely hopeless (VS7).

VS2 described her experience as follows:

> They would come to the house and conduct interviews occasionally, but they didn't want to get involved. I could tell they didn't want to get involved. They thought it was obviously not serious enough for them to get involved. But to make them pay attention, you've basically got to have bruises all around your neck.

VS13 also reflected on her troubling experience:

> I got told things like, "Well, if you just gave him what he wanted, he wouldn't abuse me." "You need to find a new man and move on." Those were the kind of responses I got from the police … Police only look for bruises that are black and blue on the outside; they don't actually look for the black and the blue on the inside.

VS13 was informed by police that "psychological abuse is too hard to prove". VS4 reflected on a similar issue relating to the difficulties of online anonymity and the police not being able to prove who the perpetrator is in cases outside an intimate partner context:

> It's very hard when someone is behind a screen and you don't know their name, you don't know their face. A lot of the time they're on the other side of the world and the police don't give a shit, honestly, they have better things to do. So, unless it's something quite severe, they're not really going to follow it up.

Victims and survivors also reported negative experiences during the criminal justice process if police did proceed with charges, with participants reporting a lack of control over court proceedings and having charges dropped without being informed:

> When you're a victim of crime, in criminal matters, you become like this irrelevant third party – you don't have a say, you don't have a voice. Police negotiated and dropped the stalking charge, and the making, using or supplying identification information. And he only pled guilty to using a carriage service to offend. Now to me, given his long history of stalking – not just myself, but his two previous ex-partners – stalking was the most important crime for him to be charged with. But of course, that was let go of. (VS15)

Some participants reported more mixed experiences with the police, saying that some officers would take them seriously, however it was a "lottery whoever you get, as to your reaction and how you are treated" (VS20). These concerns also expanded to the law not being adequate to deal with TFA. As VS1 reflected, "Because of the way that he's doing things, the legislation just doesn't allow them to actually do anything about it." VS16 likewise claimed:

> It's very easy to use social media to abuse somebody these days, and it's becoming more and more prevalent, yet the law's not keeping up with it. The police aren't keeping up with it.

VS13 expressed a similar view:

> There needs to be specific laws in relation to technology-facilitated abuse because the police don't understand it, the judges don't understand it. Just like there needs to be coercive control legislation in place. My ex would be

in jail right now if the police understood what he's doing is domestic violence.

Other participants reported that while the police officer may have taken them seriously, the limits of the law meant there was nothing they could do to help:

> The cop's like, "I don't believe him, but there's enough reasonable doubt." Even though obviously it's not what I wanted, the fact that the police believed you makes the biggest difference in the world, because you feel like you're going crazy, and no one believes you. (VS20)

Some participants reported that they sought help from victim and survivor support services such as women's refuges, victim and survivor services and domestic and family violence organisations, with the national survey finding that one in 10 (11.4%, *n*=266) did so (Powell, Flynn & Hindes, 2022). One service that participants found particularly useful was having someone with security and technology expertise help them with securing their home and technologies and educating them on the different mechanisms that perpetrators use so they could be aware of the potential dangers. VS16 explained:

> WESNET[1] booked me an appointment with some actual tech experts, who I got to go through a checklist of things with them. And they confirmed to me that they were pretty sure that my phone had been compromised, and they just advised me on what I could do to keep all my accounts safe from there forward.

Participants reported mixed experiences with victim and survivor support services, with most saying they were helpful. VS22, for example, stated:

> I accessed help from the Domestic Violence Crisis Service, the DVCS. They supported me for years. I don't think I would've got through everything without them. Yeah, they tried to help me a couple of times with – referred me to WESNET, but he was just so far ahead of everyone.

Others described them as helpful but limited in what they could actually do, and often unable to keep up with the technology that perpetrators were using. As VS7 claimed:

> They were very helpful. Well, they were helpful, but it's limited. Basically, you've got to get in there. You've got to get yourself somewhere else to live and you've got to get out. So, they were helpful, but the services are too few and they're limited.

This was particularly so for participants in rural areas, who reported there being no services readily available to help them. As VS13 described, "Because I was rural, I literally got no help at all." VS2 similarly explained:

> In terms of services … I grew up in a little country town and this was when I still lived there. I wouldn't even – I'm not even sure that there would be domestic violence support or whatever that you would engage in around that area. I'm not sure.

For other participants, the assistance from some support services was not useful for them or they were unaware that support was available. As VS15 described, "Services only empathise with you – they validate you, they understand the abuse – but really what they do is support you to keep tolerating the abuse and keep navigating it." In their experience, VS17 explained, "I thought the only option was counselling for myself. I've never heard of other options for cyberbullying." VS20 also reflected on the lack of resources in services, which they described as "very lovely, but they were very stretched".

## Perpetrator responses

In our interviews with perpetrators, we sought to understand how they viewed their actions, and whether the victims and survivors took any action in response to the abuse, as well as whether the perpetrator sought any help or assistance. We also asked whether they told anyone else about their behaviour. In describing their actions, most of the perpetrators sought to justify their behaviour in some way. In some cases, this was through blaming the victim and survivor, such as believing that engaging in TFA was justified as it was a response to something the victim and survivor had done. P6, for example, claimed, "I felt like I had an entitlement to abuse him, for him abusing my trust and loyalty." P3 similarly stated, "I thought everything I did was completely right, like I didn't do anything wrong. She was the one who was doing everything

---

1   WESNET is a service that provides relief and support to women and children experiencing domestic and family violence, intimate partner violence and other forms of gender-based violence.

wrong, and I just felt like all of my behaviour was justified." In reflecting on their experience receiving unsolicited dick pics and then posting these online, P5 stated:

> Yes, I am sharing their image without their consent and some people have gotten upset at me when finding out their photos are online, but I do believe they deserve it, and this is a good way to dissuade men specifically.

Some perpetrators minimised the harm, focusing on their own feelings and saying that they did not think they were technically doing anything illegal, or that what they did was not wrong. As P9 explained:

> I was too much caught up in my own feelings about it at the time – about the consequences of the fallout of the situation that I'd been dealing with. I'm one of those people who's a little bit like, "I'm not officially doing anything wrong."

Others justified their behaviour based on the context in which the TFA occurred, such as a breakup:

> I guess I was a little overwhelmed with how I was feeling and wasn't coping very well. It was also my first breakup, so I hadn't really had any experience in those feelings. (P7)

P2 similarly justified their behaviour as a result of their hurt feelings:

> So, it's like I am not worthy for them to spend a single minute on replying to me? Do you know what I mean? Whereas I care for them so much, but I'm just completely nothing for them.

For some perpetrators, particularly where they engaged in the abuse when they were younger, they could identify the behaviour as wrong now, but not as something they would have recognised as wrong at the time:

> Now that I've matured a bit and I've seen the impacts that online bullying has had on people close to me and people in the media that go and kill themselves from online bullying, it's definitely been a very sad – a sombre moment when I've been around that kind of stuff. But it's also a great reflection for me, in the sense of, it really does deter me from being what you'd call a keyboard

warrior and harassing people and stuff like that. So now, it's taught me to be the bigger person (P6).

Some perpetrators expressed remorse or shame about their behaviour, but there remained some justification, for example, when they reflected on the victim and survivor's behaviour. As P9 stated:

> It's embarrassing. I'm ashamed – you know when you know that something wasn't the right thing to do, but you also know you were just coping the best way you knew how.

P7 similarly explained:

> Oh, it's mortifying, thinking – what a stupid way to behave. I don't condone anything he did, but there was absolutely no need for me to carry on with that kind of behaviour.

None of the perpetrators had experience with their behaviour being reported to police, however one had experience of the victim and survivor threatening to report them to the police:

> [He said if] I didn't stop messaging him, he would go to the police. And then, I replied, "Well, if you want to go to the police and say that your ex-girlfriend's heartbroken and won't stop texting you because you've cheated on her, and you want to look like a cheating fool, then go ahead and do that." And he never ended up doing it. (P6)

Two perpetrators said that their behaviour was reported to online platforms, however there were little repercussions other than the TFA material being taken down and/or their accounts being banned, restricted or suspended. As P6 noted, "I was restricted for – I think it was 48 hours, or – yeah, my [Facebook] account got restricted." One participant described how there was often a long delay between the report being made and there being any repercussions, and that it was easy to put the TFA material back online after it had been taken down:

> They [TikTok] delete the videos but they don't ban you from posting. You can put the video straight back up again. It can be up there for a month. It takes like a month after someone reports to do something and it took – when you put a video up it'll be there for a month then it would go and it'll come back up again, so it's really – they don't do much. (P4)

About one third of the perpetrators (n=3/10) were aware that their behaviour could be illegal or against platform policies. As P5 described:

> Yes, sometimes I was worried about that [legal ramifications], but I knew most of these men didn't have the balls to take any legal action. I also remained as anonymous as I could. They didn't know my last name or where I lived etc., so I wasn't too worried.

The absence of concern reflected in P5's comments was evident in other participant interviews, with only one perpetrator acknowledging that the threat of the abuse being illegal stopped them from continuing to engage in the abuse:

> I did realise that there is actually such a law as use carrier service to menace and stuff. A girlfriend told me about that, and that's probably what made me pull up the most, was that warning from friends that if he did want to get the police involved, there is actually a charge. (P6)

While the law was not necessarily seen as a preventative measure, some perpetrators said the experience of engaging in TFA had now changed the way they used online spaces, and they were more careful with how they interacted with others online. P4, for example, said "I second guess any comment I make, ensure that it's not offensive or I just don't post." Others said they had changed their actions because the victim and survivor had told their friends, and this impacted negatively on them:

> I get a lot of people that don't like me because of what's happened on Facebook and also her friends who she's told on Facebook see me in the street and they just want to start an argument. (P4)

Only around one third of the perpetrators themselves had told anyone else about their behaviour (n=3/10). In one case, the perpetrator had told their friends, and their friends helped them to continue the abuse:

> The only people I told were my two other best friends at the time, and they were sort of helping me, they were doing it with me. So, I guess that was the other reason I didn't really feel bad about it, because I had two more people on my side who believed me, and they were on my side, and they were encouraging it. (P1)

In other cases, their friends told them what they were doing was wrong and this helped them stop the behaviour. As P6 described:

> I had a friend talk some sense into me and say, "You're better than this." … "As hard as it is, hon, let it go. You deserve better." So once I'd had a third-party step in and give me some clarity, I stepped away and said, "You know what? This isn't worth continuing." So, I've now – I've just gotten on with my life.

# Discussion

## Forms of TFA

The interview data demonstrate the breadth and depth of TFA being experienced and engaged in across four broad areas: harassment, monitoring and control, emotional abuse and threats, and sexual and image-based abuse. Participants described various ways in which they experienced the abuse, with perpetrators using new technologies to enact the abuse – such as GPS tracking services and using shared or previously shared devices to monitor and stalk victims and survivors – and using technology to commit the abuse, such as repetitive messaging by text or on social media platforms, and creating fake or new profiles to contact, intimidate or impersonate victims and survivors. These findings shine light on the ways in which TFA can be used in relatively unsophisticated or low-tech ways, such as abusive or threatening messages, through to more sophisticated or high-tech behaviours, such as surreptitiously installing malicious software on a victim's and survivor's mobile device to monitor their communications with others.

## Perceived and self-reported motivations

The interviews further demonstrate the range of motivations and drivers underpinning TFA, and the various ways in which perpetrators seek to justify their behaviour based on the victim's and survivor's actions and their own feelings. Revenge was not a common factor identified by participants in motivating perpetrators to abuse, which further highlights the importance of avoiding terms like "revenge pornography" in the broader discourse and policies or legal responses to TFA (Flynn & Henry, 2021; Henry, McGlynn et al., 2021). Gaining and/or maintaining control over the person was the primary motivation that emerged from both victim and survivor and perpetrator interviews. This was prevalent in intimate partner and former intimate partner perpetration contexts, but also in relation to family member and friend/acquaintance perpetration contexts. This further highlights the way in which technology can be used as a tool of coercive control – as Evan Stark, who first coined the concept of coercive control in 1994 observed, these behaviours are "an offense to liberty" that have a cumulative effect on victims and survivors over time, with "consequences they experience as

*entrapment*" (2009, p. 4, emphasis in original). Perpetrators identified that their motivation to control was often driven by anger, being upset with a relationship ending, or not trusting their partner. This provides some insight into the underlying emotional factors behind a perpetrator's motivation to control through TFA.

Across the interviews, TFA was most often used in the context of a relationship with a current intimate partner or ex-partner, which supports the research indicating that technologies have become ubiquitous in experiences of domestic and family violence (Dragiewicz, Woodlock et al., 2018, 2019; Harris & Woodlock, 2019; Woodlock, McKenzie et al., 2020; Woodlock, Bentley et al., 2020). This form of perpetration also had a gendered component, with two thirds of the most recent TFA perpetration experience being committed by a male perpetrator reported as occurring against a current or former intimate partner (n=13/19). These findings are also consistent with prior research on IBSA, which found that males are more likely to be identified as perpetrators in the context of current intimate partner or ex-partner contexts, compared with women, transgender, non-binary and intersex people (Henry, McGlynn et al., 2021; Powell et al., 2019). It also supports the findings from Stage I of this project (Flynn, Powell & Hindes, 2021) in which surveyed sector workers reported men as being the most common perpetrators of TFA and that TFA was most commonly experienced in the context of either current or former intimate partner relationships.

There were, however, some forms of TFA outside of intimate partner relationships reported, which have received comparatively less attention in the research to date. These included TFA with the motivation of attacking someone's identity based on their gender and/or sexuality. This supports previous research which has found that sexuality and gender minority adults are more likely to experience digital harassment and abuse, with rates of gender- and sexuality-based harassment, such as degrading and offensive comments about their gender and/or sexuality, particularly high for sexuality-diverse men and gender-diverse adults (Powell et al., 2020). It was also clear that these forms of TFA reported by victims and survivors fitted into the broader framework of gendered violence, with participants experiencing TFA

due to their departure from heterosexual, cisgendered norms. It is, however, important to recognise the unique nature of transphobia, homophobia and cissexism, and this is a much-needed focus for future research in this space.

## Harms

Like much of the research examining types of TFA, we found the range of harms experienced by victims and survivors to be significant (Harris, 2018; McGlynn et al., 2021, Rackley et al., 2021; Woodlock, 2017). Many victims and survivors reported experiencing ongoing health harms – physical, emotional and mental – as well as experiencing fear, paranoia and a sense of constant hypervigilance. There was a common theme of surveillance – a sense of always being watched and being unable to escape the gaze and control of the perpetrator. Indeed, the ongoing nature of surveillance and abuse is demonstrated through TFA still occurring even when the perpetrator was physically located in other states or cities from the victim and survivor. Some of these harms had been further exacerbated through inadequate responses from police, platforms and victims' services, such as victim-blaming responses from police, or platforms revealing the victim's and survivor's location to the perpetrator. It is therefore important to recognise that the harms of TFA stretch beyond the experiences themselves to the societal and institutional responses to these experiences.

The harms reported had lasting, complex and intersecting impacts on victims and survivors. Some were unable to seek and gain employment, had become isolated from social and family connections, had had to move to escape the TFA, and were unable to access in-person and online communities. Some victims and survivors felt a complete lack of control to live their lives in the ways they wanted to due to the TFA. This demonstrates why minimising the harms or seriousness of TFA can be so damaging, as these significant and ongoing harms are often obscured by the idea that digital abuse is less serious than physical abuse (Dragiewicz, Woodlock et al., 2018; Powell & Henry, 2018).

## Strengths and limitations

This report shines light on the lived experiences of TFA victims and survivors and perpetrators. It provides an important avenue for victims and survivors to share their stories of abuse and to have their experiences heard and reported on in order to seek to improve responses to TFA and explore ways to prevent TFA. In addition, it is one of the first studies anywhere in the world to engage with perpetrators using qualitative methods to understand drivers, motivations, experiences and characteristics of TFA. This is vital in helping to identify gaps in our knowledge of TFA, and importantly, to explore potential solutions to prevent, detect and dissuade TFA perpetration.

Like all studies, this one has some limitations. The interviews include a non-probability, small sample of participants – 20 victims and survivors and 10 perpetrators. While the depth of the data is very strong, it is not a representative selection of participants or stories, and the findings cannot claim to be considered representative. Based on their preferred pronouns, we also had more she/her participants across both cohorts than he/him or they/them. This may be a limitation of the findings (as opposed to an indication that those who identify as women are more likely to experience or engage in TFA), and again points to a lack of representation in the dataset. The recruitment of perpetrators was particularly difficult. Despite using the resources of our project advisory group and a series of social media advertisements (across Facebook and Twitter platforms), perpetrator participants were ultimately recruited using a research recruitment service that individuals opt into, where they agree to be contacted by that company for relevant research purposes. While we attempted to gather a diverse range of participants among this group, the gender and age demographics were weighted more heavily towards young women, and this was represented in the breakdown of participants (see methods section). Despite this, the participants had engaged in a range of different forms of abuse for a variety of motivations, and the data reflected some of the experiences identified by victims and survivors.

Finally, COVID-19 has had a significant impact on how we conduct research, as well as how people are experiencing TFA. Research has found that domestic and sexual violence

has significantly increased during the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, Boxall and Morgan (2021) found that, between 6 May and 1 June 2020, 4.2 per cent of women experienced physical violence by a current or former cohabiting partner, 2.2 per cent of women experienced sexual violence, and 11.6 per cent of women experienced emotionally abusive, harassing and controlling behaviours. Between March and May 2020, eSafety received more than 1,000 reports of IBSA – a 210 per cent increase on average weekly reports in 2019 (Powell & Flynn, 2020). Pfitzner et al.'s (2020) study with practitioners in Victoria also reported an increase in frequency and severity of domestic and family violence, while our survey of sector workers (Stage I of this project) found a perceived increase in the harms of TFA experienced and enhanced issues in accessing supports due to COVID-19 (Flynn, Powell & Hindes, 2021). In addition to the pandemic impacting on the data collected, it affected the way we undertook our research. The interviews were conducted in between a series of strict lockdowns implemented across Australian states – most notably in Victoria and New South Wales – and could only be undertaken on Zoom, given restrictions on intra- and interstate travel. It is possible that this may have impacted the quality of the interviews and the capacity to develop rapport with participants. It also required additional online support be available for participants and researchers in order to properly debrief during a time of increased isolation (see methods section). Despite these concerns, we are confident the data presented shines light on the nature and impacts of TFA.

## Implications and recommendations for policy and practice

The findings have important implications for future policy, training and practice. Research exploring police responses to different forms of TFA have found a range of limitations, particularly around responding appropriately to victims and survivors and understanding the applicable laws (Flynn, Clough & Cooke, 2021; Flynn & Henry, 2021; Henry et al., 2018). Our research supports these findings and suggests that additional training is needed on how to recognise TFA, which laws apply to TFA and how to respond to disclosures of TFA. This is particularly so in rural areas where victims and survivors reported a lack of support options.

There was also a common view across the interviews that TFA experiences were not always treated seriously by first responders, particularly by police and the courts. This suggests additional training and development are needed across the justice system regarding the nature of, seriousness of and range of response options available to address TFA and to support victims and survivors of TFA.

Further to action across the justice system, another key implication for policy arising from our research involves the responses and policies applied by other service providers, particularly across internet platforms, but also banks, telecommunication and other basic service providers (e.g. gas/electricity). Victims and survivors reported numerous difficulties trying to separate or delink their service accounts from abusive ex-partners and found a range of roadblocks to being able to make basic changes, such as to phone numbers or contact addresses (email and physical). It is vital that mechanisms and policies are put in place to make the process of separation or delinking accounts easier (whether in the context of an abusive relationship or not). It should be possible for individuals to change their personal details in the context of a separation without seeking the approval or notification of their ex-partners. Companies need to identify ways to make this transition possible and improve the safety-by-design approach of their policies, which also take into consideration the privacy and security challenges this may create.

Similarly, internet platforms and providers should consider how to make the reporting process for TFA experiences simpler for victims and survivors, and for bystanders. AI technologies could also be explored to consider whether there are ways to prevent or detect abusive patterns and behaviours *before* they occur – for example, pop-up messages that recognise abusive or hurtful terminology which ask the poster to check their comments before posting. It may also be possible to consider patterns in repetitive contact to see whether this is wanted or unwanted – for example, where there are constant messages, phone calls or postings to a person's accounts.

The broader data on TFA perpetration arising from this study could also be used to help inform primary and secondary prevention activities and programs. Indeed, while the sample

of perpetrators in this study was limited, it did provide some insights into the emotional drivers behind their motivation to control victims and survivors through TFA. We found that perpetrators would justify and minimise their behaviour, and often were not concerned about potential repercussions. These insights can help to inform preventative policy responses to TFA, such as campaigns which educate about the harms of TFA and bolster support for men's behaviour change programs which help them manage feelings of anger and hurt.

There is also the potential for a greater partnership between technology and service providers, government agencies and frontline support services in the design and delivery of education and training resources. This would include up-to-date information on the safety tools available on various platforms and combined efforts to prevent abuse and support victims and survivors and, where such information exists (for example, eSafety Women), increased knowledge and education about these resources. One example is the Safe Connections Program, which is an active collaboration between WESNET and Telstra, with funding from the Department of Social Services. This program provides prepaid smartphones to victims and survivors of domestic and family violence, sexual assault and other forms of violence against women. Since the commencement of the program in 2015, over 28,000 new smartphones have been given to women experiencing violence. WESNET also provides training to the SAFE team at Telstra, which is a customer service team dedicated to helping victims and survivors safely activate their new phone. There is certainly scope and need to expand these types of co-badged partnerships across service providers, the support sector and platforms.

Finally, there are key areas which need further exploration in future research. In particular, these are the complexities and unique experiences of TFA for those in regional and rural communities, those in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, sexuality diverse people, people from culturally and linguistically diverse communities, and people with disability.

# Conclusion

This report set out to present the findings of Stage II of a national research project on TFA across Australia, and specifically to understand and detail the lived experiences and help-seeking patterns of victims and survivors of TFA and the nature and characteristics of perpetration of TFA, and contribute to an evidence base that could inform practice innovation and further development of prevention and responses to TFA. In doing so, this report has generated new knowledge on TFA from the perspectives of victims and survivors and perpetrators who have experienced and/or engaged in various forms of abusive behaviours using technology.

This report has provided a summary of the findings of 30 semi-structured qualitative interviews with victims and survivors (*n*=20) and perpetrators (*n*=10) of TFA. It has reported their views and experiences of TFA; the motivations and aims of perpetrators in committing the abuse – self-reported by perpetrators and perceived by victims and survivors; the harms experienced by victims and survivors; and what actions were taken in response to the abuse, including whether the abuse was reported to the police and platform providers, and what help-seeking patterns emerged.

The data presented suggest that TFA is a serious and growing social, legal and economic problem that has significant harms and implications. Much of the abuse was committed in the context of intimate partner and former intimate partner relationships, but there was also a degree of abuse based on discriminatory attitudes, such as homophobia and misogyny, that highlights the importance of comprehensive and inclusive primary and secondary education and prevention to address TFA. Improved training of frontline responders to TFA, including police and support workers, as well as those most likely to have TFA experiences disclosed to them, such as basic service providers and internet platforms, was also recognised as key to supporting victims, and to providing ways to better understand, prevent and identify TFA.

While there have been some recent changes to improve responses and legal frameworks relating to TFA (see e.g. *Online Safety Act 2021* (Cth)), there was a clear and common perception among victims and survivors that police, internet platforms and other basic service providers (such as banks, telecommunication companies and gas/electricity providers)

have inconsistent approaches and can be highly ineffective in meeting the needs of victims and survivors. There was a view from many victims and survivors that their experiences were not taken seriously by those they disclosed to, particularly police and platforms, and perpetrators also expressed the view that they were either unaware their actions could be considered illegal or against policies, or they were not concerned they would face any consequences, even if reported. This suggests there is an urgent need for improved resources, education, training and responses to TFA, not solely in relation to legal responses, but also relating to improved policy responses within organisations that may encounter TFA disclosures and perpetration.

While this study has provided an insight into TFA victimisation and perpetration, further research is needed to develop a deeper understanding of TFA perpetration, including how to inform prevention activities, and how we can improve supports for victims and survivors. There is also a need to better understand what services could be created to help perpetrators understand the impacts and harms of their behaviour and help shift toxic actions and beliefs that legitimise TFA. There is also a demonstrable need for research to examine how technology can be harnessed in positive ways to address, prevent and detect TFA, for example through the use of AI, and streamlining and simplifying reporting of TFA, help-seeking and other services to remove barriers to victim and survivor supports.

# References

Alhaboby, Z.A., Barnes, J., Evans, H., & Short, E. (2019). Cyber-victimization of people with chronic conditions and disabilities: A systematic review of scope and impact. *Trauma, Violence & Abuse*, *20*, 398–415. https://doi.org/10.1177/1524838017717743

Bailey, O.G. (2012). Disasporas in online spaces: Practices of self-representation and belonging. In I. Rigoni & E. Saitta (Eds.)., *Mediating cultural diversity in a globalized public space* (pp. 21–33). Palgrave Macmillan.

Bates, S. (2017). Revenge porn and mental health: A qualitative analysis of the mental health effects of revenge porn on female survivors. *Feminist Criminology*, *12*(1), 22–42. https://doi.org/10.1177/1557085116654565

Boxall, H., & Morgan, A. (2021). *Intimate partner violence during the COVID-19 pandemic: A survey of women in Australia* (Research report, 03/2021). ANROWS.

Carlson, B. (2021). Indigenous internet users: Learning to trust ourselves. *Australian Feminist Studies*, 1–17. Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1080/08164649.2021.1929064

Carlson, B., & Frazer, R. (2018). *Cyberbullying and Indigenous Australians: A review of the literature*. Aboriginal Health and Medical Research Council of New South Wales and Macquarie University.

Carrington, K., Morley, C., Warren, S., Ryan, V., Ball, M., Clarke, J., & Vitis, L. (2021). The impact of COVID-19 pandemic on Australian domestic and family violence services and their clients. *Australian Journal of Social Issues*, 1–19. https://doi.org/10.1002/ajs4.183

Chatterjee, R. Doerfler, P., Orgas, H., Hayron, S., Palmer, J., Freed, D., Levy, K., Dell, N., McCoy, D., & Ristenpart, T. (2018). The spyware used in intimate partner violence. *IEEE Symposium on Security and Privacy*, 441-458. https://doi.org/10.1109/SP.2018.00061

Clark, H., & Quadara, A. (2010). *Insights into sexual perpetration: Giving voice to victim/survivors' knowledge* (Research Report No. 18). Australian Institute of Family Studies. https://aifs.gov.au/publications/impacts-sexual-assault-women

Commonwealth of Australia (2019). *Fourth Action Plan – National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010–2022*. Department of Social Services.

Council of Australian Governments. (2011). *The National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and Their Children: Including the first three-year action plan*. COAG.

*Criminal Code Act 1995* (Cth)

*Criminal Code 1988* (Qld)

DeKeseredy, W. S., & Schwartz, M. D. (2016). Thinking sociologically about image-based sexual abuse: The contribution of male peer support theory. *Sexualization, Media, & Society*, *2*(4). https://doi.org/10.1177/2374623816684692

Douglas, H., Harris, B.A., & Dragiewicz, M. (2019). Technology-facilitated domestic and family violence: Women's experiences. *British Journal of Criminology*, *59*, 551–570. https://doi.org/10.1093/bjc/azy068

Dragiewicz, M., Burgess, J., Matamoros-Fernández, A., Salter, M., Suzor, N.P., Woodlock, D., & Harris, B. (2018). Technology facilitated coercive control: Domestic violence and the competing roles of digital media platforms. *Feminist Media Studies*, *18*, 609–625. https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2018.1447341

Dragiewicz, M., Harris, B., Woodlock, D., Salter, M., Easton, H., Lynch, A., Campbell, H., Leach, J., & Milne, L. (2019). *Domestic violence and communication technology: Survivor experiences of intrusion, surveillance, and identity crime*. QUT & Australian Communications Consumer Action Network (ACCAN).

Dragiewicz, M., Woodlock, D., Harris, B., & Reid, C. (2018). Technology-facilitated coercive control. In W.S. DeKeseredy, C.M. Rennison & A.K. Hall-Sanchez (Eds.), *The Routledge international handbook of violence studies* (pp. 244–253). Routledge.

eSafety. (2017). *Image-based abuse: National survey: A summary report*. https://www.esafety.gov.au/sites/default/files/2019-07/Image-based-abuse-national-survey-summary-report-2017.pdf

eSafety. (2021a). *"For my safety": Experiences of technology-facilitated abuse among women with intellectual disability or cognitive disability.* https://www.esafety.gov.au/sites/default/files/2021-09/TFA%20WWICD_accessible.pdf

eSafety. (2021b). *"Can I just share my story?" Experience of technology-facilitated abuse among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women from regional and remote areas.* https://www.esafety.gov.au/sites/default/files/2021-08/TFA%20of%20Aboriginal%20and%20Torres%20Strait%20Islander%20women%20in%20remote%20areas_1.pdf

Eterovic-Soric, B., Choo, K.-K.R., Ashman, H., & Mubarak, S. (2017). Stalking the stalkers – Detecting and deterring stalking behaviours using technology: A review. *Computers & Security*, *70*, 278–289. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cose.2017.06.008

Facebook. (2019). *Detecting non-consensual intimate images and supporting victims.* https://about.fb.com/news/2019/03/detecting-non-consensual-intimate-images/

Fiolet, R., Tarzia, L., Owen, R., Eccles, C., Nicholson, K., Owen, M., Fry, S., Knox, J., & Hegarty, K. (2020). Indigenous perspectives on using technology as a supportive resource when experiencing family violence. *Journal of Technology in Human Services*, *38*, 203–225. https://doi.org/10.1080/15228835.2020.1742272

Flynn, A., Clough, J., & Cooke, T. (2021). Disrupting and preventing deepfake abuse: Exploring criminal law responses to AI facilitated abuse. In A. Powell, A. Flynn, & L. Sugiura (Eds.), *The Palgrave handbook of gendered violence and technology* (pp. 583–602). Palgrave Macmillan.

Flynn, A., & Henry, N. (2021). Image-based sexual abuse: An Australian reflection. *Women & Criminal Justice*, *31*, 313–326. https://doi.org/10.1080/08974454.2019.1646190

Flynn, A., & Henry, N. (2019). Image-based sexual abuse. *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Criminology and Criminal Justice.* Oxford University Press. https://oxfordre.com/criminology/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190264079.001.0001/acrefore-9780190264079-e-534

Flynn, A., Powell, A., Scott, A.J. & Cama, E. (2021). Deepfakes and digitally altered imagery abuse: A cross-country exploration of an emerging form of image-based sexual abuse. *British Journal of Criminology.* Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1093/bjc/azab111

Flynn, A., Powell, A., & Hindes, S. (2021) *Technology-facilitated abuse: A survey of support services stakeholders* (Research report, 02/2021). ANROWS.

Fraser, C., Olsen, E., Lee, K., Southworth, C., & Tucker, S. (2010). The new age of stalking: Technological implications for stalking. *Juvenile and Family Court Journal*, *61*(4), 39–55. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1755-6988.2010.01051.x

Gillett, R. (2020, February 10). Tinder's new safety features won't prevent all types of abuse. *The Conversation.* https://theconversation.com/tinders-new-safety-features-wont-prevent-all-types-of-abuse-131375

Harris, B. A. (2018). Spacelessness, spatiality and intimate partner violence. In J. Maher, S. Walklate, J. McCulloch, & K. Fitz-Gibbon (Eds.), *Intimate partner violence, risk and security: Securing women's lives in a global world* (pp. 52–70). Routledge.

Harris, B., & Woodlock, D. (2019). Digital coercive control: Insights from two landmark domestic violence studies. *British Journal of Criminology, 59*, 530–550.

Heiman, T., & Olenik-Shemesh, D. (2015). Cyberbullying experience and gender differences among adolescents in different educational settings. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, *48*, 146–155. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022219413492855

Henry, N., & Flynn, A. (2019). Image-based sexual abuse: Online distribution channels and illicit communities of support. *Violence Against Women*, *25*(16), 1932–1955. https://doi.org/10/1177/1077801219863881

Henry, N., Flynn, A. & Powell, A. (2018). Policing image-based sexual abuse: Stakeholder perspectives. *Police Practice and Research, 19*(6), 565–581.

Henry, N., Flynn, A., & Powell, A. (2019a). Image-based abuse: Victimisation and perpetration of non-consensual sexual or nude imagery. *Trends and Issues in Crime and Criminal Justice*, 572.

Henry, N., Flynn, A., & Powell, A. (2019b). *Responding to revenge pornography: The scope, nature and impact of Australian criminal laws: A report to the criminology research council*. Australian Institute of Criminology.

Henry, N., Flynn, A., & Powell, A. (2020). Technology-facilitated domestic and sexual violence: A review. *Violence Against Women*, 26, 1828–1854. https://doi.org/10.1177/1077801219875821

Henry, N., McGlynn, C., Flynn, A., Johnson, K., Powell, A., & Scott, A.J. (2021). *Image-based sexual abuse: A study on the causes and consequences of non-consensual nude or sexual imagery*. Routledge.

Henry, N., Vasil, S., Flynn, A., Kellard, K., & Mortreux, C. (2021). Technology-facilitated domestic violence against immigrant and refugee women: A qualitative study. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*. Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1177/08862605211001465

Juvonen, J., & Gross, E.F. (2008). Extending the school grounds? Bullying experiences in cyberspace. *Journal of School Health*, 78, 496–505. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1746-1561.2008.00335.x

Kelly L., Burton S., & Regan L. (1996). Beyond victim or survivor: Sexual violence, identity and feminist theory and practice. In L. Adkins & V. Merchant (Eds.), *Sexualizing the social: Explorations in sociology* (pp. 77–101). Palgrave Macmillan.

Lenhart, A., Ybarra, M., Zickuhr, K., & Price-Feeney, M. (2016). *Online harassment, digital abuse and cyberstalking in America data and society* (Report 11.21.16). Center for Innovative Public Health Research. Retrieved from https://datasociety.net/wp content/uploads/2016/11/Online_Harassment_2016.pdf

Lindsay, M., Booth, J.M., Messing, J.T., & Thaller, J. (2016). Experiences of online harassment among emerging adults: Emotional reactions and the mediating role of fear. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 31, 3174–3195. https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260515584344

Lindsay, M., & Krysik, J. (2012). Online harassment among college students: A replication incorporating new internet trends. *Information, Communication & Society*, 15, 703–719. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2012.674959

Louie, Y.M. (2021). Technology-facilitated domestic abuse and culturally and linguistically diverse women in Victoria, Australia. In J. Bailey, A. Flynn & N. Henry (Eds.), *The Emerald international handbook of technology facilitated violence and abuse* (pp. 447–467). Emerald Publishing Limited.

Lucero, L. (2017). Safe spaces in online places: Social media and LGBTQ youth. *Multicultural Education Review*, 9, 117–128. https://doi.org/10.1080/2005615X.2017.1313482

McGlynn, C., Johnson, K., Rackley, E., Henry, N., Gavey, N., Flynn, A., & Powell, A. (2021). "It's torture for the soul": The harms of image-based sexual abuse. *Social & Legal Studies*, 30, 541–562. https://doi.org/10.1177/0964663920947791

McGlynn, C., Rackley, E., Johnson, K., Henry, N., Flynn, A., Powell, A., Gavey, N., & Scott, A. (2019). *Shattering lives and myths: A report on image-based sexual abuse*. Durham University.

Messing, J., Bagwell-Gray, M., Brown, M.L., Kappas, A., & Durfee, A. (2020). Intersections of stalking and technology-based abuse: Emerging definitions, conceptualization, and measurement. *Journal of Family Violence*, 35, 693–704. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10896-019-00114-7

Morgan, A., & Boxall, H. (2020). *Social isolation, time spent at home, financial stress and domestic violence during the COVID-19 pandemic*. Australian Institute of Criminology. https://doi.org/10/53922/ti04855

Mugway, C., & Jones, K. (2020, April 8). As use of digital platforms surges, we'll need stronger global efforts to protect human rights online. *The Conversation*. https://theconversation.com/as-use-of-digital-platforms-surges-well-need-stronger-global-efforts-to-protect-human-rights-online-135678

*Online Safety Act 2021* (Cth)

Pashang, S., Clarke, J., Khanlou, N., & Degendorfer, K. (2018). Redefining cyber sexual violence against emerging young women: Toward conceptual clarity. In S. Pashang, N. Khanlou & J. Clarke (Eds.), *Today's youth and mental health: Advances in mental health and addiction* (pp. 77–97). Springer.

Pew Research Center. (2021). *The state of online harassment*. https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2021/01/13/the-state-of-online-harassment/

Pfitzner, N., Fitz-Gibbon, K., & True, J. (2020). *Responding to the "shadow pandemic": Practitioner views on the nature of and responses to violence against women in Victoria, Australia during the COVID-19 restrictions*. Monash University.

Powell, A., & Flynn, A. (2020, June 3). Reports of "revenge porn" skyrocketed during lockdown, we must stop blaming victims for it. *The Conversation*. https://theconversation.com/reports-of-revenge-porn-skyrocketed-during-lockdown-we-must-stop-blaming-victims-for-it-139659

Powell, A., Flynn, A. & Hindes, S. (2022) *Technology-facilitated abuse: National survey of Australian adults' experiences*. ANROWS.

Powell, A., & Henry, N. (2015). Embodied harms: Gender, shame, and technology-facilitated sexual violence. *Violence Against Women*, 21(6), 758–779. https://doi.org/10.1177/1077801215576581

Powell, A., & Henry, N. (2018). Policing technology-facilitated sexual violence against adult victims: Police and service sector perspectives. *Policing and Society, 28*, 291–307. https://doi.org/10.1080/10439463.2016.1154964

Powell, A., Henry, N., & Flynn, A. (2018). Image-based sexual abuse. In W. DeKeseredy & M. Dragiewicz (Eds.), *Handbook of critical criminology* (pp. 305–315). Routledge.

Powell, A., Henry, N., Flynn, A., & Scott, A.J. (2019). Image-based sexual abuse: The extent, nature, and predictors of perpetration in a community sample of Australian adults. *Computers in Human Behavior, 92*, 393–402.

Powell, A., Scott, A.J., Flynn, A., & Henry, N. (2020). *Image-based sexual abuse: An international study of victims and perpetrators – A Summary Report*. RMIT University.

Powell, A, Scott, A.J., Flynn, A., & McCook, S. (2022). Perpetration of image-based sexual abuse: Extent, nature and correlates in a multi-country sample. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*. Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1177/08862605211072266

Powell, A., Scott, A.J., & Henry, N. (2020). Digital harassment and abuse: Experiences of sexuality and gender minority adults. *European Journal of Criminology, 17*, 199–223. https://doi.org/10.1177/1477370818788006

Rackley, E., McGlynn, C., Johnson, K., Henry, N., Gavey, N., Flynn, A., & Powell, A. (2021). Seeking justice and redress for victim/survivors of image-based sexual abuse. *Feminist Legal Studies, 29*, 293–322. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10691-021-09460-8

Reed, E., Salazar, M., Behar, A. I., Agah, N., Silverman, J. G., Minnis, A. M., Rusch, M. L. A., & Raj, A. (2019). Cyber sexual harassment: Prevalence and association with substance use, poor mental health, and STI history among sexually active adolescent girls. *Journal of Adolescence, 75*, 53–62. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.adolescence.2019.07.005

Reyns, B. W., Henson, B., & Fisher, B. S. (2012). Stalking in the twilight zone: Extent of cyberstalking victimization and offending among college students. *Deviant Behavior, 33*(1), 1–25.

Ruvalcaba, Y., & Eaton, A. (2020). Nonconsensual pornography among US adults: A sexual scripts framework on victimization, perpetration, and health correlates for women and men. *Psychology of Violence, 10*(1), 68–78. https://doi.org/10.1080/01639625.2010.538364

Scott, A. J., & Gavin, J. (2018). Revenge pornography: The influence of perpetrator–victim sex, observer sex and observer sexting experience on perceptions of seriousness and responsibility. *Journal of Criminal Psychology*, *8*(2), 162–172. https://doi.org/10.1108/JCP-05-2017-0024

Stark, E. (2009). *Coercive control: The entrapment of women in personal life*. Oxford University Press.

Woodlock, D. (2017). The abuse of technology in domestic violence and stalking. *Violence Against Women*, *23*, 584–602. https://doi.org/10.1177/1077801216646277

Woodlock, D., Bentley, K., Schulze, D., Mahoney, N., Chung, D., & Pracilio, A. (2020). *Second National Survey of Technology Abuse and Domestic Violence in Australia*. WESNET.

Woodlock, D., McKenzie, M., Western, D., & Harris, B. (2020). Technology as a weapon in domestic violence: Responding to digital coercive control. *Australian Social Work*. 73, 368–380. https://doi.org/10.1080/0312407X.2019.1607510

Worsley, J.D., Wheatcroft, J.M., Short, E., Corcoran, R. (2017). Victims' voices: Understanding the emotional impact of cyberstalking and individuals' coping responses. *SAGE Open*, 1–17. https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244017710292

# Project advisory group (PAG) members

| Name | Organisation/Affiliation |
| --- | --- |
| Adrian Scott | Goldsmiths, University of London |
| Alex Davis | NSW Department of Communities and Justice |
| Alisha Elliot | Facebook |
| Cynthia Marwood | Victorian Sentencing Advisory Council |
| Jen Hargrave | Women with Disabilities Victoria |
| Jill Maxwell | Sexual Assault Support Services |
| Kara Hinesley | Twitter |
| Karen Bentley | WESNET |
| Louise Simms | Domestic Violence Research Centre Victoria |
| Maria Hach | Multicultural Centre for Women's Health |
| Matthew Parsons | Rainbow Health Victoria |
| Rebecca Johnston-Ryan | Victoria Police |
| Rosetta Lee | Women's Legal Service NSW |
| Rosalie O'Neale | Office of the eSafety Commissioner |
| Sally Goldner | Bisexual Alliance Victoria |
| Samantha Yorke | Google |
| Stephanie Francas | Our Watch |

ANROWS