

TECHNOLOGY AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

In a recent survey of victim services providers, 97% indicated that victims who seek their services were being harassed, monitored, or threatened by perpetrators misusing technology.ⁱ Understanding the impact of abusers' misuse of technology, the types of technology misused, and the ways in which technology can be used to assist survivors is therefore crucial to providing survivor support.

While harassment, threats, and intimidation are not new tactics in the world of stalking, domestic, and sexual violence, abusers are increasingly using technology to monitor, harass, threaten, intimidate, impersonate, and stalk their victims, making it difficult for survivors to find physical safety and eroding their sense of safety. In addition, it is not uncommon for abusers to misuse multiple technologies at once, while also using non-technological abusive tactics.

YWCA recognizes that not all types of violence and abuse are recognized or responded to equally. Survivors of some types of abuse, particularly newer forms of abuse using ever-changing technology, face difficulties in gaining access to justice where legal systems have not yet caught up to technological shifts. As the largest network of domestic and sexual violence service providers in the country, YWCA is dedicated to promoting women's health and safety through the provision of direct services, advocacy, and issue education.

FACTS

- Most tech-related gender-based violence is perpetrated by someone known to the victim, either as an intimate partner or as someone belonging to the survivor's immediate social circle.ⁱⁱ
- Technology-related gender-based violence can lead to emotional or psychological harm, harm to reputation, physical or sexual harm, invasion of privacy, loss of identity, limitation of mobility, censorship, and loss of property.ⁱⁱⁱ
- More than one in four stalking survivors report that some form of cyberstalking was used to stalk them; electronic monitoring of some kind is used to stalk 1 out of every 13 stalking survivors.^{iv}
- While survivors of both non-technological abuse tactics and technology-related violence engage in many of the same protective behaviors, survivors who experience technology-based stalking are more likely to take time off from work; change or quit their job or school; avoid relatives, friends, or holiday celebrations; or change their email address when compared to other survivors. They also experience greater fear over time.^v
- The financial costs associated with responding to technology-based victimization, which can include legal fees, property damage, child care costs, moving expenses, changing a phone number or email account, credit monitoring, are much higher for victims of technology-

related abuse, with an average dollar value of more than \$1,200 compared to \$500 for survivors of non-technological abuse.^{vi}

- Though abusers most frequently misuse social media accounts, text messaging, computers, emails, and online accounts (such as phone and bank accounts) to harm victims,^{vii} survivors can face multiple forms of technology-based abuse, depending upon the form of technology the abuser decides to target.^{viii} For instance:
 - Phone
 - Cell Phones: Abusers often misuse cell phones to track survivors' cell phone activity and to identify their locations through the cell phone's GPS.
 - Text Messaging: Websites permit perpetrators to falsify phone numbers, and many cell phone providers allow text messages to be sent via the internet where cell phone numbers can be faked, allowing multiple harassing and/or threatening messages to be sent.
 - Voice Messages: Abusers and stalkers use various methods to leave harassing and threatening messages, including prepaid phone cards or "pay-as-you-go" cell phones to call survivors without identifying themselves through caller ID.
 - Caller ID: Services exist that allow abusers to "spoof" (fake) the phone numbers that are displayed on a caller ID, and even allow abusers to record calls and to fake their voices.
 - Location and Surveillance
 - Global Position Systems (GPS): Abusers are increasingly misusing GPS systems to track the real-time precise physical location of survivors. Some vehicles come with GPS systems pre-installed, which allow abusers to monitor a survivor's location and to entirely control the survivor's vehicle.
 - Hidden Cameras: Small, wireless cameras can now be placed or purchased pre-installed in a variety of common household items, including smoke detectors, children's toys, and lamps, many of which can be activated remotely.
 - Computer, Email, and Social Media
 - Computer Monitoring Software: Abusers misuse spyware, often marketed for monitoring children's usage, to track survivor's computer activity, including emails, instant messages, websites, keystrokes, etc., without the survivor's knowledge.
 - Email: Anonymous email services allow abusers to send harassing and/or threatening messages to survivors, making it more difficult, though not impossible to identify them and hold them accountable.
 - Social Media: Abusers frequently misuse social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, Snapchat, etc., to monitor and harass survivors.
 - Internet-of-Things / Smart Home Devices
 - Smart home devices such as locks, thermostats, lights, security cameras, doorbells, and speakers: abusers are misusing and exploiting smart-home

technology to harass, stalk, monitor, and control their victims.^{ix}

- Most smart-home technology is installed by men, and many women do not have applications to control smart home devices installed on their phones, making abuse easier to perpetrate, even once abusers leave the property.^x

HOW ADVOCATES AND NONPROFITS CAN HELP

- Believe survivors when they communicate their experiences with technology and gender-based violence. Encourage survivors to trust their instincts.
- Help survivors develop a [technology safety plan](#).
- Help survivors to [document](#) what the abuser is doing and what the victim is experiencing so that a record of the abusive incidents and behaviors is established. If the survivor chooses to engage with law enforcement, this documentation can be used to help begin an investigation.
- Encourage survivors, for whom it is safe to do so, to download the [Tech Safety App](#) to their mobile device.
- Ensure your organization follows all appropriate confidentiality [protocols](#) to protect survivor safety and privacy.
- Review your [website](#) for technology safety features, such as adding a safety alert header, removing email addresses, and making your website more accessible.
- Review [best practices](#) when offering services to survivors through technology.
- Ensure that any [shelter location](#) remains confidential.

ⁱ National Network to End Domestic Violence. (2014). "How Abusers Misuse. Technology. Retrieved from

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ⁱⁱ Association for Progressive Communications. (June 2015). Technology-Related Violence Against Women – A Briefing Paper. Retrieved 30 August 2017, from http://www.apc.org/sites/default/files/HRC%2029%20VAW%20a%20briefing%20paper_FINAL_June%202015.pdf

ⁱⁱⁱ Association for Progressive Communications. (June 2015). Technology-Related Violence Against Women – A Briefing Paper. Retrieved 30 August 2017, from http://www.apc.org/sites/default/files/HRC%2029%20VAW%20a%20briefing%20paper_FINAL_June%202015.pdf.

^{iv} "Technology and Domestic Violence. Retrieved from <http://www.new-hope.org/technology-and-domestic-violence/>.

^v Nobles, M., Reynolds, B., Fox, K., and Fisher, B. (13 September 2012). "Protection Against Pursuit: A Conceptual and Empirical Comparison of Cyberstalking and Stalking Victimization Among a National Sample." *Justice Quarterly* 31 (6): 986-1014.

^{vi} Id.

^{vii} National Network to End Domestic Violence. (2014). "How Abusers Misuse. Technology. Retrieved from

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^{viii} Bowker, Art. (2012). "A Victim Centered Approach to Supervising Internet Harassment Offenders." *Perspectives*. Retrieved from http://www.appa-net.org/eweb/docs/appa/pubs/Perspectives_2012_Spotlight.pdf.

^{ix} Finegas, Jon. "Domestic Abusers are Exploiting Smart Home Devices." Referred from https://www.huffpost.com/entry/domestic-abusers-are-exploiting-smart-home-devices_n_5b324f53e4b0b5e692f190d3?guccounter=1&guce.

^x Bowles, Nellie. (June 23, 2018). "Thermostats, Locks and Lights: Digital Tools of Domestic Abuse." Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/23/technology/smart-home-devices-domestic-abuse.html>.