**Webinar transcript**

Technology-facilitated abuse: Extent, nature and responses in the Australian community
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Presenters:

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* Ela Stewart, Manager Legal Centre and Policy, InTouch Multicultural Centre Against Family Violence
* Carolyn Wilkes, Manager, Women’s Programs, eSafety Commission
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Facilitated by: Padma Raman, ANROWS

**PADMA RAMAN:**
Good afternoon, everyone. And on behalf of ANROWS, I welcome you to today's webinar, technology facilitated abuse, extent nature and responses in the Australian community. I'm Padma Raman, the CEO of ANROWS. I'd like to begin by acknowledging the country upon which we meet today. I'm coming to you from Naarm. Naarm is the traditional lands of the Kulin nation. On behalf of ANROWS, I pay respect to elder’s past, present and emerging. Wherever we are today, we are on unceded Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander land, and I acknowledge and pay respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people participating in today's webinar. In today's webinar, we'll first hear a presentation on the latest evidence about technology facilitated abuse, followed by a panel discussion and a live Q&A. You can send through questions at any time during the course of the discussion, and we'll try and answer as many as we can. The two research reports launched today are available in the handouts section of Go To Webinar.

If you'd like to access closed captions, please click on the link provided in the chat box. The webinar will be recorded and be available on the ANROWS website as soon as possible. You can subscribe to Notepad, our e newsletter to be notified of when it's available. Finally, we have a survey that will pop up as you exit the webinar. If you could take a couple of minutes to complete it, we would really appreciate your feedback. Your responses help us improve our webinar program in the future. This is a confronting topic, and some participants might find it distressing. It is important to take care of yourself while watching this webinar. If you'd like to access support, please contact 1-800 respect. That's on 1-800-737-732 or Lifeline on 131114. The use of technology to perpetrate violence against women is a rapidly growing and serious problem. Technology facilitated abuse comes in various forms, including online sexual harassment, stalking, partner violence and image-based sexual abuse.

Today's webinar launches the two final reports technology facilitated abuse interviews with victims and survivors and perpetrators and technology facilitated abuse. National Survey of Australian Adults Experiences. From a national ANROWS research study that examined the extent, nature and responses to technology facilitated abuse in Australia. The study aimed to understand the lived experiences of victims and survivors of technology facilitated abuse in Australia. This research is one of the first global studies to engage with perpetrators, using qualitative methods to understand their motivations. As such, it will be vital in helping to identify gaps in our knowledge of tech abuse and importantly, in exploring potential solutions to prevent, detect and dissuade tech abuse perpetration. Now on to the panel. I'd like to introduce you to today's presenters, Dr Asher Flynn, Associate Professor of Criminology, Monash University. Carolyn Wilkes, Manager, Women's Programs at the Safety Commission.

Joanne Yates, General Manager, Advocacy and Communications at No to Violence. And Ela Stewart Manager, Legal Centre and Policy InTouch Multicultural Centre Against Family Violence. We were meant to have Dr Anastasia Powell, Associate Professor, Professor, Criminology from the RMIT. And Ashanti Kulasekera Coordinator of Direct Services Team inTouch, Multicultural Centre Against Family Violence. Unfortunately, they both have had to pull out. We would like to acknowledge their contribution in planning this webinar. The report's launching today sought to understand the prevalence of technology facilitated in abuse and what types of tech abuse are used. And understand the motivations for perpetrators and the impact of tech abuse on victims and survivors. Asher, can I invite you to tell us more about your groundbreaking research?

**ASHER FLYNN:**
Things have not, I've got the. Excellent. Can everybody see the slide? I'll take that as a yes, hopefully. Excellent. OK. So, I'd like to begin by acknowledging the Aboriginal people of the Kulin nation, who are the traditional custodians of the unceded lands and which I'm presenting from today. I pay respect to elder’s past, present and emerging and respect to other indigenous Australians, who are joining us today. I'd also like to take this opportunity to very quickly recognize the individuals who generously gave their time to talk with us for this research. We hope that the way we present it gives evidence and respect to your voices. So, I'd like to begin by telling you a bit about what technology facilitated abuses is. And then going through the very large body of research that we have in this short space that I've got. So, technology facilitated abuse is a form of interpersonal violence, abuse or harassment that is perpetrated through the use of digital technologies. So, some of the examples of these that we can talk about monitoring or controlling behaviours.

So, this can be things like keeping track of where the victim survivor is and what they doing, emotional abuse or threats. So, this can include sending putdowns or insulting messages, harassing behaviours. So, this is often involving maintaining unwanted or repetitive contact and sexual and image-based abuse, which also include sexual coercion. So, these can include sending unsolicited or offensive sexual text emails and also the sending of non-consensual, intimate imagery. So, these different types of tech facilitated abuse can occur in a range of different relational contexts, and we will start to unpack some of these across the presentation. It is important to note that they can also overlap. So, a survivor may be experiencing multiple forms of abuse. And they may also be experiencing it in a way concurrently with other forms of abuse beyond technology facilitated. Our project, funded by ANROWS and DSS, sought to unpack the harms, nature and prevalence of technology facilitated abuse within the Australian community.

So, our first report, which we spoke about last year, involved a survey of sector workers in which we identified some of the key issues around training and support available. What I'm going to be speaking to today is stage two and three of the project. So, this involved interviews with 20 victims, survivors of technology facilitated abuse and 10 perpetrators of technology facilitated abuse. As well as a nationally representative survey, the first of its kind in Australia with around four and a half thousand Australians. So, to start, I wanted to talk a little bit about the prevalence of tech facilitated abuse that came up in the survey. So, we found an overall high lifetime prevalence rate. With one in two Australians, both men and women, reporting that they had experienced at least one form of tech facilitated abuse across their lifetime. We had one in three Australian adults experiencing monitoring or controlling behaviours and this was similar as well for experiencing emotional abuse or threats.

And one in four of our respondents reported experiencing harassing behaviours, and about one in four as well experienced sexual or image-based abuse. So, we saw quite high prevalence rates among the Australian community. We found that tech facilitated abuse was occurring in a range of relationship types. So, with approximately one in three TFA victimization experiences reported occurring in the context of either a current or former intimate partner relationship. Others were victimized by a family member about around one in 10. One in 10 were victimized by a friend or acquaintance, and about one in five said that the TFA was actually perpetrated by a stranger or an unknown person. In terms of self-reported perpetration, we found that one in four Australian adults acknowledged that they had engaged in technology facilitated abusive behaviours. And again, you can see a bit of the breakdown on the slide around what those behaviours involved. So, we had no overall difference between men and women.

However, in terms of the rights of offending, but men were more likely than women to report engaging in harassing behaviours as well as to report engaging in sexual or image-based abuse. Australians who had engaged in any lifetime victimization, and sorry any lifetime perpetration also included two in five young and middle aged adults. So, that's 18 to 44 years. And two in five indigenous and First Nations people, one in three LGB plus Australians also reported engaging in perpetration. And we're going to explore a little bit later in the presentation why we might have seen such high rates of particularly victimization, but also perpetration in relation to these minority communities. Almost one in two perpetrators said that the victim survivor that they'd engage in the abusive behaviour against, was either an intimate partner at the time that they committed the abuse or a former intimate partner. This is, again showing this recognition of how technology facilitated abuse is playing out in the context of intimate relationships.

And there was quite a gendered element to this, which really explore shortly as well. There was also an overlap, where we saw around 20% of Australians reported that they were both perpetrators and victims of image-based abuse. So, I wanted to briefly just provide some examples of the types of behaviours in the stories that we heard from our participants, and the ways that they experienced the abuse. So, we heard a range of different stories around how perpetrators enacted harm and how they inevitably sought to commit abuse. Participants reported by low tech ways that they were engaging in abusive behaviours or experiencing abusive behaviours such as threatening behaviour or messages. Three to more sophisticated and high tech behaviours, such as maliciously installing spyware on different devices. One of the most common forms of harassment that both victim survivors and perpetrators described was experiencing or engaging in repetitive, unwanted contact. So, this abuse was often undertaken through multiple channels and platforms, particularly when the perpetrator was blocked on one platform and they would find other ways to contact the victim survivor.

Victim survivors also reported being harassed in ways that did not always involve direct contact from the perpetrator. So, some perpetrators described harassing by posting defamatory comments online about a person. Some did this using their own profiles. Some use these creating fake profiles. And another factor we saw was victim survivors reporting their own profiles being used by perpetrators. Again, I'm going to go through these quickly so we can get to some of the discussion as well. But these are some examples that our victim survivors and perpetrators describe in terms of emotional abuse and threats. So, we saw this in the context of current or previous intimate relationships most commonly. And it was achieved through verbal abusive messages or sending threats to hit the victim or someone that they cared about. Perpetrators also reflected when talking about this type of abuse, that they would escalate their behaviour if the victim survivor did not respond to their repetitive abusive comments.

Perpetrator participants also reported engaging in a range of monitoring and controlling behaviours, primarily in the context of intimate relationships. So, this included monitoring their current or ex-partners, online interactions as well as their in-person movements. By monitoring their technology use and facilitating in-person stalking turning up to where the victim survivor was. We also had examples where people described having their social media accounts hacked. They Google location services and Internet routers hacked, as well as being monitored through CCTV tracking devices, cameras and audiobooks. We also had examples where perpetrators spoke about putting apps on the victim's survivors’ phones, allowing them to monitor their phone usage, including things like location, who they were getting messages from and their social media identities. In the, as I said in the survey, around 24, 25% of people reported having experienced sexual and image-based abuse. In the interviews, we only had one perpetrator, we acknowledge this type of behaviour and two victims, survivors who had experienced it.

For those, they had experienced it in the context of both intimate partner relationships and from strangers. So, one example that we had was in the context of an intimate partner taking an image of the person during a consensual sexual encounter. But taking an image without their consent, and then posting that on numerous websites and using that to engage in threatening behaviour. To change motivations. Now we found a range of different motivations and drivers underpinning that perpetration. But gaining and maintaining control over the perpetrator was the most common identified by both victims and perpetrators. This motivation was prevalent again in these intimate partner relationships, but also in relation to family members, friends and acquaintances. So, perpetrators also primarily identified, feeling angry and upset as their main motivation. That they wanted to control the person or have some kind of permanency and access to their lives again. In the survey, you can see here that perpetrators agreed with a range of motivations and these included around expressing anger, annoyance and wanting to hurt the victim.

It was much less likely in the survey for participants to identify that they were doing it because they thought it was funny or flattering. Briefly to reflect on the harms. Across the survey, we found a range of different harms that people identified, ranging from being annoyed to feeling angry, controlled, humiliated, depressed and afraid. In the interviews, the harms experienced by victim survivors were lasting, complex and wide ranging. They included physical, emotional and mental health concerns, as well as feelings of fear, paranoia and hyper vigilance. There was also a common theme of surveillance, a sense that they could never escape the abuse. The constancy of it was a major concern that came out. There were also a lack of trust in people and technologies in accessing support that was identified by victims, survivors. And the number of mental health and physical health conditions that arose as a result of the tech facilitated abusive behaviours. I want to end by talking briefly about the gendered nature of the harms that we identified.

So, this project sought to deepen our understanding of how gendered tech facilitated abuse is. And by gendered nature, what I mean is the ways in which the extent of differing of abuse with different based on gender or how the impacts might have changed dependent on gender. And overall, a majority of those who experience TFA said that the perpetrator was a male in the most relevant, recent incident. But women were more likely than men to experience tech facilitated abuse from an intimate partner or former partner as compared to men. They were also more likely to experience sexual and image-based abuse than men. And importantly, what we found was that there were big differences in the way they experienced the abuse. So, they experienced it in terms of fearing for their safety, in terms of the abuse being part of a pattern of abuse from the same perpetrator and that they felt controlled by the same perpetrator. So, the abuse was occurring in the context of an ongoing controlling, coercive, controlling relationship.

Gender was not the only factor that emerged in the study. Importantly, we found there was high and clear into sexual dimensions. So, as I mentioned, there were high rates of victimization experienced by gender diverse and sexuality diverse respondents. With almost three in four identifying as being a victim at least once in their lifetime. Indigenous and First Nations people also reported very high rates, with seven in 10 of our respondents experiencing victimization. Victimization rates were also high for those who identified as needing daily assistance or having a disability. Reporting at least three in five, having one victimization experience across their lifetime. These high victimization rates among minority groups can be attributed to the high uptake of digital and online spaces being seen as safe among such groups as a way to express identities and seek help. But it can also lead to really the positive use of online spaces being circumvented by broader structural discrimination and harassment.

So, it's important to look at the rights in that context as well. In terms of our policy implications, I've listed a few things here and we can talk some more about this today. So, I'm not taking up everybody's time. But some of the key factors to come out for us were around looking at ways that we can develop safety by design principles. Like the Safety Commissioner are working on for people developing digital platforms and technologies. But also things like having mechanisms in place to help de link people online. So, this can include through banks, electricity, gas, where we commonly see victim survivors reporting that it was very difficult for them to separate their accounts, or to start a new account without the permission of the previous partner being able to get access to that. So, overall, the results show us that we've got to continue to address the substantial proportion of tech facilitated abuse that's occurring. That it's not a unique form of abuse, but a tactic of abuse that is being used to target victim survivors across a range of different platforms.

And that there really is a long way we need to go to be able to start to address some of these concerns, including recognizing the motivations and the support networks that might be needed. So, thank you, Padma. I'll hand back to you.

**PADMA RAMAN:**
Thank you, Asher. I might just wait for the panellists to turn their cameras on and the microphones. Great. As we've just heard, there are various motive, motivations that underpin technology facilitated abuse amongst perpetrators. With gaining and maintaining control over the victim and survivor as the most prevalent driver. And monitoring and controlling behaviours were the most common type of tech facilitated abuse. So, can I start with how has technology changed forms of abuse, such as stalking, for example? Might start with Joanne.

**JOANNE YATES:**
Thanks very much, Padma. And thank you Asher, for such an important research report. Really, overall, the findings of the report reflect No to Violence’s work in this space. Overall, technology has changed the views because a perpetrator has access to a victim survivor no matter the time of day, the location of the victim, or indeed the location of the perpetrator. Technology in all its forms of surveillance devices and spyware, regular phones, even digital watches, are increasingly and in dire and dangerous levels enable rather increasing and dangerous levels of surveillance of the personal. Both personal devices seem to be very apt at every day. Sorry, everyday tools that personal devices don't seem at all to be threatening, but indeed they are. Some platforms are provided by the service providers, for example, utility companies. And some are even a growing number of organizations whose primary purpose is to monitor individuals under the guise of protecting their own personal safety.

So, the intersection of our lives with ever present and omnipresent technologies that challenge the ability of perpetrators to stalk, harass and control of their partners or former partners. The other thing about that is that spyware is transformative abuse because it removes the physical time frame boundaries that abusers now have to control the victim. And of course, this severely limits the victim survivor’s opportunity to plan for their own safety. Victims also have a very legitimate fear that the perpetrator is already aware of everything that they're doing, undermining their own sense of safety. Seeking help, seeking, of course, may result in an escalation of abuse, of abuse, and often means that women are now self-censoring and avoiding a public presence because they'll be the target of online abuse.

**PADMA RAMAN:**
Great. Ela, can you talk to us about the impact of monitoring and stalking on migrant and refugee women?

**ELA STEWART:**
Yes, thank you. Thank you, Padma. Thank you Asher, for that report. Look, it's not overly different to what people in mainstream communities experience. However, there are added layers that clients from women, from migrant refugee backgrounds in particular can experience when it comes to this are through our service. We see the importance of technology to ensure connection to the community, to networks, and in particular for clients who are here temporarily. Perhaps she's on a temporary visa and they're here and you know, the role that technology and social media plays to keep her connected to her family or friends and networks, I would say, is really important. But then when that is used to abuse the woman, it's kind of(INAUDIBLE) a really big tall. So, what we generally see is as the mainstream communities will see abusive text messages, emails, social media being used to direct abuse. But then there are also other scenarios that we do, we do unfortunately face, such as isolating her ability to connect with family overseas.

Limiting how much she is allowed to speak to her family and friends, sometimes cutting her off completely, monitoring her calls and messages. If she's been speaking to you, whether it's her colleagues or family overseas. Restricting her access to immigration and visa documents, this is sometimes a major issue for our clients. You know, particularly if she's on a spousal visa. So, she's come out here because she's either already married. He's going to be married and he's sponsoring her and he may limit her access so that she doesn't even know exactly what visa she's on. And then there's also some of our clients are threatened. So, you have negative or derogatory or personal information about them sent home to their families and friends overseas, which can have ramifications.

**PADMA RAMAN:**
Thank you Ela. And I guess technology doesn't have any borders or boundaries. So, you could also be getting abused from other countries or from the country of origin.

ELA STEWART:
Absolutely.

**PADMA RAMAN:**
Joanne. How does No to Violence address motivators of technology facilitated abuse with perpetrators? I think you're on mute, Joanne.

**JOANNE YATES:**
Determined not to do that. I beg your pardon?(LAUGH) I guess the first thing Padma, to be really clear is that we should never really underestimate the creativity of men who choose to harm their partners. And this technology is one additional tool in their arsenal in which to do that. Of course, technology makes it far easier for men to coerce, intimidate us, stronger control of (INAUDIBLE) actions. Really informative presentation demonstrated and of course at its most extreme level will include threats of abuse, rape and other expressions of extreme misogyny. All of this is actually about coercive control, of course, and technology facilitates the abuse and does escalate into physical abuse. And as we hear from coronial investigations, it is an omnipresent tool in the lead up to homicide in its most extreme of circumstances. Of course, from our point of view, they must pay repercussions for perpetrators to engage in technology facilitated abuse. We think we need a different response from the way we address their motivation, their controlling behaviours, coercive control generally.

There's a range of different activities that we think would include improved risk identification across the specialist sector. Some of our work, for example, includes arguing for a standard of assessment for technology facilitated abuse that considers a wide variety of perpetrator behaviour. And includes, of course, importantly, victim survivor experiences, specialist training and understanding technology facilitated abuse for specialist men's service providers. And other services and agencies that intersect with perpetrators in attending survivors. We need to encourage technology designers to design safety into their design devices and platforms. To guard against tech abuse and encourage protective and systemic change in the way that technology is both delivered and used. Today's research really demonstrates the importance of an ongoing research agenda to learn more about the context, motivation and outcomes of tech (INAUDIBLE), To enable us to develop appropriate responses. And of course, finally ensuring that the responsibility is absolutely placed on the person using technology as a form of abuse and not the victim survivor who is experiencing it.

**PADMA RAMAN:**
Thanks, Joanne. As you've said, technology is very much part of everyday life and using tools to monitor a person is increasingly normalized as a way of showing care for someone. For example, parents install apps or monitor their children's online activities. These technologies, however, as you've said, can be used in a malicious way to stalk and control someone. How does this occur, and how should tech companies or other essential service organisations like banks or telecommunications organisations address this? Carolyn, I throw to you first from that.

**CAROLYN WILKES:**
OK. Thanks, Padma. I'm just, you know, I'm joining you from unceded, Nunavut country. And I want to express my respect and appreciation for the care taken of this country by many thousands of generations and care that continues today by elders and community. As you say, technology is all around us and is created to meet a need or solve a problem. And it's not usually created with the intention of being used for harm. Issues that arise when the use of the technology is, has unintended consequences or when technology is repurposed over us. And technology has also been embraced across all sectors and into service delivery areas that traditionally would have been face to face. And this is accelerated with COVID and many government organizations and utilities have been thrown into a service delivery model without necessarily time to prepare. And consider the safety side for those experiencing or at risk of to take facilitated the peace. I mean, an example is a banking industry, where technologies provided the ability to quickly and easily make online transactions, transforming banking for many of us.

But it wasn't a welcomed revelation to me that abusive micro-transactions are a theme where people make low value transactions, often as little as one per, $0.01 to abuse and threaten their victims. When we hear from online front for frontline workers that this can happen with the transfer of child support payments. With former partners issuing threats and insults along with money transfers. But with increasing awareness of these types of abuse, eSafety is work for the banking sector. And we found them to be responsive to safety by design principles, which Asher mentioned earlier, and which are ways tech creators can build in safety principles. Rather, the design phase of a piece of technology or tech service. (INAUDIBLE) sector has begun to identify and root out online harassment and other forms of technology facilitated abuse. By implementing proactive online safety measures like artificial intelligence capabilities and algorithms, which work to proactively detect and block harmful or abusive language.

Real time prompts not just when harmful or abusive language is identified. Channels for customers to report instances of harm, which include feedback loops and clear escalation pathways. And community consultation to better understand lived experiences and approaches to online safety that don't perpetuate harms. And like banks, other essential services like electricity and gas companies. They can use the safety boards on principles and tools to consider from the start how they apps and online platforms could be misused by perpetrators. Or how they processes can be designed to make it easier for victim-survivors of domestic and family violence, to navigate their way through changes in accounts without alerting the perpetrator and placing them in danger. And of course, a safety by design and trauma informed approach will also benefit the employees of all these essential services and organizations who are also members of the community at risk of tech facilitated abuse.

**PADMA RAMAN:**
Thank you. Carolyn. Would you have anything to add to that, Asher?

**ASHER FLYNN:**
I think Carolyn's made some really good points there. I guess the only thing I would add is to also think about the ways that say digital platforms. Social media companies can be responding to challenges that are, that are identified. So, for example, and we've seen this, we've seen some really positive initiatives and responses from different companies. One example we've got at the moment,(INAUDIBLE) which had an issue with their reporting policy. So, if you want to report someone for abusive behaviour, you had to still be matched with that person on the dating app to be able to report the bad behaviour. They've recognized that this was a limitation and they've now made changes that you can report someone for abusive behaviour even if you no longer match with them. Because what they were seeing was a range of perpetrated behaviours, where they were being abusive and then are matching quickly so that they couldn't be connected and they couldn't get in trouble or removed from the site. So, it's really great that we're starting to see some of these major platforms and ways that we communicated and socially, engage with each other, taking on board some of the advice.

And particularly working with the SID commissioner to be able to change some of these ideals.

**PADMA RAMAN:**
Thank you. Your study found that tech facilitated abuse is really gendered, perpetuated by men, rather than, more likely to be perpetuated by men rather than women. How does services try to identify if tech facilitated abuse is occurring? Ela I might start with you.

**ELA STEWART:**
Yeah. I think the particularly the specialist family violence sector has gotten quite good at being able to identify it. I think that when a client first comes in, for example, at passive through intake, there will be questions that have kind of been vetted as part of the process where she will be. Do you have your own passwords? Can he access email address? Do you have your own Apple ID? I do like the questions, but then again, the intake worker will say as relevant and where there's a risk and that she will advise the client on what to do. For example, you should probably change the password better. I think those questions are revisited quite frequently, I believe so. There are questions about, you know, has people contacted you online. You know, has been contacting you through social media? You know, have you heard from me? Is that something that, you know, Special Family Violence Services have been doing for a long time, which is asking the client, is it safe to call you on the phone?

Can I message you? What are the safe times to call and to revisit these questions regularly? So, I think that our services have had to just kind of come up with these questions and ways to address the risk in that way. And there's a lot of information that our workers also provide at that point where the client might not recognize that it's actually abuse. That the relentless text messaging or the fact that he's still reaching out when she's asking explicitly not to or that he's checking it, might not have quite, made sense to in the context of the abuse that's yet. So, the workers can really help her to understand as well.

**PADMA RAMAN:**
Great. And Joanne, do you want to talk about that in the context of perpetrators?

**JOANNE YATES:**
Kind of similar sort of response. It's really the practitioners that are on the ongoing violence as men's referral service. On other practitioners who work with men were often referred to the terms of intervention order, if there was one established for the perpetrator as a starting point for the conversation. Often these orders specifically restrict a perpetrator from existence. For example, calling, messaging or emailing a victim survivor. These kind of conversations can also explore the perpetrators understanding of the order's terms and can discuss and explore the risk of potential breaches. This is usually where practitioners can get a better idea of whether a perpetrator is considering using technology and more specifically, using it powerfully. Other feedback from the Men's Referral Service who receive calls from victims, survivors. And our counsellors specifically screen those calls for technology facilitators to be used in the same way that victim survivor services is.

Allergists described do. For example, they might explore whether their partner checks their message history, whether they know how to delete a search history, how to remove location, capability devices and so on. Counsellors are also alert to mentions of social media, as we've had in our conversations so far, and whether perpetrators might repeatedly check somebody's social media. Because those things can be used specifically to stalk, harass and intimidate, either by their own profile or hidden profile, or even misusing their previous partner's profile. Those particular issues are taken very, very seriously because we know that their high risk factor for jealous and obsessive behaviour and all the following risk assessments that they are particularly highly rated. There are some challenges, though, in practitioners who work with men that face when they're trying to identify whether tech facilitated abuse exists. And one of those is to know the perpetrators don't usually intentionally disclose the true nature and extent of the strategies values.

Of course, to engage in such abuse, the perpetrators often seek to deny, to minimize, to make excuses for their behaviour. As Asher has demonstrate that they just want to justify, their own need to monitor their partner's behaviour, they will often report. They just want to know that she's safe. They might report that she's been unfaithful previously. And so they just want to make sure that she's maintaining a faithful disposition in the relationship.

**PADMA RAMAN:**
I did it, too. Which is what's surprising about the, the fact that so many men actually report, self-reported that they were perpetrators of tech facilitated abuse. The research found that victims and survivors were more likely to reach out for support, but many of them didn't really know how to seek that support through eSafety, for example. Since the research was taken, the eSafety Commission has implemented some more pathways for support for victims and survivors. Carolyn, can you tell us about what the commission's implemented?

**CAROLYN WILKES:**
Yeah, sure. So, since January this year, with the commencement of the Online Safety Act, our powers have been bolstered to help protect Australians, a key part of the new legislation as we(INAUDIBLE) speak. And that gives eSafety formal powers to require online service providers to remove online abuse that targets an Australian adult with the intention of causing serious, serious harm. And also under the act, our existing schemes have been strengthened. Our youth focused cyber, cyber bullying scheme can now order online service providers to remove material not just from social media sites. But from all online services where children are spending time, such as online gaming chats, websites, direct messaging platforms and hosting services. And across all our protection schemes, including the image-based abuse and the illegal and restricted content schemes. Online service providers now have 24 hours to respond to a big one, not just for me, safety in most circumstances. And that's down from 48 hours.

And that's given eSafety new powers to gather information, investigate and uncover the identities behind accounts being used to conduct this abuse. For the tech industry, the new Online Safety Act also mandates a series of code regulatory industry codes that will require a broad range of industries to not only proactively remove illegal content, but also restrict children's access to harmful content. And the Online Safety Act also includes the development of basic online safety expectations. Which will set out expectations of services taking responsible steps to ensure Australians can use this safely. And that they have clear mechanisms in place to allow people to report abuse and harmful material. Whether we're reporting schemes, there are thresholds. The serious harm mentioned before mean serious physical harm or serious harms to a person's mental health, whether temporary or permanent. It doesn't include ordinary emotional reactions such as distress, grief, fear or anger. And this is a higher threshold than for children and reflects the balancing of free speech considerations.

And the children require additional protections. Assessment against that threshold frequently requires additional contextual information about the target and the end user because of the relational nature of cyber abuse. Consequently, eSafety will often need to reach out to complainants to seek further information about their complaint, material or removal. Whenever there will be instantaneous reporting to us as we need to establish that threshold and harm will generally be serious when it endangers or could endanger a person's life or otherwise has or could have some form of lasting effect. I will note here that if the circumstances and content of a complaint don't meet the threshold of serious harm, our investigators can and do still provide support and referrals to people. Examples of online material that could reach, likely to reach that threshold of doxing, incitement of violence, threats of violence or volumetric attacks. When a person is tagged or linked to an abusive post which others like share or repost with additional commentary.

From the perspective of women's programs world, we have these new powers. Our key messages are about the need to prioritize women's safety. And you'll said that there are multiple options available to address the abuse. Despite the new and strengthened state reporting schemes and their effectiveness. There are times when women will not feel safe to report and may still be in a relationship by necessity. So, and while reporting to eSafety is one of the available options, others are online resources and the support provided by frontline workers. But as the research researchers made clear, we need to work to raise awareness of eSafety. And we're doing that through relationships with police and educators and departments and other types of services. But that's definitely a focus for us with these findings.

**PADMA RAMAN:**Ela. You said before that, you know, specialist family violence workers are aware of technology facilitated abuse and are capable of looking out for it. But with technology constantly evolving, how do we make sure that we build a capacity or, or that people who work in the sector can keep up with that constantly evolving nature of technology?

**ELA STEWART:**
Absolutely. Look, this is something that does come up for us whilst we are trying to catch up and understand how it looks. I think that there does need to be a more consistent approach across the sector about how to better respond to that. Both from, I guess, you know, definitions, legal and legislative definitions of tech abuse. And then lots of education not only through the community but general sector capacity building as well to really understand what it’s like, how it can evolve. You know, I'm really aware that, you know, as technology is constantly evolving, so is the abused for these purposes. But it is just about that ongoing investment into building the capacity of sector working so that we always understand what it's looking like. Whether it's a new app or whether it's the dating app that's come out, whether it's a new form of communication. I think it's really important that across the sector we're providing this as much (INAUDIBLE) as possible. And that the way that we identify it and do the risk assessments around tech abuse is consistent as well so that we're all on the same page.

**PADMA RAMAN:**
Alright. We're getting some questions in from the audience. Asher, this one's for you. Did the age of perpetrators and victim survivors skew to a younger demographic? Were there any instances of technology facilitated elder abuse? Great question.

**ASHER FLYNN:**
Yeah. Thank you. And thanks for that question. Look, we did say higher rates of victimization among younger cohorts. So, that was sort of 18 to 44 years was where we saw the highest rates according to age demographics. And this is not surprising, given that the digital uptake among younger adults is quite high. And especially in light of COVID, where all our lives turned online. And that became our only way to communicate with each other. The young people, this is already something that was happening and that they were doing. So, that wasn't too surprising for us. In terms of elder abuse, we had much lower rates of people responding, being victims of tech facilitated abuse in the survey. But we did have a couple of interviews with survivors who were older and who were experiencing the abuse. One was in the context of a controlling, intimate partner. The other was in the context of a friend. And the abuse was based on that ability or the disability and the fact that they required daily assistance and they received abuse from a friend who had been a former carer of theirs.

And so they spoke about experiencing that and how difficult it was from this person's perspective because they were very reliant on their digital technologies to be able to communicate with people. And it became a real source of concern and paranoia and just that they didn't want to be on their phone. And every time it went off they thought, is that the person again? So, we did see it in that regard. But unfortunately we weren't able to delve into the survey data in terms of impacts beyond the person's most recent experience to really dissect some of those age demographic issues. Further research needed, I'd say. (LAUGH)

**PADMA RAMAN:**
Yeah. Absolutely. Another good question that's come through, is trolling and cyber bullying so commonplace now that people don't necessarily recognize technological abuse compared to other forms of abuse? What would you say, Asher.

**ASHER FLYNN:**
Yeah. I think that's a really important point that you've raised in that it has become almost a commonplace thing. And again, as I noted in terms of employment in the lockdown, that that was the way we were all engaging online. (INAUDIBLE) And we see an increasing reports of, say, image-based abuse of roles that are online hate and stranger perpetrated abuse was something that we saw an increase of during that time. I think that the fact that our perpetrator participants failed to recognize the harm of their behaviour and what I was doing was a clear indication that we tend to normalize this type of abuse. And I also think given the high rate that we found one in two Australians. It also indicates that there must be a sense of normalization of this type of abuse as well. That so many people can recognize it. But we only had 92% of people reporting the abuse to the police, which indicates either a lack of trust in reporting to the police or also that they didn't think the abuse would be treated seriously.

So, I think that's a really important point and something we need to focus on in terms of education and awareness raising is what the harms and impacts of this type of abuse are because they are significant.

**PADMA RAMAN:**
Yeah. And they're minimized, aren't they. It feels like it's minimized. And maybe that's because you can't actually see the impact of the behaviour. There's a sense of sort of distancing when you're using a platform or using a device.

**ASHER FLYNN:**
Yeah, absolutely. And I mean, one of the perpetrators we spoke with who engaged in abusive behaviour against friends and partners but also against strangers. Would describe engaging in the abuse and then going and having dinner with their kids and not realizing that it was actually that they caused all this harm. And then going back into what happened on the student where they engaged in the abusive behaviour and see what controversy that sparked and things like that. So, I do think there is a real minimizing, as you said, of yeah.

**PADMA RAMAN:**
This could be for any of you. How should tech abuse be addressed through primary prevention? We've talked about awareness raising. Are there other forms of primary prevention that we should be thinking about? Joanne.

**JOANNE YATES:**
A good question. Padma Thank you. And I suppose that there is that like all forms of gender-based violence are the forms of primary prevention, not really about gender equality. That's what we're talking about technologies and other tools that perpetrators use to cause harm to people. Whether they are in an intimate partner relationship or it's actually just described conflict strategies. The ability of men to use that for their own purpose because they wish to control whoever it is, is the focus of their abuse is what that's about. So, really, if we serious in the primary prevention space, we're really talking about gender equality. And we're talking about all of those aspects of a woman's life that keep her. Broaden it out to men and that keep us in caring professions. All of that needs to look at that. We're talking about minimizing the gender pay gap. We're talking about women in leadership positions. We're talking about women in decision making roles. We're talking about access to child care, the distribution of unpaid domestic labour, all of those things.

It's not necessarily about taking a respectful relationship. So, that's in a really important part of ongoing education. But it's not about people in their relationships necessarily. It's about stopping the abuse, and that's about gender equality.

**PADMA RAMAN:**
Correct. Another question here Asher. Did the research examine the impact of TFA on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women compared to non-Aboriginal women? So, we talked about the high rates in Aboriginal communities, but was there a correlation with Aboriginal women?

**ASHER FLYNN:**
Yes, there was. And I'm sorry we didn't get a chance to report on everything within this, within this seminar. Yes, there was. I am right. So, much so, seven in 10 of our indigenous and First Nation respondents reported experiencing victimization. And we did see higher rates of that when we broke it down to look at Indigenous women versus men, there were women identified as experiencing victimization at least once in their lifetime. And I think the work of (UNKNOWN) in this space is really important to kind of start to look and write down some of the factors that might be contributing to that. And I mean, (UNKNOWN) almost talks a lot about the idea of shared digital technologies between indigenous communities. And also this idea that it's meant to be that Indigenous communities can use online spaces as a positive platform. But then at the same time, because it's higher uptake, it becomes a source of respite and abuse. So, it is something that I think and that's one of the major findings of our research and report.

Is that there does need to be a really intersectional focus on any type of response and research. To take facilitated abuse that we need to be looking at things through gendered lens, but also intersectionality lens as well. So, thank you for the question.

**PADMA RAMAN:**You didn't break it down in terms of migrant and refugee communities. Did we have that data?

**ASHER FLYNN:**
No. We had some data on people who, where English wasn't their first language at home. In the report, I don't have the stats specific to that on me right now, but that they in the report did have a look at that. Again, we had to base the survey data on their most recent experience of tech facilitated abuse. But yes, there is some reports of that. And they were higher rates again for people who didn't speak English as a first language at home compared to those who didn't.

**PADMA RAMAN:**
Interesting. Now, the question that's come through for Asha and Joanne. Was there a difference between the amounts of anonymous technology facilitated abuse and abuse from an identifiable perpetrator? Did perpetrators shift between identifiable and de-identified forms or did they stick mostly to one type? That's a really good question. Asher.

**ASHER FLYNN:**
Yeah, excellent question. So, perpetrators in our study, most prominently they identified as perpetrating against. So, it was around 48% identified as perpetrating against a partner or intimate partner. In terms of against a stranger I believe it was one in 10, say that they perpetrated against a stranger. For (INAUDIBLE) the victimization again we had very high rates of intimate partner was around 38%, said it was an intimate or former partner and it was very low rates. Again, perhaps less than one in 10 who were penetrated experienced it by a stranger. What we did find in the interviews, though, when we were able to delve into some of the stories. Is the ways that even known perpetrators would hide their identity to be able to commit the abuse. So, when they got locks on the platform or their phone number got blocked, they would create fake profiles to be able to follow and harass the victims on social media. They would lock their phone numbers and call on private. And they would create new email addresses and contact the victim three different ways, such as through their work accounts or through their.

For one example, the woman was the social media persons, the hedgehog's booth, and so they contacted her through their accounts. Again, through hiding their identities, so a real mix of both. But the underpinnings back to when we were talking about a that partner or a former intimate partner context was the perpetrator wanted the survivor to know it was them even when they were masking the identity. The masking the identity was to protect them from police intervention.

**PADMA RAMAN:**
It's fascinating. There's a question on the work force capacity building and how do we actually keep in front of emerging technologies. But maybe, Carolyn, you could speak to that from the eSafety commissioner's perspective.

**CAROLYN WILKES:**
Definitely. Yeah. So, as many people may not know, eSafety provides training for frontline workers in tech facilitated abuse, both face to face webinars, virtual training. And we also have an online learning system for people who can't do it face to face. It's a self-paced system. And that, that training has been developed in partnership with experts in the field of domestic and family violence. It's continually updated and improved with contact with, with frontline services. And those frontline services, they include domestic and family violence, support services, police, domestic violence liaison officers within the police. But we try to get as many workforces as we can involve that are having immediate contact with victims, survivors of domestic and family violence. Because we know that, you know, to be a trusted person that someone might reach out to, helpful with or help with. And so we want to make sure as many people as possible can access our training and understand both what tech facilitated abuse is.

And how to respond in ways that keep women and other victims of domestic and family violence and tech facilitated abuse safe. So, that information about all of that training is available and the other ways that we keep up to date is internally. We have our industry and our investigations areas of eSafety. So, we make sure we're touching base with them regularly to find out what, what's the latest information that they have on, on the ways that technology is being misused. And we can incorporate that within our training and help those frontline workers be as responsive as possible.

**PADMA RAMAN:**
Thank you, Carolyn. And awareness raising clearly was a central, central sort of lesson from this important research. We've come to the end of our Q&A session. But I'd just like to say to Asher, this is just such amazing research. And I think that the fact that you've had so much interest in it, speaks to how important the research is. But can I thank you all for this discussion today. We had so many more questions, a really engaged audience, and I'm sorry we couldn't get to all of them. But thank you and thank you to the audience for your participation. So, as I said before, the webinar recording will be available on the ANROWS website soon for on demand viewing. Please tell all your colleagues as you exit the webinar. A short feedback survey will open in a new window. We'd really appreciate your feedback and for any researchers tuning in today. If you're working on projects addressing violence against women. Please include your projects on our register of active research on ANROWS website.

It's centralized and publicly available and it's, it's a great database of current work on domestic and family violence. So, thank you again to the panellists and to our audience. I'm Padma Raman. On behalf of ANROWS, bye for now.