'Can I just share my story?'

Experiences of technology-facilitated abuse among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women from regional and remote areas

Full Report

August 2021

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This is an edited version of a report commissioned by eSafety in 2020 from Australian National University researchers at the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research. We would like to thank the study participants and especially the survivors and professionals who gave their time to contribute to a greater understanding of technology-facilitated abuse of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in regional and remote areas. Your knowledge makes a difference.

We would like to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the lands on which we gathered, collected, and reported this research. We acknowledge that this research was conducted on stolen land and that sovereignty was never ceded. We would like to acknowledge and pay our respect to their Elders past, present and emerging. We recognise their leadership, strength, and resilience in trying to prevent technology-facilitated abuse. We acknowledge the impacts of ongoing colonisation and the ways this continues to drive violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, families, and communities. We commit to truth-telling and it is our hope that this research can be of benefit to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

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eSafety recognises the details reported here represent lived experiences. We acknowledge the damaging effects of technology-facilitated abuse on families and communities. This report discusses issues that some people may find distressing and it includes abusive language.

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1800Respect   1800 737 732

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1. Introduction

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women are disproportionately affected by violence in all its forms, and are overrepresented as domestic, family, and sexual violence victims (The Northern Territory Government, 2018). They are 35 times more likely to be hospitalised as a result of violence than non-Indigenous women and they report three times as many incidents of sexual violence compared to non-Indigenous women (Olsen & Lovett, 2016, p. 13). Indigenous women are also far more likely to be killed due to assault than non-Indigenous women (Our Watch, 2016). They are also hospitalised due to family violence at three times the rate of Indigenous males (Our Watch, 2018).

With the increasing use of electronic and communication technology and internet connectivity in regional and remote areas, technology-facilitated abuse (TFA) is believed to be becoming more widespread yet the extent of it in regional and remote areas remains relatively unexplored. TFA refers to abusive behaviour using phones and other devices, as well as social media and online accounts.

There are four main types of technology-facilitated abusive behaviours: harassment, stalking, impersonation, and threats (Office of the eSafety Commissioner, 2019). TFA covers the sharing of sexual images without consent; the use of GPS technology to monitor a person's location and movement; the creation of fake social media accounts (such as on Facebook or Instagram) to impersonate and humiliate a person; and threatening or abusive messages.

This research report looks into the experiences of TFA among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in remote and regional locations, with a particular focus on different types of experiences, cultural sensitivities which surround this abuse, and how women can best be supported. The findings of this research aim to inform programmatic and policy responses to address and prevent TFA in ways that are culturally safe and appropriate.

1.1 Executive summary

For many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women living in remote and regional areas, the internet and mobile phones are a lifeline of connection and support. However, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women are disproportionately more likely to be targets of online abuse, and they experience online abuse at higher levels and in different ways to other sectors of the Australian population.

In 2019 eSafety commissioned research on the experiences and impacts of technology-facilitated abuse (TFA) involving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women living in remote and regional areas. The research was conducted in an effort to better understand the specific experiences of TFA by a subset of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population. This research will inform eSafety programs, policy and messaging responses, particularly initiatives for frontline workers, to prevent and reduce the harm that TFA does to Indigenous women living in regional and remote Australia.

This report was produced by The Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research at the Australian National University. The research team used qualitative methods to collect, analyse and report on information provided by frontline workers and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women living in three different indicative regional and remote locations in Australia: Central Australia, remote Western Australia and regional NSW. The report addresses a critical gap in research in understanding the specific issues encountered by women in remote and regional areas that had been identified by previous eSafety research work on 'Online safety for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women living in urban areas' (eSafety, 2019).

This research found that the experiences of Indigenous women living in remote and regional areas are widespread and diverse but share common risks when experiencing technology-facilitated abuse. The research found that the impacts of TFA on women who participated in the study were serious and long lasting. It also identified a general lack of awareness about TFA among both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and frontline workers in the three regions. This highlighted how raising awareness of TFA is a critical and important avenue to prevention and providing safe avenues for reporting.

This report gives voice to a vulnerable sector of the population and highlights the critical need to listen to these voices, in order to begin to deal with the problem of technology-facilitated abuse experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women living in regional and remote areas. It also recognises that while the perpetrators of TFA are not necessarily Indigenous themselves, the solutions needed to respond to this form of abuse should consider the unique challenges many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women face, including disproportionate rates of poverty, violence, abuse and imprisonment. The safety of women and children should also be at the centre of all responses and initiatives designed to reduce the harm caused by TFA.

1.2 Key research aims

- To listen to the stories of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women who live in regional and remote areas and who have experienced TFA.

- To gain insight into specific situations, issues and cultural requirements Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women who live in regional and remote areas face in relation to TFA.

- To understand the impact of TFA on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women who live in regional and remote areas.

- To understand the level of knowledge of online safety, reporting TFA and safe use of devices by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in regional and remote communities.

- To understand more about these women's preferred pathways to seek assistance or take action and trusted sources of help and support.

- To understand cultural sensitivities that need to be considered in relation to the type of support and information provided.

- To explore the perspectives of frontline workers working with Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women from regional and remote areas who have experienced TFA.

- To understand how to enhance early intervention and prevention approaches in existing eSafety programs.

1.3 Key findings

- This research found that women had diverse experiences of TFA which was further complicated by living in regional and remote contexts.

Types and forms of technology-facilitated abuse:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women most commonly experienced TFA from a current or former male partner within the context of intimate partner violence.

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women experienced different forms of TFA, and the most commonly reported behaviours were threats, harassment, monitoring and stalking, followed by impersonation.

- Different forms of violence were associated with different technology-facilitated abusive behaviours, for example, impersonation was commonly linked with lateral violence[1] perpetrated by women, whilst monitoring was most commonly linked with intimate partner violence.

- The tools and tactics used to perpetrate TFA against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women were many and varied, but the most commonly reported vehicles were messaging, phone calls, fake social media accounts, and monitoring apps or platforms.

- TFA against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women is primarily driven by jealousy and gender inequality.

- TFA perpetrated by women against other women was often driven by jealousy and usually in response to perceived sexual misconduct with a man.

- There were also differing experiences of TFA across age groups. Those in the younger age groups were more likely to experience imaged-based and monitoring types of abuse whereas Elders were more likely to experience technology-facilitated financial abuse.

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[1] 'Lateral violence' or 'horizontal violence' refers to the violence within communities and perpetrated by oppressed peoples against one another (Priday, Gargett, & Kiss, 2011). 'Lateral violence' is the term used by the participants in this research to refer to TFA and violence by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women against other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women. The use of the term 'lateral violence' in this report is therefore informed by the research participants and is intended to distinguish this type of violence from TFA perpetrated by men against women, as well as from family and community violence.

Risk factors

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in remote and regional areas are vulnerable to technology-facilitated abuse because of a lack of education around identifying TFA, and, particularly in remote areas, a lack of education about digital literacy and accessible services.

- Close social networks and kinship structures can be sources of strengths to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women experiencing TFA, but they can also inadvertently make it easier for the perpetrator to gather information and locate women, increasing women's vulnerability to violence from multiple abusers.

Benefits of technology

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women receive a lot of benefits from using technology, including safety and the ability to stay connected to family and friends.

- Technologies, particularly phones, are reported to be critical to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women's safety, and as a result, were often withheld or damaged by their abusers.

Response and prevention

- Awareness of TFA and women's rights and education on digital literacy and online safety is pivotal to preventing TFA of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women.

- To minimise the impacts of TFA, and to support women experiencing abuse, there needs to be culturally appropriate and accessible services, good relationships between the community and services and police, and there needs to be clear and consistent legislation.

- Social media and technology companies must have some accountability and play a role in preventing online abuse.

- Banks and financial services must be involved in addressing the financial aspects of TFA.

- TFA must be taken seriously by the criminal justice system and addressed prior to the abuse escalating into physical violence.

2. Key findings from interviews with frontline services

Interviews with frontline staff from a diverse range of frontline services were used to explore their perspectives of working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women from regional and remote areas who have experienced TFA. These interviews discussed referral pathways and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women's preferred ways of seeking help and support. Table 1 gives a breakdown of five key themes that emerged from interviews with frontline workers, which will then be elaborated below.

Table 1. Key themes to emerge from interviews with frontline services in regional and remote areas.

Key theme	Definitions
Tools and tactics of abusers	The tools and tactics abusers use to perpetrate technology-facilitated abuse (TFA) against women.
Support	The different types of help and support that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women experiencing TFA access, including their reporting of this abuse and their engagement in the criminal justice system.
Risk and protective factors	The different factors that make Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in regional and remote areas vulnerable to experiencing TFA, as well as those factors which prevent women from experiencing this abuse or minimising its impacts.
Drivers of technology-facilitated abuse	The underlying causes and drivers of TFA against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women.
Uses of technology	The ways that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and communities make use of technology in their lives, and how these strengths can be built upon to prevent TFA.

2.1 Tools and tactics

The frontline workers who participated in this study reported a myriad of technology-facilitated abusive behaviours that abusers use to exert control over and abuse their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander female clients. The most commonly reported ways that this abuse was perpetrated was through messages, then phone calls, damaging phones, and the use of fake accounts. Many frontline workers reported that individual women were subjected to multiple forms of abuse using a number of different tools and platforms.

> 'We get a lot of reports from women who've experienced other women sharing photos of them or making fake accounts. Threatening over Facebook. We've had women report that other women have created a profile and messaged all their family, from that fake profile and kind of saying derogatory things about other community members to really breed that conflict. And then there will just be general kind of criticisms posted over Facebook so general sort of abuse, which might not be threats, but that might be just derogatory comments relating to another woman.'
> BNK01

Messages

In many of the stories told by frontline workers, the abuse would begin with messages and then escalate over time, involving multiple forms of technology-facilitated abusive behaviours.

> 'So, I have a case study that, all of that is wrapped into one. The woman ended the relationship. And the person who used violence then moved to another jurisdiction. Over a period of four months, from the time that he left and until four months later, (he) would constantly call and send her abusive text messages [of a] derogatory nature, demeaning. All of the colourful language under the sun. She didn't respond to any of them, would block [him].
>
> And then he would contact other family members or ex partners ... to find out if she was back together with them, or... where she was living, what she was doing, who she was going out with. So, gathering information about her. And then ... after a period of about four months,

he found out she was in a relationship with someone else. And then his streams of abusive messages became a lot more constant.

And then he would use the messages to threaten to come back to [town] to find her - [so he was making] threats to harm. And then, because ... she wasn't responding, he then posted intimate images of her to his own Facebook account. She had already blocked him off social media so she didn't see it herself. It was her daughter that alerted her to the fact that they were on his Facebook ... while the photos were taken with her consent, in an intimate setting, she obviously hadn't consented to them being shared. And then he sent intimate images, not the same ones but different ones, to her 18 year old daughter - directly to her phone number. And then he threatened to post more pictures online if she didn't send him belongings that he thought she still had, which she didn't. So he was then sort of using [the] images as a way to blackmail her essentially.

And yet, being in another jurisdiction, it meant ... police [had] to speak to police in that jurisdiction and nothing really came from that in a criminal prosecution sense. It ended with us assisting to have a five year [non-contact domestic violence intervention order] issued against him for her protection and included a social media clause specific to not posting online, anything to do with her.'
WOT12

Frontline workers reported that women were bombarded with texts, often from multiple phone numbers as abusers would message the woman from the phones of friends and family.

'So we've had cases of up to 520 messages in four days ... between two parties, so we [police] ... usually charge on a stalking [charge], or something like that because it's such an extensive form of harassment.'
CCR23

Text messages, very abusive or very inappropriate [like] sending pictures of body parts and phone calls, threats, death threats and getting other family members to ring, and even to the point where [the abuser would ask] "can I borrow your phone" and then they just take off [and have stolen the phone].'
FW005

Some Aboriginal women who participated in this research as frontline workers also reported their own experiences of TFA and reported the inventive ways abusers would find to continue to message the woman.

> 'He had my bank details and he would send money from my account to his account with the caption "Ring me". When I didn't want to ring him or [when] I [had] blocked him on [social media and his phone number] he got into my bank account and sent me emails because I blocked his number, blocked his Facebook. But then he would send money from his account, he would [send] like one cent, with a message "Ring me now" or something like that. He'd kind of find little ways to get my attention.' FW002

Frontline workers also commonly reported that messages were used to threaten the women they worked with, this includes threats to harm and threats to kill.

> 'Posting threatening messages, sometimes there's images as well where they might be holding a knife...with a message under that says... "I'm going to stab you when I see you next"... But then there's ones [messages] where they'll just literally [say]... "I'm gonna kill you".' CCR23

Phone calls

Frontline workers also reported that phone calls were used to harass and threaten Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women. Once more, phone calls often came from multiple phone numbers, as people in remote settings often share phones. Abusers would borrow phones from friends and family members to repeatedly call the woman, and often, abusers would call from private numbers leading to many women refusing to answer calls from private numbers. Some frontline workers reported this as an issue because many support services have private numbers for safety reasons, which made it more difficult for them to reach and support the woman. Similarly, in response to the harassing phone calls and messages, many women would change their phone number. However, the abuser's attention would then shift to family members as they harassed them to gather information about the woman so that they could continue their abuse. This meant that changing numbers was only a temporary solution as the abuser was often able to find their number

again and continue the abuse. One frontline worker reported that women changed their phone numbers so many times in response to the abuse that they had up to twenty phone numbers listed for the women they supported – and none of them would work.

> 'The constant phone calls and harassment is probably the biggest issue. And the thing that you see the most here in my job, [the women will show us their phones] and it's got like 20 missed calls on it from various numbers. And then she blocks his number. And then he calls from a private number or calls from a different number.'
> BR01

Frontline workers also reported noticing a difference between the experiences of older versus younger Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women. They reported that older women were more likely to experience technology-facilitated abusive behaviours via phone calls, whilst the younger generations experienced it via text messaging and social media.

> 'The older cohorts, so middle age [or] older cohort, mostly, [TFA] comes in the form of... the ability to perform or to make a phone call. So, making the phone calls, talking to one another or not talking or abusing one another down the phone. Whereas for young people [TFA] will [usually be through] texting. Actually, even for the middle aged women [texting is used to perpetrate TFA too]. Texting is a big feature. [Whereas for] young people you'll find that [TFA is] more on Facebook or social media platforms, where the abuse occurs.'
> FW001

Damaging phones

Frontline workers also reported that abusers would withhold women's phones or damage women's phones. Phones, although sometimes used to facilitate abuse, were also seen as being critical to women's safety in regional and remote areas. Phones were often reported as being a central element to the safety planning frontline workers conducted with the women they worked with. Phones can be an important safety device because they offer a way to contact support services, report to police, and call for help. Frontline workers reported that abusers would often damage phones to prevent the woman from reporting or accessing help. Frontline workers also reported that abusers would often

withhold women's phones so that they could not contact friends and family to further isolate and control them.

> 'So they use all the credit and they don't bring the phone back for these ladies. [The] majority of the time, the women come in with absolutely nothing, or they [say] "look at this", and [the phone is] completely smashed. I don't often see the ladies here with computers but certainly [I see the abusers smashing] mobile phones, because it is one way of the perpetrator controlling them. It's like the lifeline, the phone, and [the abuser has] smashed that and [the women have] got nothing now.'
> FW005

Fake accounts

Frontline workers also reported the extensive use of fake social media accounts to harass, threaten and humiliate women. These fake accounts were very rarely used to impersonate women experiencing technology-facilitated abuse (TFA), but in these instances, abusers were often able to access the woman's accounts through shared mobile devices, and then would send messages to other community members from their account, or post comments and images onto their social media pages. The objective here was to humiliate the woman as well as to potentially incite violence against her. The use of impersonation was often within the context of lateral violence between women.

> '[Fake social media accounts were used to] message and share things online that would put that person in a difficult situation like saying violent things about another community member. Because people thought it was her saying these things and they didn't realise it was coming from a fake account, [that caused backlash against the woman]. [They would also use fake accounts to share] sexualised photos and message family members and [say] derogatory things to family members ... I think [the use of fake accounts for TFA is] used as an isolation strategy to put people offside.'
> BNK01

More often, frontline workers reported the use of fake social media accounts being used to impersonate the woman's friends and family members, or the construction of fake identities (also known as catfishing) to befriend the

woman. These fake accounts were then used to gather information about the woman so that they could continue their abuse. Fake accounts were also used to post personal images of the woman without her consent, as well as to send harassing and threatening messages to the woman.

> 'Her phone was just filled with abusive calls, and that sort of thing. But she was also smart, she kept them. There was a [intervention order] on this person, but he also went onto Facebook and impersonated other males. I actually got from the police screenshots of the things that he was posting to her. Both texting and he befriended her under a different name and started sex texting, got her phone number started sex texting her. And this went on for a while … before she actually clicked that it was her ex-partner.'
> FW003
>
> You know, he shared personal images of her that she took with him. But cropped himself out of it and post it all over social media … He even made a fake account for a porn site, and [through] that porn site, gave all these random men her mum's address where she was staying … and her phone number, because she had all these random people ring her and turn up to her mum's house, because of what he had done [making a fake account on a porn site].'
> CN03

2.2 Support

Frontline workers reported that the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women they worked with accessed many different sources of support, but primarily this was informal support from friends and family members. Typically, women only sought support from services once the abuse had escalated, often only seeking help once the violence had become physical. Frontline workers reported that this may be because women did not know their rights or could not identify technology-facilitated abuse (TFA) as abuse or know that it was illegal. Added to this were the complex relationships involved in the abuse, often intimate partners, but also often other family and community members.

'The technology-facilitated abuse is just like any other form of abuse [and] should be taken as seriously as any other form. And for those women [experiencing TFA, if] they've got a phone, they can ring support agencies, they can ring people to talk to, they can access shelters or refuges, they can ring the police so that it makes it easier for them to get in touch with other people. The other thing that I've seen people do is turn to Facebook again to broadcast [the TFA they are experiencing]. So the problem is broadcasted on Facebook, and that could be good or bad. They get the support from family members but ... it could worsen the situation.'
FW001

Frontline workers also reported that regional and remote contexts made it much more difficult for women to access help and support. This was due to the lack of services available, but also other contextual complexities such as extreme remoteness, long travel distances and times, and lack of reliable phone network coverage. Particularly where long travel times to access support were concerned, frontline workers noted that it may mean removing women from their cultural ties and community support networks. There was also the perception that physical violence was more extreme in remote and regional areas, meaning that police took TFA less seriously in these locations.

'You know, [town in regional NSW] is big and we've got great services here, but there's no way we have more services here than Sydney and Melbourne and [other] urban areas do. Even [regional town in NSW], where I'm from, they got nothing, nothing. They have to travel to [other town in regional NSW] to get that support. Well technology could be handy there – they can ring for assistance and that sort of stuff but there's no way in the world that regional areas have more support like [urban areas do]. That's where it differs because they've got more support in urban areas.'
CN03

'And that wouldn't happen in the city, because you go to the police and you say "I've got an issue and you need to deal with this" and the police go "Okay right, Fair enough. This is a lot". You know there's services and there's a lot more police officers and whatever else in an urban area. When you're in [remote location in WA] and everybody's having a big [physical fight], and you're sitting here talking about being cyberbullied,

they're gonna be like "sorry we're gonna deal with this [physical fight] here, you are going to need to sort that [TFA] out yourself". So I guess that's another thing that makes women vulnerable in in remote areas. The other thing, also, is this cultural obligation stuff as well … There is situations and relationships where people can't say or do things.'
FW002

When Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women did access support services, this differed between the regional and remote locations. In extremely remote locations, frontline workers reported that women would most often seek help and support from the health clinic or from youth services/workers as these were the only services available. In regional areas, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women were more likely to seek help and support from women's shelters, women's legal services, medical clinics and police. Frontline workers emphasised how important financial services are for women experiencing TFA, but that these weren't always available. Frontline workers also noted that support from family and community can be a benefit, more so in remote and regional locations, but remote communities are often characterised by small communities where staying anonymous is challenging as everyone knows everyone's business.

Reporting

Frontline services also reported that the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women would and did report the technology-facilitated abuse (TFA) they were experiencing, both to support services and to police. Many frontline workers reported that women had saved and screenshoted messages, phone call logs, and social media posts as evidence to show support services and police. While these responses by women were encouraging, typically the abuse had been occurring for quite some time before women sought help. Many frontline workers also discussed how the onus cannot only be placed on the woman to seek help, but there needs to be more preventative work and accountability by the system and from the public at large.

Frontline workers' reports of police responses differed. Some frontline workers reported that police would respond swiftly to TFA, whilst others reported that it was difficult to get police to take the abuse seriously, because of the attitude that violence is not 'serious' unless it is physical.

> 'I went to the police for her and showed them the threats she received. And they've just [said] "you can't prove anything" basically. Just the way that they treated me and her that moment on that day was one of the most disgusting things I've ever seen. Really how my blood was boiling ... You could see clearly who was messaging. Police just said "this messaging stuff, that could be you on a fake account"... And again, that's putting accountability, on the affected family member ... and not the perpetrator.'
>
> PE04

Because of their geographical location, several frontline services worked with police in multiple jurisdictions across multiple states. These frontline workers reported that police response differed between jurisdictions and that coordination between police in different states made it difficult to respond to TFA and to support women.

> 'So I think there needs to be clear ... responses from police, and more ... clear legislation that isn't different state to state. So that women know what their rights are. And so that services know what women's rights are.'
>
> BNK01

Criminal justice system

Frontline workers also discussed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women's differing experiences when engaging in the criminal justice system. Most often, women's engagement was through police or women's legal services, and this was usually to put a non-contact intervention order in place. Many frontline workers reported that the abuse continued even after intervention orders were in place, which often led to charges of harassment and stalking. However, frontline workers reported the toll it took on women who were often burdened with the responsibility of collecting evidence and advocating for themselves to police, lawyers and judges. This was regarded as especially taxing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in regional and remote areas because of cultural sensitivities, language barriers, and lack of available services, especially culturally safe and appropriate services.

'I don't know [any services] that [address technology-facilitated abuse]. And not all services have access to certain areas.'
MCP02

'[I have] personally had a restraining order on someone and [I also work to support women experiencing violence and abuse]. Under the restraining order, they write that you're not allowed to use any form of technology or social media to make any contact with this person and you can't give your account to other people. You know, so it does have those provisions to protect someone from that abuse. But essentially at the end of the day … I wouldn't have liked to have had the restraining order, that's not something that I wanted to do. I felt like I had no other choice. And so, I would like to see more support. I don't think that there's very much, because I think that people are scared to contact the police. They don't want to. I didn't want to do [it]. And then after I had [called the police], I felt I'd done the wrong thing and I felt guilty for ages … My partner's in prison at the moment so it's taken a long time to kind of be okay with me feeling [guilty] … Even though he'd done the wrong thing, I went through a lot of guilt, and I can see why women won't report it or [don't] want to do anything about that. Otherwise [police] go into the complete extreme and relationships break down and family feud starts and whatever else.'
FW002

There were also several reports of men who had been incarcerated for their abuse of their female partners or ex-partners continuing their abuse from prison. These men were able to continue their abuse using phone calls directly from prison, or by contacting friends and family members. These family members would then exert pressure on the woman, usually through abusive and threatening phone calls and messages, to 'drop the charges' against the man.

'And even when men have been incarcerated at times … they have … bombarded family, or … the woman who's been victimised by their violence. So often bombard them with phone calls and put the pressure on them to drop charges and things like that but then that can also extend to their family network … [They do it to] isolate that woman further and discourage them from accessing justice through the legal system.'
BNK01

2.3 Risk and protective factors

The frontline workers who participated in this study, several of whom are Aboriginal women, reported a number of risk factors which make Aboriginal women in regional and remote areas particularly vulnerable to experiencing TFA. Frontline workers repeatedly noted how some of the strengths of Indigenous communities – such as strong relationships and kinship connections – can also mean that TFA can flourish. This is because these vast networks can make it easier to locate people, often by contacting family members to obtain new phone numbers and addresses, which increases the vulnerability of a woman experiencing abuse from multiple abusers, including her partner's family members. Moreover, Indigenous languages can be used to disguise abuse from service providers and police – particularly cultural references which do not translate into English.

Vulnerabilities

Frontline workers also identified other factors which make Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women vulnerable to experiencing TFA and exacerbate its impacts. Prior experience of violence and trauma, as well as poor mental health, were identified as factors which contribute to making women vulnerable to abuse. These factors can also exacerbate the impacts of this abuse – for example, high rates of depression and anxiety.

'It all relates back to their mental health ... with their depression, anxiety, shame, intimidated, all that stuff. So mental health comes in quite a lot, and that's my role as a mental health worker and that's what I see a lot. Especially with the age range between 18 and 30, they get with these men when they're 13, 14, 15 [years old]. In our [Aboriginal] cultures, we stick together so the [women have] got to stay with [the man] for years on end. And when [women are aged] 25, between 25 and 30 is when they wake up and they leave, and then this is where it all starts ... Most of my clients are Aboriginal women between 18 and 30 [years old], and that's because of their mental health, because what they've gone through with their trauma, and past experience with domestic violence and social media like technology.'
CN03

Other vulnerabilities and risk factors identified by frontline workers included lack of appropriate housing, as overcrowded living conditions meant that it was more likely that people were sharing phones, and it was also more difficult for women to find a safe place to stay if they were experiencing abuse. Poverty and disadvantage, in general, were also identified as risk factors and it meant people had fewer choices and options when experiencing abuse.

> 'I think there are certain things that may predispose them a little bit. Such as … about 70% of our clients here don't own a car. So … that is something that the white community [doesn't experience as much]. It doesn't happen so much … in other pockets of the community. A lot of people don't have access to cars. So being able to escape somewhere easily becomes more of a challenge.'
> DK02

Overwhelmingly, frontline services also identified the lack of awareness and education as the primary risk factor for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in regional and remote areas experiencing TFA. This was also coupled with the lack of appropriate and accessible services to respond to the abuse and support women's help-seeking behaviour.

> 'I think it just puts them in probably a more compromised position, because [in remote locations] the education is not there. The services to teach them about it are not there and you know that [means] "I won't always report it to police because I'm not aware that it's there". [They don't know] that it's an offence for someone to do it.'
> CCR23
>
> 'If they're not informed, what [technology] should be used for. Because it's just become a weapon, an extra weapon.'
> MCP02
>
> 'From the groups of women that I've worked with what makes them more vulnerable would be the fact that this technology is so new, and … they lack the awareness or education on how to manage the technology. It's all very exciting. It's lovely and posting everything on there [but] there are consequences, and the lack of awareness that makes them more vulnerable, I say.'
> FW001

Protective factors

Frontline workers were also able to identify a number of protective factors which can prevent women from experiencing TFA, or minimise its impacts if they do experience it. The primary protective factors identified by service providers were: prior exposure or experience with technology (being educated or tech savvy); having a tight social network; the community having a good relationship with police; having good role models; and a good connection with support services. These protective factors would mean that women are more able to identify abusive behaviours and have the tools and skills to respond to the abuse, with either good digital literacy and online safety, or by reaching out for help. To support help-seeking, frontline workers believed good relationships were critical: personal relationships as well as relationships with police and other services. Without these good relationships, frontline workers felt that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women would be unlikely to tell anyone or reach out for support, as they would be too isolated and/or too intimidated. In addition to education, fostering supportive relationships was considered to be the most critical way to respond to TFA.

> '[Aboriginal women] are more comfortable if police take action on their behalf. So it takes accountability off the woman. Yeah, so the perpetrator says "oh you've gone to the cops and you've dobbed on me, you know, you've ratted on me" and it's not taken well with family and the community. It's just like, "no, I said I didn't want action, the police has done it on my behalf". Yeah, which is what I speak to my victims about, I say "put the blame squarely back on us, as law enforcement. You are going to go out and live in your communities, you don't want this". And look there is still a stigma about us and them, the police and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. The gap is being closed which is fantastic. There is among certain individuals that they're not going to come to us so if we can remove the woman from that situation, and say "no its me"... that's fine, it keeps them safe.'
> TR05

2.4 Drivers of technology-facilitated abuse

In their interviews, frontline workers repeatedly touched on the underlying drivers of TFA of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women. Overwhelmingly, frontline workers identified jealousy, as well as other forms of gender

inequality, as the key driver of this abuse. Frontline workers reported that jealousy, in the context of intimate partner violence, was the extension of coercive control. 'Jealousing' was used as a verb and discussed as an action – not an emotion – it was something to be performed. Particularly in the central Australian context, 'jealousing' was talked about as an action rather than a feeling. It was something that was performed publicly to sanction real or imagined sexually inappropriate behaviour. It was often discussed in the central Australian yarnings that when a man is jealousing a woman, he will use violence against the woman. Whereas, when a woman is jealousing a man, she will use violence against the other woman. This often took the form of impersonation (see section 4.1 of this report). In response to this driver, frontline workers discussed the importance of education about healthy relationships which start in primary schools.

'I think [jealousing is] an extension of that coercive control. And when women have taken steps to support their own safety, and the user of violence might feel like they have lost some sense of control, [jealousy is] a method to maintain that control when they might be physically separated.'
BNK01

'Jealousy has now become a verb – it's a doing thing – but it's another word for using power and control and violence to justify it … [To prevent TFA we must focus on] the underlying drivers of control, having control.'
MCP02

'So I've seen all of those [TFA behaviours] in various forms, but mostly the biggest one has been the relentless checking in or calling, and it's all fuelled by jealousy.'
FW001

'There's no way that the woman could call for assistance or call police …. if they didn't need the police immediately. It's more about isolation, friends and that kind of thing, getting jealous of the Facebook.'
FW003

Gender inequality

Frontline workers also identified gender inequality as a key driver of TFA of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, and that within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, this form of abuse was most often perpetrated by men against their female partner or ex-partner. Because of inequitable gender roles and the dominance of men over women within broader society, this placed women in more vulnerable positions. For example, women's caring responsibilities, not only for children but other family members, further exacerbates the impacts of TFA especially in situations where women are more financially dependent on their male partners or on other family members to assist with accessing financial support. Given the low resource setting as well as strong familial ties, women were more likely to borrow or share phones, making it easier for others to access their personal details. Women are also more likely to receive child payments from Centrelink, which makes them vulnerable to experiencing financial abuse. Moreover, frontline workers reported that often women went to live in their male partner's community with his family, which also meant that they could be further isolated and cut off from their support networks. Finally, it was reported that technology-facilitated financial abuse disproportionately affected women, and that the uneven power balance in relationships between men and women meant that women were often unable to play an equal role in financial decision-making – at times coerced into taking out loans in their name – and were more likely to be burdened with their male partner's debt.

'The father will have the independence and go anywhere they choose to. Look that happens everywhere. But what we find is that that obviously creates an isolation. And you know how females are positioned financially, I guess, they can spend what they want on groceries, but very rarely [will they] be spending money on themselves. Generally, whoever the male in the relationship will be like … "no, you need to buy me this, you need to buy this, you need to get me a car". That is one example that I will put down, is that if they're taking out a loan, especially for a car, it will be under the female's name. That's what we find a lot, and then when the relationship goes pear-shaped, the car, he can do whatever with it. The financial responsibility and burdens go back on female for repayments. Yes, that is one example that we do see often

in the community … If a woman might retaliate and end up in custody, where are those kids going to go? It's going to generally fall back on an aunty or grandmother in the community as well to try and raise those kids. And, again, technology-facilitated abuse, it becomes not just that individual female's problem. But aunties, sisters, cousins, grandmothers, it will become that family's problem… I would say here [technology-facilitated abuse is] 90% [perpetrated against] women.'
TR05

'[In my role I see a lot of] younger relatives using their grandma's bank card. So I guess that's facilitated by technology. So they just [take] their grandma's keycard. They go to ATMs and withdraw money or also [access their grandmother's bank account through] internet banking. Like the older person doesn't know this is happening.'
FW004

2.5 Uses of technology

When asked about how they saw technology being used in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, most frontline workers reported harmful uses and risky behaviours. Frontline workers highlighted the risk posed by online scams that target Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, particularly older people in receipt of Centrelink payments. They also noted risky behaviours such as sexting and illegal behaviours such as child grooming and pornography.

'So, through work we've seen [technology] being used for bullying. I've seen it being used for securing, grooming children or coercing children into sexual acts or into offenses. I've seen it cause riots within community. I've seen a lot of [men], watch porn on the internet. And as a result of that, I've seen that it causes an unrealistic belief … of what would not be a normal sexual relationship for a female … They use [technology] in the schools which is good as well, but [I've also seen it be used for] sexting between young kids. [I've seen] possession and distribution of child pornography. And a lot of abuse, a lot of abuse, stalking, just a constant barrage of abuse and I've had one or two incidents where the Find My iPhone has been used by a partner to track their partner, where they watch what [their partner is] doing and that sort of stuff. Yeah, [technology is] not generally [used] for good things.'
CCR23

Frontline workers also however reported the many benefits of technology to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women… Frontline workers emphasised the importance of phones for women's safety and safety planning; and they also emphasised the importance of technology for communication as the women they worked with had family spread over vast geographical spaces. Moreover, frontline workers discussed how enmeshed technology has become in daily lives – from managing finances to children's education – technology is a part of life. The key message was not that technology is innately harmful or destructive, but people need the awareness and tools to use it safely and respectfully. In this respect, even the term 'technology-facilitated abuse' (TFA) was unhelpful as the term places the emphasis on the technology, rather than the harmful behaviour driving the abuse.

> 'So having phone reception has made a huge difference for women to be able to access safety and call our service. Previously, they would have to use a public phone, or an office phone which is not very accessible or confidential. So in that way I think definitely [women benefit from technology]. Also, people … [are] spread so far across different towns these days and across different communities. So just maintaining that connection to family, I think, has to be a positive thing. Yeah, particularly where people have had to relocate because of violence, so they might have to move away from [remote community] to say Adelaide, and technology might be one of the only ways they can maintain that contact with their family and community.'
> BNK01

3. Key findings from yarning with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women

Yarning was used to gain insight into regional and remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women's experiences of TFA, and how this experience impacts their lives and wellbeing. We also wanted to understand their levels of digital literacy, including their knowledge of online and device safety and security, and their experiences when reporting TFA. Table 2 gives a breakdown of five key themes that emerged from yarning with women, which will then be discussed below.

Table 2. Key themes to emerge from yarning with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in regional and remote areas.

Key theme	Definitions
Types of TFA and behaviour	The forms and types of technology-facilitated abusive behaviours experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in regional and remote areas, and the tools and tactics used to perpetrate TFA against women.
Types of violence	The different types of violence – and relationships to users of violence – as reported by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in regional and remote areas.
Impacts of TFA on women	The different ways in which the experience of TFA affects Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in regional and remote areas.
Strategies used by women to keep themselves safe	Different strategies Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women use to respond to their experience of TFA, including digital literacy, engaging with support and reporting.
Benefits of technology	The ways that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women benefit from the use of technology, and how technology can also increase their safety.

3.1 Types of technology-facilitated abuse and behaviours

The types of technology-facilitated abusive behaviours reported by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in remote and regional areas were many and varied, and most women reported experiencing multiple forms of TFA. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women reported threats as the most common form of TFA they experienced, followed by harassment, stalking and monitoring, image-based abuse and impersonation. Women reported that the TFA they experienced was primarily perpetrated by men – usually current or former intimate male partners – but was also perpetrated by other women.

Threats

Women reported receiving threats typically via text messaging and phone calls, as well as via Facebook Messenger. Typically, younger women received threats via text messages and social media, whilst older women received threats via text message and phone calls, but this largely depended on women's proficiency with technology. Those women who were more technologically engaged received threats on a variety of platforms. Other threats including threats to kill were used to incite fear.

> 'I was frightened [because] she'd send messages [threatening] to throw acid on me and I was actually [terrified about the threat of] the acid more than anything because I thought that's [something] she could do quite easily.'
> FU01

Women also reported veiled threats written as statuses or posts on Facebook and other social media. These threats were written in such a way that they made the woman feel threatened but were ambiguous enough to avoid detection or sanction when reported to the police. Other times the threats were made in Indigenous languages which also made reporting to the police more difficult, particularly when the language and its meaning doesn't translate to English.

> 'So he's writing [threats] on his wall. Not saying names but clearly [implying] who it is … I'm close to both sides of the family so I know who he's talking about. And he's referring to a little child, little girl, and she's a young one and [she and her mother have] been through a hard time.'
> FN23

Another commonly reported form of threat included threats of suicide and self-harm. These threats were deliberately used as a form of coercive control to exert power and control over their partners or ex-partners.

> 'He would threaten me that he was going to harm himself and he would send me photos … he would send me photos of cuts on his arm with his arm bleeding and things like that. He was going to kill himself and the only way that he wouldn't was if I would go see him.'
> RT03
>
> 'He'd send another text and say, "well I'm just going to kill myself". And of course, because I think [of] myself as a pretty kind person, I would panic and drive around there, and he knows that's what I'm going to do.'
> EC04

Whilst some threats were directed at individuals, other threats were directed to groups of people, particularly within the context of community violence and intra-family violence. This particularly played out with the recording of physical fights which were then shared on social media. These videos were sometimes used to threaten other people.

> '[On the video] this lady and [some men] comes up [to the camera] and says, "yeah, you make sure you're recording this. So them other mob can see". And it was on social media, but [sent] through [Facebook] messenger, they said in it in language: "you make sure, you record this, because I want these mob to see who done the trouble, who made the mistake so they can get the same punishment. [The same physical assault] that these mobs [of assaulted people] are getting".'
> SP02

Racist online abuse

Some women who participated in this research also reported feeling affected and victimised by racist threatening comments made online, usually in open Facebook groups. In one of the three locations of this study, several open Facebook groups are used by community members to post about events and news in the town. Increasingly, community members have used these open Facebook groups to report instances of crime and anti-social behaviour in the town, which then becomes dominated by racist rhetoric, particularly in discussions about youth crime in the town. These women also reported that constantly seeing this racist commentary online affected their wellbeing and sense of security in the town.

'So if someone says "kids running amok again" then people [respond] "Oh, they have to be black kids. Well, why don't we all put our gear on and go smash them to teach them what's right and wrong because they need to be put in a box". Or "why don't we run them over in a car". These [comments are about] eight-year-old kids … And then you jump in and say "well these kids have got rights as well". Well then you get the hyenas … They hop straight on and literally slam that person [who was defending the children] from every corner. They say "you're just a do-gooder that wasn't even raised in this town. You don't know what's right for these blacks" and all the rest of it.'

CF33

'And I get really tired of people putting Indigenous people in the same bucket, saying that we're all drunks, we're all this, we're all that. Well we're not, because just like everybody else, we are all different. Some of us are really good, and we try and make a good life for ourselves, but still get chucked in a bucket. So there's this forum … and they just straight up discriminate [and make racist statements] on every single comment. I mean, it just gets too much like how can someone have so much hatred and live in this town? So I removed myself from that group, it became too much and it was starting to actually affect me as well at work in life … So like some of the comments they'd say about the kids and that. Like, they're children, how could you say that about a child? Like they may not have a safe home to go to and here you are calling them "this little black [prick]" and "they should just piss off and go ride their bike into the wall" or something, you know? [Saying things like] really just "go kill yourself" basically, on a public forum, it's like how can you have that [hatred] against a child?'

FN23

Harassment

Another commonly reported form of technology-facilitated abusive behaviour experienced by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women participants in this study is harassment, not always by their current or ex-partner, instead from a third-party. Women reported experiencing being bombarded by text-messages and phone calls, as well as repeated attempts to contact them on social media.

> 'I had an experience once several years ago where I reckon it was a fake account, and they began sort of, I'd say, harassing, more than anything else on Facebook, mostly about my relationship and my partner, never actually found out who it was. That's pretty hard because you walk around and it could be anybody.'
> FN23
>
> 'So I was at home alone with the kids and she would continually message. The messages will start from six o'clock right through to 12 at night, and anything in between. So between my [husband] and I, when she was on a real high, it would be anywhere between 30 to 50 messages a day and then anywhere between 20 and 25, to 50 hang phone calls during the day as well.'
> FU01

Women also reported a variety of tools and tactics abusers would use to harass them. Typically, women reported being bombarded with text messages and/or phone calls, including on Facebook Messenger. Once women blocked phone numbers and accounts, the abuser would continue to harass them using a private number or by using other people's phones to continue to message and call them. Women also reported that abusers would use a series of fake Facebook accounts – or use other people's accounts – to continue to contact and message them. This experience was thought to be typical in regional and remote locations where the very small and close-knit communities meant that abusers were able to access the women using their mutual connections as well as by targeting the woman's family and friends.

> 'I received I think, in one day, 14, messages, just one after the other, [and had] multiple missed calls. He then started using other people's phones to contact me, trying to get me to answer [the phone] and send me messages [from] other people's accounts.'
> RT03

Women reported experiencing this level of harassment over many years and had a variety of strategies for responding, which will be discussed in section 4.4 of this report.

> 'Yeah, lots of messages, lots of phone calls to the point where [they would use] different numbers or private numbers [to call and message]. The way I see it now is that I just don't answer any number that I'm not aware of, [I don't answer] any unknown number at all. But the persistence where they've used other people's phones even to connect me, maybe a friend or mutual friend or something. Obviously, I'd [confront] them later, and say "what did you do that for?" But [they were] not aware of the situation or they're frightened of that person [so they would give them my phone number] … I counted the day, and it was four years he'd been sending me these messages … [I've] changed numbers that many times.'
> Y001

Women reported a variety of different means that their abusers would use to try to contact and harass them, despite them often having domestic violence or intervention orders placed against them, and in several cases, even when the abuser was incarcerated. Often this was in the form of phone calls, text messages, and online communication, such as email and Facebook Messenger, but there were also reports of different means, such as messages sent through online banking.

Stalking and monitoring

Stalking and monitoring as forms of abuse were commonly reported by the women. It was not uncommon to hear women reporting the abusers' use of social media, such as Facebook, to glean their location and to track their whereabouts, sometimes through friends and family. Often this information was given freely as friends and family did not know the circumstances of the

abuse, but in other cases, friends and family were subjected to harassment from the abuser until eventually they gave information.

In one example, rather than the use of sophisticated technology, this was done by keeping watch on the woman's social media accounts and using the content, such as photos and check-ins, to learn her location. This information was then typically used to threaten the woman and make her feel unsafe, and as though she was being constantly watched.

> '[They would make a fake profile of] a family member... Just so I [will] want to be friends with them [on Facebook]. [They make these fake accounts] because they want to snoop around and see what's happening in my life so they can go and change stories around ... [They want to] find out information ... Or they could be just spying on me to see who I'm talking to.'
> SP02

There were other reports of how Facebook Messenger was used to monitor women's online activity as another extension of coercive control and emotional abuse.

> 'I'm terrified of even touching the thing [phone] because he's always accusing me of texting someone else, or [interrogating me] "who are you talking to", and [he had a] huge mistrust in me even though I'd given him no reason ever to distrust me ... [so in the morning] he would check his Facebook [and] go into our text ... and see how long it had been since I've been online, and sometimes [it would say I had been active online, even though I had been asleep all night]. I don't know it's just a glitch in the Facebook system, and I googled it: "Why is Facebook saying that I was online, three hours ago" when three hours ago, is 3am in the morning, and I was not on my phone. "Why is it saying I was on my phone". And it's just a glitch in the system if someone sends you a [message] or tagged you in a post online [at that time, perhaps] from across the other side of the world again. I have lots of friends across the world, I use technology to communicate with them. So they would tag me in something at 3am, our time, and Facebook would just say, there's been some activity on my account, so it would say I [had been] online. But then [because he believed I had been online during the night] that would cause whole days and days of horrible nastiness and fights and mistrust and it affected my life in such a way that I was exhausted.'
> EC04

GPS tracking as a means to locate women was also used by the perpetrators. There were several reported instances of the 'Find my iPhone' app and Snapchat being used to stalk and monitor women, particularly in the context of intimate partner violence. This information would then be used by the abuser as an extension of coercive control, as they would interrogate the woman about her movements and behaviours throughout the day, usually in an attempt to 'catch' women in a lie. This served to isolate the woman by making her constantly fearful of being tracked and followed.

> 'My ex-partner had put an app on his phone to track me and he would mirror his phone to my phone to download any discussions through Messenger or Google. Yeah and subsequently, he would take my phone from me, but he's definitely done that to me. He's collected information about my financial situation as well. But yes, he's definitely tracked me, so he's always known my whereabouts, and just information, period.'
> Y001

Often women reported not knowing or not realising that the abuser was tracking their movements using this technology until much later. For example, one woman reported the use of Google, including her web browser history, being used to monitor her activity throughout the day. This often made women distrustful of the other relationships in their lives as they initially didn't know how their abuser was gaining the information about their movements.

> 'He [would] use Google to find out where I was and how long I've been there and all that sort of stuff. [He would] take my phone, check my Google and [he] had ways of finding out exactly where I was and how long I was there for all that sort of stuff … which I had no idea how to utilise Google [like that]. So on your phone, if you have a Google account, and you're logged in, it accesses your web browser [and it will record] anything that you've looked up, and everywhere you've been, if you put your Google location on your phone unless you select to turn that off, [it stores everywhere you have been]. I remember I come back one day, he questioned me about "why were you at this house for half an hour? You were here, then you went here". [And he would tell] me that I went to someone's house 38 times in one week and things like that, and I had no idea [how] he knew all that information. Until he ended up telling me, [he tracked me] through Google.'
> RT03

Another woman reported how her abuser also installed security cameras throughout their home that sent notifications to his mobile phone when there was movement in the house. This information was later used to interrogate the woman about things she had done throughout the day, such as when she had gone shopping, where she had gone, and what she had bought.

> 'Yes, so my location on Snapchat has always been disconnected out of fears [because] I've been followed previously. My ex-partner was very abusive ... [so my location on Snapchat was] disconnected very early on in the piece. However, there were security cameras surrounding the property where we lived together with my daughter. Every move that I made, he would get a notification on his phone to say that there's been movement detected, and he would be watching me on the cameras ... So If I got home from shopping he would get a notification and he would be watching the live stream of me getting home, and he would come home and question me about what money I spent, where I bought [it].'
> OK02

Image-based abuse

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women participants also reported image-based abuse. In many incidents, this was the sharing of sexualised images without the woman's consent, it also included reports of unsolicited nude pictures being sent to women.

> 'Can I just share my story about a bad experience that I've had? I went to purchase a fridge and a washing machine from a rental place. And there were no [women] working in that space, though. Just all males. I walked in there right. And [the male worker] gets all my details, my phone numbers and everything and I go "oh well, because it's a business. I'm okay with it". I go home. Two days later, I'm getting the nude pic of this fella. Literally a nude pic. I froze. I literally froze for half an hour. My sisters were like "you alright? What's wrong with you?" I think I've just been kicked in the guts. And I threw my phone and said "Can you look at that?" And I showed them that [naked picture] and they said "oh my god! This is wrong".'
> SP02

The use of image-based abuse was common in the context of intimate partner violence, where an abuser would share a sexualised image of his current or ex-partner to shame and humiliate them. These images were often shared on Facebook or via text messages.

> 'You know, [they share a naked] photo [and send] rude messages. They put rude things about [women online] … [They do it to make women feel] shame. Making people [feel] shame. And then [women] get embarrassed when that other person says that "we're seeing you on the Facebook" and all that.'
> GR57_1

Women also reported that abusers would share personal images of them with their ex-partner as another means of manipulation and exerting control.

> 'After that, he would send me photos that were of us when we were together, so photos of me when I was pregnant, photos of me during labour, and he would just be taunting me with these images. Just to prove that he had the control over me still.'
> OK02

Other reports of image-based abuse were not the sharing of sexualised images, but the sharing of everyday photos in order to incite violence against the woman. This often occurred in the context of lateral violence perpetrated by women, where women shared photos of other women, and sometimes of their children, on social media to spread rumours and to humiliate the woman.

> 'She put a picture up on Facebook … of a married man. [The photo was] of him with his current new girlfriend. She said that "they'd been sleeping together for this long. I've got an STI off her", all this stuff she put on social media. [Her intention was to] just round up the crowd [to create backlash against the woman]. [People would make comments like] "oh we'll bash her" and all this sort of stuff, calling her [insults], this poor innocent woman in this photo.'
> CF33

Impersonation

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women also reported impersonation as a common technology-facilitated abusive behaviour, however, this was rarely impersonation of themselves but of other friends and family members, or the creation of fake accounts. The purpose of this form of impersonation was usually to elicit and gather information about women to police their behaviour or to track and monitor their whereabouts.

> 'The only experience I have with that is he would make fake accounts and try and add me on social media to [find out] where I'm at, and [look at what] I'm posting, all that type of thing. But I'm very guarded with my social [media] so I never accepted [their friend requests], but that's really the only experience I've had with them.'
> OK02
>
> 'So I haven't experienced him pretending to be me. But I have experienced him taking other people's phones and pretending to be them. And talk to me as if he is that [person]. Then the same as other people's Facebook accounts, [he would] access them and try and talk to me.'
> RT03
>
> 'Yeah, some [people] use their family phone. So if it's someone ... [you are] close with, [the abuser will] use their phone to make it look like they're calling you, they're texting you but it's actually them'
> Y003

In the context of lateral violence, women would often create fake accounts of other women in order to impersonate them and send threatening and abusive messages to other community members in order to start conflict, humiliate the woman, and/or incite violence against her.

> 'She had [made profiles of us on sex] websites as well so I had a fella ring me one time and asked if my husband and I were interested in ... a threesome and so she did all that, she profiled us on other [sex] sites.'
> FU01

In regional and remote contexts, the fact that phones are often shared with many people using them made it easier for accounts to be hacked and to be used to impersonate women and send messages on their behalf.

> 'In communities, it's one phone, ten people possibly share [one phone]. One person is responsible for that phone so that one person gets a heart attack at the end of the three months or whenever they get their bill. They're swapping and changing the phones all the time so if you're logged into Facebook on there and you're not logging out, they're gonna hop in and send messages on your behalf and then there's a lot of conflict going on.'
> CF33

3.2 Types of violence

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women from remote and regional areas reported experiencing technology-facilitated abusive behaviour in the context of multiple forms of violence. The most reported forms were intimate partner violence, followed by family violence and lateral violence. It was clear that the multiple forms of violence were also related and interconnected. Typically, women reported TFA occurring between intimate partners as a form of coercive control which then escalated into physical violence, and then came to involve families and even whole communities.

> '[They threaten to physically assault the family] connected to that person. It's a ripple effects of lateral and family and domestic violence. So when they talk about payback, that's kind of like a ripple effect of the trauma.'
> SP02

Intimate partner violence

TFA was most commonly reported by the women as being used within the context of intimate partner violence. This mainly took the form of men using technology-facilitated abuse as an extension of coercive control of their female partner or ex-partner. However, there was also one reported case of a woman using TFA against another woman – the latter is the current partner of the former woman's male ex-partner.

'But then she sent the bomb squad around. [And that was the first time] the cop said, "you're in a domestic violence situation, you've got to get help". She sent the bomb squad around ... big bang on the door and this is about 10 o'clock on a Sunday night, open the door and they've got everything pointing at me. They didn't have the guns. But I think they knew [that it was a fake report] because she was [constantly] ringing the cops on us ... Anyway they all came around with the vests on and looked through the house because she said we had guns up in the roof. Anyway, after all that had been looked at ... He said, "You've got to go and get help".'
FU01

Aside from this report, other women reported male partners and ex-partners using technology-facilitated abusive behaviours such as harassment, threats, monitoring and impersonation to assert control over the woman. Most women reported that this occurred gradually, then over time became more intense and consuming, before escalating into physical violence. As will be discussed in section 4.4, most women did not report (if they reported at all) until it had become physical violence.

'Yes, so he used to call me consistently. When I made the decision to leave him it was very hard. Given that he was losing his control over me and the abuse was ending. He would call me constantly. In one day, I had about 50 missed calls, I had to report it to the police and then go through the process of [getting] an intervention order.'
OK02

'You know, obviously, he was an abusive person, period, but to go to that extent. In the end, I just didn't have a phone because he would take it from me. He didn't want anyone to talk to me at all in the end. Just the behaviour of control, it's all about control.'
Y001

Family violence

The women who participated in this study also reported TFA within the context of family violence. This violence typically began on social media, often Facebook, and would come to involve several family members. The woman reported that the conflict would often begin between young people, with

abusive and threatening messages and comments, who would then show their parents. Their parents would then become involved in the conflict and it would escalate into physical violence. This is exacerbated by remote and regional contexts, as the small size of these communities means that the families cannot avoid running into each other, and this can result in public physical violence.

> 'You know you've got them bickering over social media. And then the parents get involved so when the parents see each other now down the street, you know something's gonna happen, because whatever went down with their kids, because of all of this texting … it just fuels them up to a point where they're just gonna be like, "nup, as soon as I see her, she wait", you know, that kind of thing.'
> Y003
>
> 'What was happening [was that] girls were hacking other girl's accounts and sending other girls messages and … creating fights. A lot of families [came] to school threatening to flog certain girls.'
> CF33

This family violence was also often reported in the form of Elder abuse. The women who participated in this study reported adult children using their elderly parent's phones and online banking, including their myGov account, to apply for loans in their name. Other reports included adult children withholding or damaging their elderly parents' phones to prevent them from contacting police or calling for help.

> 'Yeah, I can't have a phone. My son took it from me. I can't help it, you know.'
> GR57_2

Lateral violence

TFA was also reported as occurring in the context of lateral violence – between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women – and the abusive behaviour overwhelmingly reported in this context was impersonation. Typically, women would hack social media accounts (usually accessing their logged in accounts through shared mobile phones) and/or make fake accounts

of another woman in order to send messages to other community-members to humiliate or incite violence against that woman.

> 'I have had a sister message a bunch of my friends in her own account. And you know said a lot of things about me.'
> Y001

Lateral violence perpetrated by women was often reported as being a product of 'jealousing' or perceived sexual misconduct with a male partner. In this context, technology-facilitated abusive behaviours, particularly impersonation and image-based abuse, were used to publicly shame and humiliate other women, as well as incite physical violence against that woman by other community members.

> 'It's not normal for me. But for this town, it's very normal for those young girls. And I just think "she wasn't married to you, he was. You need to have a go at him, not her. Don't have a full on go at her. You're married to him". But they like to blame that woman.'
> CF33
>
> 'In my experience, I get attacked a lot by females. It's just lateral violence around jealousy. Because where I come from, who I am, my identity, my family connections, and where I work, who I work with.'
> SP02

3.3 Impacts of technology-facilitated abuse on women

The women who participated in this study reported a number of different ways that TFA impacted them and their children. The most commonly reported impacts were fear, isolation, and financial impacts.

Fear

Because of the nature of TFA, women often feel exposed to abuse even when they are physically safe. Several women, for example, reported feeling afraid many years after the abuse had ended and some reported they continued to modify their own behaviour, such as deactivating social media accounts. The fear is triggered even by hearing a message notification which may signal their

abuser contacting them again. Several women reported that when they are in public, they are constantly watching out for their abuser and continue to feel that they are being watched and followed. This fear in turn creates mistrust. Several women reported having to work very hard to overcome these feelings in their other relationships. The impacts of the culture of fear created by this abuse is clearly ongoing and requires the woman to manage the impacts long into the future, even if they had relocated.

> '[Because I was so scared, it] took me a long time [to stop] looking for her [when I was outside the house] … The other day, [for example, I saw a woman and I would] think that [the perpetrator had that] same sort of hairstyle. [I] think this is what needs to change in the law as well, that [TFA is taken seriously before it escalates, before] the stabbing or the acid or whatever. That [TFA] is seen and heard, and [police respond]. Because that's preventative. Because … I felt like if I didn't leave my home in my town, and my friends, my family, I'd end up dead.'
> FU01

Isolation

The intentional cutting of support networks and channels of communication of women by their perpetrators serves to isolate them but is further reinforced as women respond to the abuse by further disconnecting themselves from technology, which inadvertently impacts their existing relationships and networks.

> 'Well, not long after that, I did delete Facebook, and I only had Messenger, and then I just deleted Messenger…I took the screenshots of the information. But I didn't want to talk to anyone anyway because a lot of technology had just depressed me.'
> Y001

> '[I was] either isolated or wasn't allowed to see my family or was disconnected from all of them. I have very little friends because I wasn't allowed to go out. He [would] harass them and [question them about what we had] been doing and what [we] have been talking [about].'
> OK02

Financial impacts

In addition to the social and emotional impacts of TFA, women also reported the financial cost of this abuse, both direct and indirect. In a number of cases, women reported having to constantly change phones and phone numbers in order to stop the harassment, which carried a financial cost, often one that the woman could not afford. Women also reported having to relocate towns, which meant the loss of their jobs in addition to the cost of moving. Women also reported their abusers as controlling their bank accounts – from not being allowed to have personal bank accounts or monitoring their transactions, which made it difficult to put aside the money to leave the abusive relationship. Some women also reported that their abuser used their personal information to take out loans in their name and/or to withdraw from their savings, which continues to impact their lives many years after the abuse had ended.

‘I don't give out my number. I make sure that any family or friends that may have my number, ask first if they're able to [give it out]. No one just hands out my number at all. I've had to change all these things, passwords, from leaving my ex, and [make] big, big, big changes. He was able to even take about four and a half grand out of my bank so, a lot of money.’
Y001

‘You get the ones ... involved in [domestic violence] and their partner goes into prison. Some of them have to buy phones to be able to keep in contact [with their partner in jail] and it's hard, I think, for them to break that cycle. [It's hard for them] to seek help for themselves because ... especially being in these small, remote towns and communities [violence has] been normalised. [Women experiencing domestic violence] kind of just get stuck in that little trap and then they don't sort of see any way out. But you do see a lot of that when partners go to prison – the wife or partner at home has to be the one that has to go out and buy the phone just to be able to keep that communication open, even though it's not a healthy, or a good thing, they still tend to do it.’
Y003

Other impacts

Women also reported that it wasn't just the TFA that impacted them, but the response – or lack thereof – to this abuse. Women reported how detrimental and destructive it was to report abuse only for it to be dismissed or disbelieved. This left women feeling isolated and powerless. Common amongst all the reports was that the expectation and onus was placed on the woman to respond to and end the TFA she was experiencing, either by relocating, ending the relationship, or seeking an intervention order. This meant that women had to modify their own behaviour to keep themselves safe, whilst there was little to no accountability for the person who had abused them, often over many years.

3.4 Strategies used by women to keep themselves safe

Women reported using a variety of strategies to respond to TFA and to keep themselves safe.

Blocking, deactivating or moving

The primary way that women responded to TFA was through removing themselves from the exposure or risk by blocking – both phone numbers and social media accounts. However, this required women to block multiple accounts and numbers because often their abuser would continue to make new accounts and numbers to contact them.

> 'I would have been doing all that [blocking on social media] ... [but] she kept changing her profile all the time. I think it just become that we [stopped blocking her] and we just kept recording everything or kept everything, saved everything ... it was all just mainly over phone, texting, and messaging, I'd block her. On my phone, I blocked her over 20 times, different profiles.'
> FU01

In addition to these responses, women also deactivated their social media accounts, secured their phones and accounts with privacy settings, and even relocated towns.

Changing phone numbers

Changing phone numbers was a commonly reported strategy. However, this strategy alongside others can have negative consequences on the women as well. For example, many women reported changing their phone and phone number to put an end to harassment and abuse via phone calls and text messaging. However, the constant changing of phone numbers was not only burdensome but also impacted their access to support services and made it difficult for friends and family to contact them. Women also reported that this strategy was only temporary as inevitably their abuser was able to gain their contact details, usually via friends and family, and continue the harassment.

'It's hard like it's not as simple as just blocking someone's number because they can put their phone ... on private and call. [They can] go and get another SIM card and renew or they can use someone else's [phone].'
RT03

'Yeah, it does get frustrating like you just want to smash your phone, you want to snap the SIM card and all of this, but you know everyone else has got your number, like your family. And then, your bank knows your phone number for security reasons, myGov, all of these things, like, you [are] just sort of trapped in a way, like you feel trapped like you can't delete. You know you can't snap your SIM and get a new number because then you have to change everything else around. But then at the same time, you know you're wanting to get rid of, you know this person who's threatening, tormenting you, through these avenues. Doesn't matter if you block them, they still find other ways to still get in touch.'
Y003

Collecting evidence

An important avenue for responding to TFA was through collecting evidence in order to report the abuse to support networks and/or police. Women shared that they would screenshot conversations, save messages, emails, and call logs, and record the abuse to report the behaviour. This often stemmed from women needing proof for an intervention order or for the police to respond to the abuse. Underlying this was also the fear that they would not be believed. Some women reported that despite keeping this evidence and reporting the abuse to police many times, they were not taken seriously especially where escalation to physical violence had not yet occurred.

> 'I don't even remember half of what she's done. But anyway, still got all that evidence, but nobody was believing us. You know nobody was actually listening to our story … Nobody was believing about the messages, even though we've printed them all off. It just was so hard to get help or legal help around stopping her from doing what she was doing.'
> FU01

Reporting

All the women who participated in this study said they would report TFA to the police (and many already had). Reports about police responses varied – some women said that police took it seriously and acted immediately, whilst others said police did not appear to take it seriously at all – even so the women felt that they could and would report the abuse. Having a good relationship between the police and communities was seen as being critical to women's safety and their ability to report abuse.

> 'I talked to my daughter and said, 'if they come around, you just have to make one phone call to the police and tell them that they threaten[ed] you. Show them what the text message is'.
> GR57_1

Other strategies

A number of women stated that the onus for safety cannot only be on the woman, but there must be accountability for the abuser. They also stated that prevention work that engaged with women, men and communities should start from an early age.

> 'I also think men [need to be educated] as well. In terms of "you can't message that women, you can't ring them non-stop", you know, those type of training workshops as well. So it's not only the victim, I think the perpetrators need to be trained as well and educated around what is acceptable for technology use. And that even though nobody's watching, you still can't ring your wife 50 times, or can't track them and things like that.'
> Y002

3.5 Benefits of technology

The women who participated in this study identified a number of benefits of technology, despite some stating that they found technology problematic and continue to struggle with the role it plays in their lives and that of their community. For example, in remote communities where phone network coverage is limited, and there are barriers to accessing internet and wi-fi at community centres and other locations, platforms such as Facebook were noted as being an important and affordable means for keeping in touch with their friends and family in other locations.

> 'Well Facebook is used in a good way. For a lot of communities, Facebook's free. If you want to get in contact with someone, it's free. And we know that a lot of communities in the Northern Territory don't even have the bandwidth to contact [friends and family] but Facebook or Twitter, you can just look in Facebook to see where someone is, whereas on the phone you need credit [so]social media is good for that [connecting with people for free].'
> CF33

Safety

Moreover, most women reported that phones are critical for safety. Having a phone meant that women could call for help – in the context of a road accident in a remote location, or when experiencing domestic violence. Women, particularly older women, talked about how important it was to have access to a phone to contact emergency services. However, women also reported that because phones were used to call the police, this often resulted in abusers withholding and damaging their phones.

> '[They smash the phone] because you might ring the police and things like that, for emergency. We need a phone … for us old ladies and we need a phone for emergencies. We don't text message and things like that.'
> GR57_1

Education and digital literacy

Although many women were disappointed in how much technology had come to dominate their children's lives, they agreed that technology was now a part of their daily lives. Rather than avoid technology, they emphasised the need to learn how to engage with it safely. Women talked about how technology can be used for education and making connections. Women with a lower level of digital literacy were perceived as being more at risk of technology-facilitated abuse (TFA), as they were less able to identify it – particularly in the context of monitoring – and were often not equipped with the skills to respond i.e. by updating their privacy settings. Women emphasised the need to upskill women and communities so that they could enjoy the benefits of technology, whilst maintaining their privacy and online safety.

'I think… definitely a lot of the senior generations would like to know more around technology and what the younger kids are looking at. It would help them to understand the next generation in terms of where they're at and how they could help the grandchildren around any of these health-related issues that are connected to technology … In terms of young people, they're growing with technology, so it's like [as] soon as something [new] comes out, they're already adapted. It's like their born now with this extra brain cell to [understand technology].'
Y002

'So it's not a scary process, because a lot of Indigenous women are frightened [of using technology] because our culture is sort of up and down at the minute because of technology [and] because of our way of living, full stop. You know. So understanding their own culture for one, and understanding [new technology] on top of that … is a great big gap. So sometimes the gap is really small for some because they're [familiar with technology]. But there's … a big gap [of access and understanding of technology] that needs to be closed, obviously. So getting them to report or talk about [TFA] needs to be [done in a culturally-safe] way for [Indigenous women] to feel at ease.'
Y002

4. Case studies

In this section, three different stories from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in regional and remote areas are presented. These stories have been selected to illustrate different experiences of technology-facilitated abuse (TFA) among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in regional and remote areas. All names have been changed, and other identifying factors have been changed or removed.

4.1 Central Australia

Sandra is aged in her early thirties and technology has played a big role in her life. She likes to use technology, particularly social media, to stay in contact with friends and family and to share stories and experiences. Being a teacher, Sandra also likes to use technology as an educational tool.

Years ago, prior to becoming a teacher, Sandra was contacted by a friend who told her that someone was posting things about her to their Facebook page. Sandra looked on the Facebook page, and although she did not know the person, there were a number of posts about her, so she messaged the person on Facebook Messenger to ask why they were posting about her. The person began harassing Sandra by sending many messages that were about Sandra and her partner. Sandra was confused and upset, because this person seemed to know intimate details about Sandra's life and specific events that had happened in the past, which led Sandra to believe that this person must have been present at these events. Sandra still could not identify the person which made her think that the person was using a fake Facebook account and profile. Although the messages eventually stopped, Sandra never found out who the person was, and this continues to make her feel upset because that person could be anyone in her life.

Years later, once Sandra had become a teacher at a school for Indigenous and non-Indigenous teenagers, students would often report different types of abuse to Sandra. Chief among them was harassing and abusive text messages and posts on social media. Several of Sandra's students also experienced monitoring and stalking. Sandra always advised her students to save the messages and report the behaviour to police.

Recently, Sandra's good friend and sister, Jackie, came to Sandra because her thirteen-year-old daughter, Kylie, was being threatened online by a much older man. This man, who was in his late thirties, had begun by posting abusive and threatening statuses on his Facebook account. Although he did not use names, everyone close to the family knew that he was talking about Kylie. Sandra, who is close to Jackie's family as well as Jackie's deceased partner's family, was able to see the man posting these threatening messages all over Facebook and was able to identify the man as one of Kylie's family members from her father's side. Eventually, the abuse escalated to the point where the man began private messaging Kylie on Facebook with threatening messages. Sandra advised Jackie and Kylie to screenshot the messages and report it to the police, but because the man was a family member, they were reluctant to do so.

The abuse continued to escalate to the point where the man sent a young woman – who was one of his family members – to Kylie's school to physically assault her. Kylie was then involved in a physical fight out the front of her school.

The abusive and threatening messages on Facebook continued and Sandra again advised that Jackie and Kylie should go to the police. Because Jackie wishes her children to have a relationship with their deceased father's family, she is still reluctant to report to the police and is seeking to resolve the conflict by using friends and family to mediate the situation. In the meantime, the man continued to make comments online, prompting Sandra to making a 'laughing reaction' to a post about this man on Facebook. Sandra then received a private message on Facebook Messenger from this man, accusing her of laughing at him and threatening her by saying that he would 'catch her' around town. Sandra elected to ignore the message. Sandra continues to feel very worried for Jackie and Kylie because she believes that the man is unstable and likely to use physical violence.

Although these abusive behaviours are ongoing and Sandra continues to see technology used in harmful ways in her community, she believes it is possible to use technology safely and positively. Sandra would like to see big tech companies develop an algorithm which would allow them to identify abusive and threatening content and messages, which can be automatically blocked. She would also like to see more education and awareness initiatives in the community so that people are able to identify when they are experiencing technology-facilitated abuse and know their rights and how to respond. When

there is conflict, Sandra would like to see more opportunities for mediation to resolve disputes.

4.2 Remote Western Australia

Teresa was born and raised in remote Western Australia. Although she has spent some years living down south and getting away, she gets butterflies in her stomach whenever she is about to land in remote Western Australia. Like many Aboriginal people in remote and regional areas, Teresa says that technology has been such an important vehicle for staying connected with family and friends. Social media enables Teresa to feel like she is part of the many experiences that her family and friends go through. These experiences, however, are not always positive.

Teresa has experienced different types of abuse facilitated by the use of technology through different devices and platforms. Teresa's ex-partner would make lots of phone calls, send lots of messages and photos, sometimes using different or private phone numbers so that Teresa would not know he was behind the calls and messages. When unable to reach her, he would resort to using mutual friends to reach her. In the end, he also took away her mobile phone so that she would be unable to talk to anyone. The extent of technology-facilitated abuse experienced by Teresa included being tracked by having her phone content cloned so that her ex-partner could download her conversations on social media. Her ex-partner was even able to take out large amounts of money from her bank account without her knowledge.

Harassment over social media and dating apps was also a major part of Teresa's experience with technology-facilitated abuse. Over four years, a close family member had pretended to be someone else, stalked, hassled and sent derogatory messages with sexual connotations to her over Facebook and a dating app. Teresa was smart and took screenshots of the messages as evidence but she did not know whether it would be safe to disclose or who to report the incidences to. However, her family members chose to believe the perpetrator rather than Teresa and are no longer on speaking terms with her.

Teresa has taken many steps to protect herself and to prevent these experiences from reoccurring. Many of these strategies and tactics are also used by women who have experienced technology-facilitated abuse. She has tried changing passwords and phone numbers numerous times. Teresa has kept away from social media for the last two to three years, only recently

contemplating re-engaging with Messenger again. She no longer gives out her number and does not answer calls from unknown or unfamiliar numbers. She ensures her location is turned off and switches the phone off sometimes while her phone is being charged. She thinks that everyone should be more vigilant about reading the terms and conditions when downloading an app, when visiting a new website and also knowing which personal information is being shared online. If something is unclear, there should be avenues for getting information and help with understanding like a telecommunications provider or shopfront.

Teresa is also very fortunate to have a younger family member who teaches her how to use a phone and protect herself while being on devices. At her younger family member's prompting, she created a pin code which prevented her aunt from successfully looking into her phone at night. She is also grateful that she and her younger family member can be mutually supportive by reminding each other to be cautious, to be safe online and also to disengage from technology and social media when things become too much to maintain their emotional wellbeing. She also thinks that online safety awareness and education should start early at schools as every kid has a phone now.

Teresa thinks it would be useful if there was an app that can filter words or content about what is being stated and posted. This app could also flag if something inappropriate was being shared online.

4.3 Regional NSW

Nikki is a single parent in her mid-20s and has enjoyed living in her community for a long time. She had a previous relationship where she lived with her partner and their daughter. The partner was abusive, and often utilised technology as a means of control over Nikki.

While in the relationship, Nikki and her then partner had security cameras installed outside their house for safety, but soon Nikki realised that the cameras were being used for stalking and tracking her movements at the house. Her partner would get notifications on the phone when movement was detected, so he knew when she arrived home and when she left. He could see her via a livestream app on his phone. Nikki's partner would use this information to start fights.

He also controlled who she connected with on her social media accounts. If he didn't like someone being there, he would ask her to remove them, and if she

didn't, he would take the phone and do it himself. Nikki's partner would demand access to the phone, and if it wasn't given, he would take it while Nikki was sleeping. If she changed the security passcode, he would demand to know why and gain the new passcode. Nikki's partner would use access to technology as a means of controlling Nikki's actions, for example by withholding passcodes to the TV or wi-fi if she didn't do what he wanted. He was also physically threatening towards her.

When the relationship ended, Nikki's ex-partner would harass her by calling, sometimes up to 50 calls a day, and sending numerous texts, at all hours of the day and night. Some texts were threatening. Nikki's ex-partner would use social media to stalk and harass her, and so she blocked him on social media, but he would create a fake account and add her again, so he could see where Nikki had been posting, or he would send her messages from a fake account to try and get information off her.

Nikki felt isolated by her ex-partner's actions and felt the only way to seek help was by going to the police. Once an intervention order was in place, Nikki's ex-partner was only allowed to contact her about their daughter. This meant she could not block his number, although her ex-partner blocked her sometimes, and then she wouldn't be able to contact him regarding the care of their daughter.

Nikki recognizes the importance of technology in everyone's lives, and that action to combat technology-facilitated abuse, due to its complexity, needs to be multifaceted. Nikki believes that through increased awareness about what technology-facilitated abuse (TFA) is and how people can protect themselves, technology can be used safely.

5. Discussion

In this section, the challenges to preventing TFA and the implications of the research findings for eSafety's work will be discussed. This discussion will focus on cultural and contextual sensitives that need to be considered in relation to the type of support and information provided to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women experiencing TFA. This discussion will also highlight any understandings gained through the research that could enhance early intervention and prevention approaches in existing programs.

5.1 Implications for eSafety

To enhance early intervention and prevention approaches in existing programs, the research has identified the need for eSafety to engage with the following groups in the following ways:

- Awareness-raising campaigns and educational programs to be developed for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

- Frontline services to develop responses for both victims and perpetrators of TFA.

- Big technology companies to develop and enforce codes of conduct on their platforms.

- Banks and financial services to prevent financial abuse, theft and fraud and mitigate unwanted contact.

Awareness and education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities

There is still a general lack of awareness among Aboriginal and Torres Strait women in the three regions about technology-facilitated abuse (TFA). This lack of awareness means that cases of TFA may be reported only once they have escalated to physical abuse. To address this, the most critical and important avenue to prevention is to raise awareness and educate communities about TFA.

Raising community awareness about TFA was, by far, the most cited response. While things are changing, some of the frontline workers have emphasised that people are less aware of the reality of TFA in regional and remote areas

compared to metropolitan and urban areas. Incidentally, the relatively low reporting of this form of abuse in these regions likely reflects the lack of awareness around TFA rather than an indication of the number of cases.

Significant work needs to be done to raise regional and remote communities' awareness around the forms that TFA can take, how it impacts groups such as young people, LGBTIQ+, women and Elders differently and how family or community members can contribute, inadvertently or not, to the problem. Members of the community need to be made aware of the potential consequences of sharing people's phone number, email or social media details without the person's permission.

To reach a critical mass, awareness campaigns and programs should aim to educate both the broader population as well as the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. As such, education requires a multi-pronged approach combining locally relevant televised and social media public campaigns as well as local activities and awareness campaigns during community events, in schools, and in women's, men's, youth and Elders' groups. Workshops on online safety and privacy, and knowledge of online resources that can help develop strategies to prevent, mitigate or stop TFA would also be critical. There is also a need to consider informal forms of support such as peer group sharing and teaching or even enhancing digital literacy within families through children and parent exchanges.

Education about technology-facilitated abuse and the law

Many participants in this study, frontline workers and women, emphasised the need for accountability for TFA, but also highlighted the lack of understanding and awareness about what constitutes an offence according to the law. Awareness campaigns, education involving youth services, schools, and most importantly, working with communities to develop appropriate solutions may facilitate early recognition, reporting and intervention and allow for mediation to become a core dimension of the response. The legal status of some digital behaviours needs to be clarified. These awareness campaigns could be used to inform both the victims and perpetrators that abusive behaviours such as threats, harassment, stalking and impersonation are as illegal as physical abuse. It was clear from a number of frontline workers interviewed during the project that many people are unaware that non-physical forms of abuses also constitute offences.

While the perpetrators of TFA are not necessarily Indigenous themselves, as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women experience violence from Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, the solutions devised to respond to this form of abuse should also consider the already disproportionate rate of imprisonment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders peoples. However, women and children's safety must be at the centre of all responses to TFA.

Frontline services' responses to technology-facilitated abuse

A wide range of responses were suggested to address the multifaceted and continuously evolving issue of technology-facilitated abuse (TFA). Preventing, mitigating and stopping this form of abuse is understood as requiring both tailored individual and all-of-community approaches. eSafety should partner with appropriate community-led organisations to inform the development of these responses.

Responses to support the victim

Greater understanding and awareness of the complexity and impacts of TFA and knowledge of the resources available could help to improve the programs and services offered to victims and work with them to create culturally appropriate prevention and support strategies. Guidance for the women on how to document the abuse and collect evidence to build their case (e.g. avoid deleting abusive communication, take screenshots, etc.) was also raised as a way to support the women.

Responses to work with the perpetrator

There is a need to place responsibility on the perpetrators of violence by designing and developing programs which increase awareness of their destructive behaviour in the short term and work with them to change their behaviours in the longer term. Participants in this study emphasised the need for accountability and criticised responses which place the onus on the woman to end the abuse she is experiencing.

Appropriate and safe avenues for reporting

Multiple frontline workers and women have referred to the fear that many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders women have of the police. Stories were also told of victims, who, encouraged by their social workers, steeled themselves to visit the station only to be told that the police could not act on

the reports because it was not possible to prove with certainty that the communication was sent by the perpetrator. A better understanding of what the police can and can't do could help to maintain trustful relationships between the support staff and victims. Some of the solutions proposed to build better relationships and understanding between the police and the community included community-police days, as well as hiring more Indigenous police officers and Indigenous liaison officers. Police staff also need to be better trained to deal with domestic and family violence cases.

While mandatory reporting may go some way to minimising the exposure and harm associated with TFA, it may also make women more vulnerable to it. This might be the case where the avenues of reporting, or agencies and individuals responsible to acting on the report are not well equipped to deal with or respond to the report. When reports are not responded to appropriately and efficiently, this can expose the woman to further abuse in the form of reprisal violence.

Support for frontline workers

Frontline workers have expressed their struggles to keep up with technology changes as well as with the perpetrator's evolving tactics. Regular training around the use of technology, privacy settings and online safety would equip them to better understand the needs and support of the women they are working with.

Responsibility of big technology companies

Some of the research participants reflected on the roles and responsibilities of big technology companies in addressing abusive behaviours facilitated through their platforms. This includes:

- responsibility to monitor what is published via their platforms
- roles in awareness/education campaigns teaching the young people how to safely use these platforms including terms and conditions and use of their personal information
- improved clear and accessible codes of conducts defining what constitutes unacceptable behaviour and illegal practices online
- greater clarity surrounding reporting mechanisms for abusive content and behaviours

- revision of account suspension rules associated with offences and cancellation of accounts.

One of the simple strategies recommended to and adopted by the victims of TFA is to block perpetrators accounts, phone numbers and email addresses from their accounts and devices. However, the ease with which the perpetrators can create new or fake accounts means that this strategy is not always efficient in stopping further contacts and abuses. This simultaneously points to the need for big tech companies to better regulate the creation of accounts on their platforms.

Technology-based responses

In addition to the implementation of better and clearer codes of conducts by big technology companies, technology-based responses included the use and/or development of applications that enable women to alert the police or another third party quickly and discreetly during an emergency. It was also suggested that applications that filter or flag particular words in order to help the victim manage the messages, phone calls and images they receive could also be useful.

A key strategy for victims to stop TFA is to change their phone, phone number and potentially their email and social media accounts. Their phone number, however, is what connects many of these women to relatives, friends and services. The need to contact many people to inform them of the number change can be significantly daunting for women who are already dealing with a crisis situation. One of the frontline workers in regional NSW mentioned that the victims could use some help to go through this process. In many cases, privacy mechanisms in place may prevent a third party from supporting or helping the women change their personal details.

Banks and financial services

Frontline workers and women often highlighted technology-facilitated financial abuse as well as the financial cost of TFA on women. eSafety should particularly engage with telephone companies to devise ways of mitigating the financial cost of replacing phones and SIM cards. Moreover, eSafety should engage with government agencies and departments, particularly Centrelink, about increasing the safeguards on myGov and other government websites to protect the privacy and security of women, and prevent financial abuse and exploitation, particularly of Elders.

Similarly, there is a need to engage with banks and financial services regarding online banking about the ways these platforms can be used to cause harm. There were two reports in this research of online banking being used by abusers to send messages to women when there was a non-contact intervention order in place. Moreover, there have been multiple reports of loans being taken out in women's names, and reports of theft of women's savings from their accounts. eSafety should work with banks and financial services to raise their awareness about how their platforms can and have been used to perpetrate TFA, and how additional safeguards can be put in place to prevent further harm. Moreover, banks and financial services can have a role to play in assisting women experiencing TFA and/or financial abuse, through interest-free payment plans, and small loans to help women to relocate.

5.2 Challenges to preventing technology-facilitated abuse

Language

One of the major obstacles that quickly became apparent during the interviews and yarning sessions is that the term technology-facilitated abuse (TFA) is not well-known and hard to understand. Both the frontline workers and victims reported not knowing the term and many victims did not think that this form of harassment was actually a form of violence. To avoid miscommunication and misunderstandings, awareness campaigns and programs need to draw on concepts and imagery that make sense for the communities and groups they aim to inform and educate, whether it is teenage girls, Elders or the wider community. For example, a frontline worker in central Australia proposed the term "humbug" as one way to talk about this issue in a manner that would resonate with the community. Complex terminology can impede the capacity of the victims and community to identify the forms that TFAs can take.

Inadvertently educating perpetrators

While emphasising the importance of informing the women using their services about TFA and available resources, frontline workers also pointed out the risks of inadvertently educating the perpetrators about these strategies, therefore putting the women at risk. In health centres or police stations, posters advertising applications to protect women against TFA in the context of

domestic violence could be seen by the perpetrator who may then try to find the application on their victim's devices which can potentially escalate to other forms of abuse. Such resources need to strike a balance by giving women the information they need, without inadvertently broadcasting methods of abuse. One suggestion was for posters that include an audio button which, when pressed, delivers facts about TFA and the law and/or women's rights in local Indigenous languages.

Organising activities for women such as weaving workshops where various issues including TFA can be shared was proposed as a culturally appropriate way to provide information to the women without risk of sharing it with male perpetrators. These workshops can also provide avenues to address jealousy and strengthen relationships between women to prevent lateral violence between women.

Challenges presented by technology and technology-based solutions

Perpetrator's access and control over the victims' devices and accounts means that technology or application-based solutions to TFA and domestic violence may not be the best or safest approaches. Frontline workers have discussed some of the applications they use themselves to ensure their safety. These applications often involve tracking options that inform a trusted person of the users' whereabouts and a button or other mechanism (for example, shaking the phone a certain way) to alert the authorities or a third party of an emergency. Some of the caseworkers emphasised that, in a situation of domestic violence, the victims need to be able to contact the police or emergency services without having to speak to an operator as this can further escalate the violence. Several apps are available in Australia to support domestic violence victims to seek and access help during times of crisis. While they are made to look like any ordinary app, they may raise suspicion from the perpetrator if noticed. Some victims may also be given a secondary phone to hide and use in case of emergency. Again, this may contribute to escalating the abuse if the device is found by the perpetrator.

The rapid and continuous changes happening in the technology space make it difficult for victims as well as frontline services to keep up. Regular training on technology changes could better inform frontline workers on how to support victims. As was highlighted in several interviews and yarnings, the perpetrators often found creative new ways to get in touch with victims despite their phone

numbers and account being blocked. A few participants have notably mentioned that perpetrators have used the message option available during bank transfer to reach people who had blocked them.

5.3 Avenues for further research

While the individual semi-structured interviews and yarning sessions enabled in-depth exploration of the experiences of TFA, future research could consider focus groups as a means of qualitative data collection. Recruitment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women may be easier especially if framed more broadly as TFA observed in the community rather than personally experienced abuse. The various experiences drawn from the stories of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in this research could be used as vignettes to initiate discussions in focus groups. This could be complemented by anonymous surveys (phone, mail out or online) to determine the prevalence and extent of technology-facilitated abuse – due to safety concerns, this should focus on perpetration rather than victimisation. However, this method will have limitations in remote contexts, and with people with limited English.

The strength of this report is the narratives shared by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women themselves in Section 4. The lack of awareness and familiarity with the terminologies used in the research points to the need to conceptualise and articulate these concepts within useful education and awareness raising strategies. Related to this is the need to explore technology-facilitated abuse from the perspectives of perpetrators. It is highly likely that perpetrators are unaware that their actions can be classified as a form of abuse and how this form of abuse interacts with and overlaps with other forms of physical, sexual and emotional abuse. The findings in the report also demonstrate that online safely is more than just being cyber aware. It is fundamentally about knowing how your devices work and how to use your device competently and safely. This points to the need for further research into digital literacy in regional and remote areas and the role that digital literacy might play in experiencing or committing TFA.

In terms of support and prevention strategies and tools, there is more work needed to explore the types of informal support available to and used by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and men. The findings highlight there is mistrust in some services and a lack of culturally responsive and appropriate services and help. Models such as peer-to-peer exchanges and sharing and role models could play a pivotal role in these instances. Further research could explore how peers can

be important educators and champions for promoting and raising awareness around online safety and TFA.

The ways in which Indigenous cultural protocols and authority can lay the foundation of policy and strategies have been explored in the context of sentencing and prevention of re-offending in the context of the justice and child protection systems. An important avenue of research is how Indigenous cultural authority and protocols can frame and guide strategies around reducing and addressing TFA. This relatively unexplored area draws on Indigenous strengths and philosophies and could be used to develop strategies to mitigate and minimise this type of abuse in situations where the abuse escalates beyond just the individuals involved to include the families and community at large.

6. Conclusion

Although the use of technology is instrumental to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women's safety, the women who participated in this study experienced multiple forms of technology-facilitated abusive behaviours using phones, monitoring devices, and online platforms, particularly social media. The participants in this research reported that the experience of technology-facilitated abuse (TFA) was often coupled with low levels of digital literacy, particularly regarding knowledge about online safety, how to report TFA, and how to use devices safely.

The women participants also reported the diverse ways that their experience of TFA impacted them and their families. These impacts often last long into the future. The experience of TFA affected women's sense of safety and security, and women reported experiencing fear and isolation which they had to manage for many years after the abuse had ended. TFA also detrimentally impacted women's other relationships and their own sense of well-being. In addition to these social and emotional impacts, women also experienced economic impacts, including debt and financial costs incurred because of the abuse.

It is clear that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in regional and remote areas have diverse and unique experiences of TFA, and that often their location presents additional barriers and obstacles to seeking and obtaining help. The contextual and cultural sensitives that need to be considered when providing information and support to women in regional and remote areas include language barriers, poverty, and overcrowding in housing. This, in combination with low incomes often means women are more likely to share phones with other people. The low resource setting also means there may be a lack of services, education programs and transport. Moreover, the close-knit communities where everyone knows everyone else's business may make it difficult for women to safely report as well as make it easier for perpetrators to locate and monitor their victims.

Similarly, this context presents several complexities for policies and programs aiming to prevent TFA. The frontline workers who participated in this study reflected on how critical awareness and education is to preventing TFA and minimising its impacts. Frontline workers also reported that women's preferred pathways to seek assistance and their trusted sources of support in

remote locations were the health clinic or from youth services/workers. In regional areas, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women were more likely to seek help and support from women's shelters, women's legal services, medical clinics and police. The women participants reported that they were most likely to make use of informal support channels, such as a family and friends, and rarely reported TFA until it had escalated to physical violence. This was usually because of lack of understanding and awareness of TFA, and what constitutes an offence under the law. This highlights the need for eSafety to build upon and enhance these pathways to support, and if women turn first to trusted friends and family, then it heightens the importance of an education campaign to the wider community.

6.1 Recommendations

To enhance existing early intervention programs and responses to technology-facilitated abuse, key recommendations are:

1. Develop culturally and contextually appropriate community-driven awareness campaigns, in order to teach women their rights, how to identify technology-facilitated abuse, and to make clear to abusers that their behaviour is illegal.

2. Develop culturally and contextually appropriate community-driven resources, such as television adverts, posters, and social media campaigns with educational and anti-violence messaging.

3. Develop and disseminate community-driven resources in local languages.

4. Develop a comprehensive training program on relevant legislation that includes how to identify and respond to technology-facilitated abuse for remote and regional frontline workers, including healthcare workers, youth services, police and legal services.

5. Work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations to develop culturally safe and responsive programs to be delivered in jails for perpetrators of technology-facilitated abuse.

6. Work with big technology and social media companies to better identify and respond to online abuse.

7. Work with banks and financial services to raise their awareness about how their platforms can be used to perpetrate TFA and to develop additional safeguards to prevent further harm.

To enhance primary prevention programs and to prevent TFA, the recommendations are:

1. Embed age-appropriate progressive digital literacy and online safety initiatives into school curriculum, beginning with primary school.

2. Develop culturally and contextually appropriate community-driven educational programs to be delivered in communities on device and online safety.

3. Develop and/or support existing community-driven educational programs and initiatives about healthy and respectful relationships, which begin in primary school

4. Develop and/or support existing primary prevention campaigns which challenge rigid gender roles and 'jealousing' behaviours and promote gender equality.

7. Research challenges and limitations

This research was conducted in a complex and, in many ways, limiting set of circumstances. The COVID-19 pandemic context in which the research evolved demanded that the team be creative and flexible. The travel restrictions alongside university regulations limited the ability of team members based at the ANU to travel and conduct fieldwork in the Western Australia and NSW field sites. In addition, many partner organisations and community-based researchers were still providing on-going support resulting from the pandemic in addition to their daily operations and activities, which at times limited their capacity to engage in the research.

Recruitment

The research team faced numerous challenges in recruiting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women for the yarning sessions in Western Australia and NSW. One of our community-based researchers confided that she had overestimated the willingness of people to share their stories. The topic of this research is indeed highly sensitive and potentially anxiety and trauma-inducing for the participants as well as the researchers. In tightly knitted communities such as those included in this research, the community-based researchers are likely to be exposed to stories of or about people they know. Furthermore, some frontline service workers were not always comfortable with the idea of inviting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women whom they support to participate in this project. When responding to these challenges, the research team prioritised the safety of participants and researchers first, listening to the community-based researchers and the partner ogranisations, and always deferring to the ethical principle of 'do no harm'. The limitations of recruitment were therefore addressed in part by adapting the recruitment strategy to include not only Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women who have experienced firsthand TFA, but also those who have witnessed this form of abuse occurring in their communities.

Ethics processes

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, there was a moratorium on new research activities in some parts of Western Australia as regional and remote communities took actions to keep themselves safe. Fortunately, the pre-existing relationship and research with the community-based researcher and

the support for this work by the partner organisation facilitated the opportunity for submitting the proposed project for ethics consideration and approval.

Time constraints

The timeframe of this research was particularly narrow. The necessary but lengthy ethics process and the pandemic context reduced considerably the time allocated for data collection. Good qualitative research, Indigenous or otherwise, relies on the quality and depth of the relationships with the research partners and participants and the capacity to engage with each other. The stories we are presenting here are rich and diverse, however this project would have benefitted from having more time spent in each community. This would have enabled researchers to fully comprehend the breadth of experiences lived by the Aboriginal participants, to account for various Indigenous perspectives, and a better understanding of the contexts in which they live.

Sorry business

The research was also marked by sorry business, including the tragic theft of R. Rubuntja's life. R. Rubuntja contributed to this research through her work with the Tangentyere Women's Family Safety Group, and she participated in the development of the discussion guides used in the interviews and yarnings. Her loss is keenly felt. The research team hopes this research and this report can serve her memory and legacy by contributing to the much-needed work to prevent all forms of violence against women.

8. Methodology

This qualitative research followed an inductive and iterative protocol which allowed for adaptations to be made throughout the research but also for foreseen and unforeseen themes to emerge from this work. This approach was undertaken in order to gain a holistic understanding of technology-facilitated abuse (TFA) from the experience and perspectives of frontline workers, stakeholders and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in remote and regional areas (see Appendix B for further details about the methodology).

The research design includes interviews with frontline services and stakeholders, and one-on-one yarning with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in three different regional and remote locations in Australia: Central Australia, remote Western Australia and regional NSW.

8.1 Fieldwork locations

The fieldwork regions were selected because of their regional/remote status, their comparatively low rates of COVID-19; and the existing professional and personal relationships with the research team. The research team has widespread networks and has developed relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and organisations in two of these locations over many years. Members of the team have also undertaken extensive fieldwork in some of these locations, including research on domestic, family, and sexual violence. In the course of this project, members of the research team dedicated themselves to building trustful relationships in the third region. The extensive fieldwork experience and both pre-existing and emerging relationships on the ground were crucial to ensure that this sensitive research was conducted in a relaxed, open and safe manner with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

The locations also have a number of cultural and contextual complexities due to their regional/remote status. These complexities add important context to the findings presented in sections 3 and 4 of this report. Such complexities also illustrate how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in regional and remote areas have different experiences than those in urban areas. Whilst some of these factors may differ between regional and remote areas, and these locations cannot be generalized, some of these complexities in the research locations include:

- Poor infrastructure and housing: fewer sealed roads make remote locations difficult to access – and for women to travel to other locations; overcrowded housing means women are more likely to share and borrow phones, and privacy is more difficult to maintain.

- Lack of/or fewer services available: fewer support services, particularly specialist services, are available in regional areas, and more so in remote areas, which means women have fewer avenues to access support.

- Poor (or no) phone network coverage or internet bandwidth: this can make it difficult for women to access support and call for help.

- Multiple nation groups and multiple languages: information and support services are often unavailable in people's native language, rendering them inaccessible.

- Less access to education opportunities: this may mean women in these areas have lower levels of digital literacy, as well as lower levels of awareness about TFA and how to access support.

- High rates of poverty and disadvantage: women experiencing TFA have less resources available to respond and the impacts of the financial cost of TFA is higher.

- Small tight-knit communities: offer a strong source of informal support for women, but can also be exploited by abusers who use mutual relationships and connections to gather information and maintain control over the woman.

- A history of hostility with police: a distrust of police due to historical violence as well as more recent deaths in custody, may mean women are less likely to report to police.

8.2 Recruitment and participant information

Frontline workers and stakeholders

A total of 15 stakeholder participants representing a cross-section of work sectors, regions, and Indigenous status gave insights into the range of existing experiences and understandings of TFA within the different contexts and regional complexities. The research team, community-based researchers and partner organisations worked together to identify and invite services and key informants for the sample. The main criteria for recruitment to this part of the

research was that the person worked directly or indirectly with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women who have experienced technology-facilitated abuse (TFA).

The range of respondents represented in this sample includes:

- 3 women's services

- 2 police officers (from two different police services)

- 3 legal services

- 1 drug and alcohol service

- 1 health service

- 2 Aboriginal health services

- 1 Aboriginal corporation

- 1 men's behaviour change program

- 1 youth service.

Of these, five were Indigenous and 10 non-Indigenous and 14 of the 15 were female. Nine of the interviews were conducted in person, with six conducted online (see Table 3).

Table 3. Distribution of frontline service workers and stakeholders by demographic and data collection characteristics.

Number of participants	Age range	Indigeneity		Gender		Mode of data collection	
		Indigenous	Non-Indigenous	Female	Male	Online	In person
15	23–58	5	10	14	1	6	9

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women who have experienced TFA were recruited through the partner organisations, community-based researchers' networks and the stakeholders who participated in the interviews. The participants selected were therefore already connected to a service that knows them or could support them if needed.

The sample size of 12 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women is characterised by different age groups, educational achievements, and experiences of and different impacts of TFA. The ages ranged between 26 and

65 with the majority being in the 26 to 45 range. The inclusion criteria for this category of participants was that they must be Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women who have experienced or witnessed TFA and currently living in regional or remote areas. All of the participants identified as Aboriginal. To the best of our knowledge, none of them also identified as Torres Strait Islanders[2].

Table 4. Characteristics of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women across the three regions by mode of data collection.

Number of participants	Age range	Mode of data collection	
		ArtVoice and yarning	**Yarning only**
12	26–65	5	7

8.3 Discussion guides

Two discussion guides were prepared for this research. Both guides were designed to stimulate open and flowing conversations, to place a greater emphasis on listening and create ample space for the participants to influence the discussions, reflecting the iterative intent of the approach.

The first discussion guide consisted of a list of open-ended questions to guide the interviews with frontline service workers on their experiences and work with clients. The second was an illustrated guide to facilitate the one-on-one yarnings with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women who had experienced technology-facilitated abuse (TFA). Both guides were co-developed with the Tangentyere Women's Family Safety Group in September 2020 (see Appendix C for more details). The group notably discussed how many women would not understand the term 'technology-facilitated abuse' and suggested alternative language, terms, and tools to break down this concept with the participants. These included stories to be used as vignettes during the yarning sessions. The group also discussed what should be included in the care packages for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women participants. The guides were subsequently reviewed, revised and adapted to the remote Western Australian and regional NSW areas with local research partner organisations.

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[2] While the sample may not have included any women who identified as Torres Strait Islander women, frontline worker participants were asked to speak about their experiences with both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women.

8.4 Interviews with frontline services and stakeholders

Five semi-structured interviews were conducted with frontline services and stakeholders in each site. The interviews lasted approximately 60 minutes. Six were conducted online via Zoom and nine in person. The research team pre-circulated the questions to the participants before the interview so they could prepare their responses and mitigate the risk of vicarious trauma. All participants were assigned a random code which was used in place of their name to safeguard their confidentiality. All direct quotes from participants in this report are attributed to the participant's code.

8.5 Yarning with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women

The interactions with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women who experienced technology-facilitated abuse (TFA) were guided by a yarning methodology as this conversational approach is considered more culturally appropriate (Aveling, 2013). The yarning involved sitting down with the women, having a conversation and listening to their stories. While the one-on-one yarning sessions did not follow the question and answer format of typical structured interviews, the yarnings were guided by the list of topics included in the discussion guide. As mentioned above, vignettes were also used to facilitate discussions in a sensitive way. These vignettes provided a way for the women to be able to talk about this type of abuse without being asked directly about their own experiences. They also allowed women to talk about the TFA they had witnessed in their communities, rather than having to exclusively talk about their own experiences. This approach was considered to be culturally safe.

To limit the risk to the women, the team elected to recruit women who had experienced TFA but were of low risk of re-victimisation. To identify these women, the research team drew upon the partner-organisations as well as the community-based researchers and frontline workers to recruit women who were assessed as low risk. The women also had the option of having a support person or staff present during the yarning sessions.

Eleven yarning sessions were conducted with 12 women across the three sites. One of the yarning sessions involved two women who expressed their

preference to be in each other's presence. The sessions lasted between 20 minutes and 60 minutes. In line with the WHO guidelines for research about violence against women and girls, all one-on-one yarning sessions were conducted in person. Most yarnings were conducted by the community-based researchers.

8.6 ArtVoice with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women

The use of the ArtVoice methods was proposed by the Tangentyere Women's Family Safety Group (TWFSG). The group suggested that the use of pictures to illustrate some common forms of technology-facilitated abuse (TFA) would help prompt the discussions. The ArtVoice method was therefore included as part of the research toolkit and training on this method was organised for the community-based researchers.

At the start of the project, it was envisaged that all sites would employ the ArtVoice method. However, during the project, some methodological flexibility was necessary in reflecting local Indigenous and culturally appropriate methodologies. In both WA and NSW, the research team, with advice from and reflections with the community-based researchers, decided to place greater focus on the yarning as a rapport building tool rather than use the ArtVoice method.

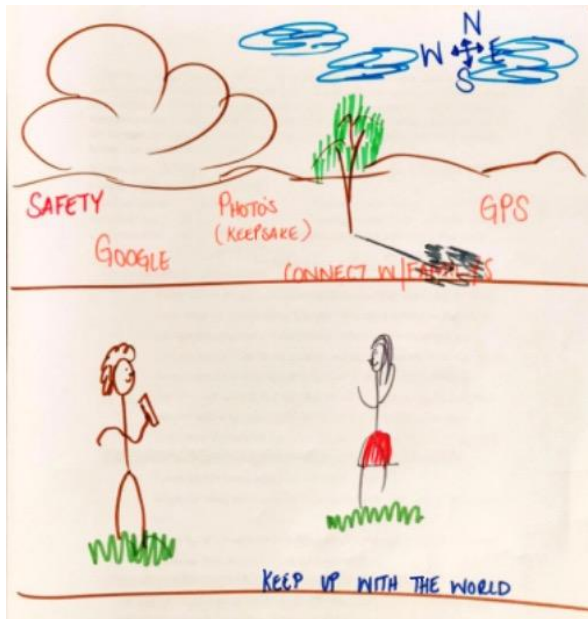**Figure 1. ArtVoice by SP02 showing how she sees technology being used in her community**

Figure 2. ArtVoice by GR57_1 showing the types of technology she sees being used in her community (phone, tablet, TV and laptop).
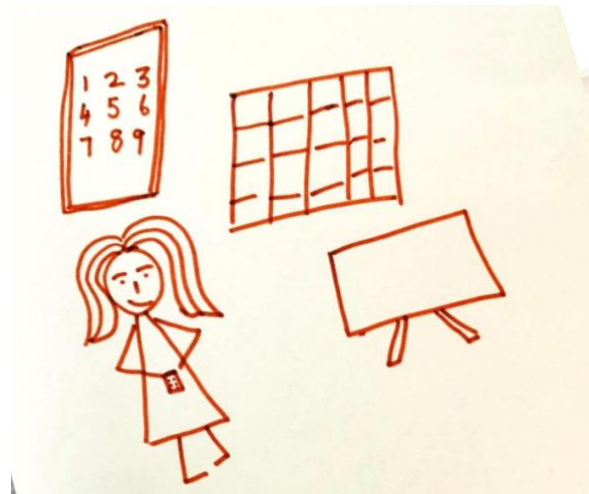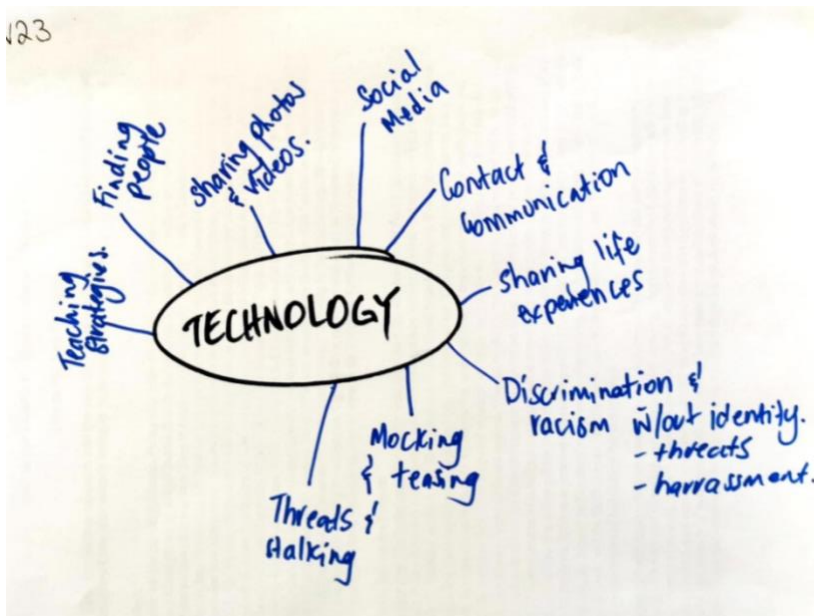

Figure 3. ArtVoice by FN23, who elected to do a mind map of how she sees technology being used in her community.

8.7 Case studies

Three of the stories shared with the research team during the one-on-one yarning sessions were selected to illustrate and describe in greater depth the various forms that technology-facilitated abuse (TFA) can take, their impacts and possible strategies to stop or mitigate such abuse. One story was selected for each region.

8.8 Data treatment and analysis

The data collected across the three sites during the yarnings and interviews, the observation notes and ArtVoice drawings were compiled and coded using the NVivo software. The codes were then refined and regrouped into themes that underpinned the data analysis.

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Appendix A: Previous research

Technology-facilitated abuse (TFA) is common, especially among women experiencing domestic violence. For instance, one study found that 99.3% of domestic violence practitioners had clients who had experienced technology-facilitated stalking and abuse (Woodlock, et al., 2020).

Although TFA may be perpetrated by strangers, it is linked to other forms of interpersonal violence, is a common form of intimate partner violence and family violence and is used to reinforce abuse offline (Henry et al., 2017; Office of the eSafety Commissioner, 2019). Domestic, family, and sexual violence, in all their forms, are gendered – the perpetrators of this violence are overwhelmingly male, whilst the victims are usually women and children (Manjoo, 2012; World Health Organization/London School of Hygiene and Tropical, 2010; Ellsberg, et al., 2015; Our Watch, 2018; Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety, 2019). As with other types of violence, studies have shown that the perpetrators of TFA are most likely to be male and known to their victim (Henry et al., 2017). The consequences of TFA also seem to be different for men and women. For example, whilst men and women are equally likely to report being victims of image-based abuse, women are more likely to fear for their safety due to image-based abuse (Henry et al., 2017). Given that Indigenous women are overrepresented as victims of domestic, family, and sexual violence (The Northern Territory Government, 2018), it is therefore likely that they also experience high rates of TFA.

Globally, violence against Indigenous women is disproportionately frequent and severe (Manjoo, 2012). In Australia, three of every five Indigenous women have experienced physical or sexual violence at the hands of an intimate male partner (Our Watch, 2018). Intimate partner violence (IPV) makes up one tenth (10.9%) of the total burden of disease for Indigenous women between the ages of 18 and 44 – this is the highest health risk factor for Indigenous women, more than alcohol, smoking, or obesity (Our Watch, 2018). Again, whilst both women and men are at risk of experiencing high levels of violence, the perpetrators of this violence are usually men and the victims of this violence are mostly women and children (Cuneen, 2002, p. 243). These stark figures have invariably resulted in violence against Indigenous women being characterised in various reports as a 'tsunami', an 'avalanche', an 'epidemic', and a 'national emergency' (Brown, 2014; Cripps & Davis, 2012; Day, Francisco, & Jones, 2013; Skelton, 2011).

While there is an established body of literature around different forms of violence including physical violence, intimate partner violence and personal violence, what is less known is the extent of TFA among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, and how their experiences may differ from the experiences of non-Indigenous women. The evidence base on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women's experiences of TFA is emerging. One study found that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experienced image-based abuse, or the non-consensual sharing of intimate images, at more than twice the rate of non-Indigenous Australians (Henry et al., 2017). In 2019, eSafety published a report entitled 'Online safety for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women living in urban areas'. This report shows that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in urban areas tend to experience particular forms of TFA. These are: abusive phone calls and text messages, destroying or restricting technology access, social media and third-party abuse, monitoring and stalking, image-based abuse, and fight videos (Office of the eSafety Commissioner, October, 2019). The report also recommended the investigation of experiences of TFA in regional and remote areas. It recommended speaking directly with Indigenous women to hear about their experiences in order to address the significant gap in the evidence base about their experience of TFA, the rates of this abuse, and the impacts this has on their safety and wellbeing.

Few studies have explicitly examined how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women experience TFA, the risk factors associated with this victimisation, and protective factors which may prevent abuse or support survivors (Office of the eSafety Commissioner, October, 2019). Some have theorised that this evidence base is limited due to a lack of understanding or focus on different types of violence apart from physical violence (Office of the eSafety Commissioner, October, 2019). However, it is becomingly increasingly evident that with the emergence of new technologies, such as social media, abusers are making use of these platforms to engage in coercive control. Coercive control is a form of domestic or intimate partner violence, and the term refers to a pattern of abusive and controlling behaviours designed to exert power over another person (Brancatisano, 2021).

Internet technologies have become ubiquitous among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, as they have with communities elsewhere in the world (Carlson & Frazer, 2018). There is an emerging evidence base which suggests that the impacts and motivations of technology take up and TFA may be different for Indigenous people (Carlson & Frazer, 2018). Internet technologies can offer a way for people to connect and maintain connection

and carry out cultural obligations such as Sorry Business. Internet technologies also transcend geographical and distance barriers of access (through online banking for example), as well as provide tools of empowerment for historically marginalised groups to engage in activism and contribute to national conversations. However, internet technologies can also provide ways for abusers to track, monitor, and humiliate their victims (Carlson & Frazer, 2018). Some studies have also found a reluctance among historically marginalised groups to engage in internet technologies because of the risk of exploitation and abuse through these mediums (Rennie et al., 2018).

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women also experience particular risk factors and barriers which may make them further vulnerable to TFA. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women who live in remote and regional locations, for example, can be further isolated due to TFA as they are further restricted from communicating with support services and other sources of informal support, such as friends and family (Women's Legal Service NSW, Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria and WESNET, 2015). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women who have low levels of English proficiency can be exploited by abusers who take advantage of the social isolation and language barriers faced by these women (Women's Legal Service NSW, Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria and WESNET, 2015). Moreover, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women who live in remote and regional locations – particularly those living in remote Indigenous communities – need access to technology as an important safety planning tool. However, lack of access to technology, limited internet access, and limited phone network coverage, not only serve as additional barriers for women who need to seek help and safety, but also present additional opportunities to abusers to isolate and control women (Brown, 2020).

Research is needed to understand the causes and impacts of TFA against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, and how it might be effectively prevented and addressed (Carlson & Frazer, 2018). Understanding these causes and impacts of the harms created through TFA is important for improving community safety as well as digital inclusion and improving access to technology for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (Rennie et al., 2018).

Importantly, further research is needed to explore the specific experiences of TFA among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in remote and regional areas (Office of the eSafety Commissioner, 2019).

Appendix B: Additional notes on methodology

Working to give voice to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women who have been victims of abuse added to the complexity and sensitive nature of the topic. Several authors have emphasised that research on issues relating to technology-facilitated abuse (TFA) should be conducted in ways that are culturally safe and appropriate, especially by drawing upon yarning methodologies (Office of the eSafety Commissioner, 2019; Aveling, 2013). In line with this, this qualitative research is strongly informed by principles of Indigenous methodologies. From the outset, the team sought to ensure that the research was relevant, beneficial and mattered to our partner organisations, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous and the women they serve. The partner organisations were selected as they work with and support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women who have experienced TFA. They were also selected for their capacity, knowledge, and experience to assist with community-based research. The research team as well as a number of specialists and female patrons from these organisations worked together to develop the research tools and recruit participants. In all of the sites, this research was considered important and responded to the pressing need to improve the understanding of the reality, impacts and extent of TFA against Elders, women and children.

The research design follows the AIATSIS Guidelines for Ethical Research in Australian Indigenous Studies as well as the World Health Organisation's guidelines on ethics and safety in research on violence against women and girls (VAWG). One of the key preoccupations of this research has been to privilege the voices of local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women participants at every stage, from its design to its implementation and dissemination. Whenever possible, we have used their words and direct quotes in this report. Equally important, and despite the significant time demands and travel constraints as this project evolved, has been the team's commitment to sustain and build trustful, respectful, accountable, safe, reciprocal, and hopefully lasting relationships with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and organisations involved.

The research team is composed of four experienced women researchers from a range of disciplinary, professional and ethnic backgrounds including two First Nation researchers. Two of these researchers also played the role of community-based researchers. Two additional community-based researchers were recruited and trained for the regional NSW site, and were connected to a

support service in that location. In total, three of the four community-based researchers are First Nations women. Appropriate training, supervision and debriefs were undertaken with community-based researchers to ensure their wellbeing. This included having access to counselling should they report experiencing negative impacts from being involved in the research. The presence of community-based researchers with knowledge of their regions was critical to the recruitment process and enabled the yarnings to be conducted in person following best practice guidelines in research on violence against women. They were ideally placed to conduct the data collection while being sensitive to the issues faced locally. The recruitment of local community-based researchers was also an occasion to build local research capacity.

Appendix C: Discussion guide development and rationale

The question guide for the interviews with frontline services and the discussion guide for the one-on-one yarning with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women were developed in a participatory process with partner Indigenous organisations.

By developing the research tools in collaboration with Indigenous people, the research team can ensure the approach, questions, and language is culturally safe, appropriate, and accessible. The participatory approach also means the research can be conducted according to the priorities of Indigenous people and encourages ownership of the research and its findings.

The development of the guides began with a workshop with the Tangentyere Women's Family Safety Group (TWFSG) in Central Australia in September 2020. There were thirteen members of TWFSG present in the workshop: three members are aged between 18-21, six members are aged between 30-45, and four members are aged between 50-65. The varying age ranges allowed for a diversity of views and perspectives to be included in the workshop.

In this workshop, the community-based researcher gave an overview of the 'Experiences of TFA among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women from regional and remote areas' research project, and its aims and objectives. TWFSG then worked in small groups to answer a range of questions. For example, TWFSG were asked what kinds of technology they see being used in their communities and how it was used.

The women reported a wide variety of technology being used in Central Australian Aboriginal communities and said that access to technology is important for people to stay connected, to take care of financial matters, and for safety reasons. TWFSG were then asked about technology-facilitated abuse (TFA) and once again, the women reported a range of technologies being used to harass, monitor, impersonate and threaten women. TWFSG felt the rate of TFA is high in Central Australian Aboriginal communities. TWFSG felt that many women would not understand the term 'TFA' or understand what it means, so they suggested some alternative language, terms, and tools to break down this concept with participants. TWFSG also suggested some stories that can be used as vignettes. The women also suggested items to be included in the care package for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women participants.

TWFSG were then asked to develop some questions to be used in interviews with frontline services and to identify some services who should be invited to participate in an interview. TWFSG also developed topics to discuss with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women. TWFSG were highly supportive of the yarning and ArtVoice methodology with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, and additionally suggested the use of pictures to illustrate some common forms of TFA and to prompt discussion. TWFSG emphasised listening to women and responding to their stories. TWFSG felt the research was important, and particularly expressed concern about TFA against Elders and women, and cyberbullying of children.

After the initial workshop with TWFSG, the discussion guides were sent to the partner organisation in Central Australia for review, but they made no further additions or changes to the guides.

The initial discussion guides developed with TWFSG were used to inform the remote Western Australia fieldwork. The initial questions were sent to the partner organisation in the Western Australian site, who responded that guides were relevant and appropriate for the remote Western Australia context. The initial discussion guides similarly informed the fieldwork in regional NSW. The questions were sent through to the partner organisation in the NSW site who reviewed and reported that they were appropriateness for use in regional NSW contexts.

Appendix D: Discussion guide for interviews with frontline workers

Interview ID #: _____

Name of researcher: _____

Location: _____

Participant's gender: _____

Participant's organisation: _____

Participant's age: _____

Participant's Indigeneity: _____

Level of education: _____

LGBTQI+ / People with a disability / Single parent

Hi my name is _____ and I am here on behalf of the Australian National University and the Office for the eSafety Commissioner. We are conducting some research on experiences of technology-facilitated abuse among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women from regional and remote areas. Technology-facilitated abuse refers to abusive behaviour using phones and other devices, as well as social media and online accounts. There are four main types of technology-facilitated abusive behaviours: harassment, stalking, impersonation, and threats. Today I would like to talk to you about what, if any, technology-facilitated abuse against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women you may have encountered in your work, but I'd like to begin by asking a few questions about yourself so I can understand your perspective a little better. May we start our talk now?

1. Can you tell me about yourself and the work that you do?

    a. Prompt: Where do you come from? What organisation do you work for? What is your role at your organisation? Do you identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander? How do you identify your gender? Are there any other groups i.e. people with a disability, LGBTQI+, single parent that you identify with? Are you happy to share your age with us? What's the highest level of western education you have completed?

2. How have you seen technology being used in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities?

3. Do you think Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in your community benefit from the use of technology? How so?

4. Can you tell me, what's your knowledge or understanding of technology-facilitated abuse of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women? Where/when/how does this abuse occur?

    a. Follow-up: without identifying anyone, have you seen or heard of any instances where technology has been used to stalk or monitor Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women? For example, the use of GPS technology to monitor a person's location and movement.

    b. Follow-up: without identifying anyone, have you seen or heard of any instances where technology has been used to harass Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women? For example, by bombarding them with text messages or phone-calls, or by sharing personal images without their consent.

    c. Follow-up: without identifying anyone, have you seen or heard of any instances where technology has been used to impersonate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women? For example, by creating fake social media accounts.

    d. Follow-up: without identifying anyone, have you seen or heard of any instances where technology has been used to threaten Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women? For example, by sending or posting threatening or verbally abusive messages.

5. What are the consequences or impacts of technology-facilitated abuse on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women?

6. Is there anything that you can identify that makes Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women vulnerable to experiencing technology-facilitated abuse?

    a. Follow-up: how do you think the experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women who lived in regional and remote areas might differ to those living in urban areas?

7. Do you know of any strategies or supports Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women make use of to protect themselves/keep themselves safe when they experience technology-facilitated abuse?

    a. Follow-up: can you identify some of the relationships and supports Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women draw upon if/when they experience technology-facilitated abuse?

    b. Follow-up: How do Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women learn about these supports/services?

    c. How can these supports/services be improved to meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in regional and remote areas?

8. How can technology-facilitated abuse of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in regional and remote areas be addressed and/or prevented?

    a. Follow-up: what kinds of things would help you in your work with women who have experienced technology-facilitated abuse?

    b. Follow-up: what kinds of support would be needed to prevent technology-facilitated abuse in your/this community?

9. Is there anything else you would like to say or add?

10. Could you suggest or recommend any Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women you work with who would be interested in taking part in this research in the coming months?

Appendix E: Discussion guide for yarnings with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women

Hi my name is _____ and I am here on behalf of the Australian National University and the Office for the eSafety Commissioner. We are conducting some research on experiences of technology-facilitated abuse among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women from regional and remote areas. Technology-facilitated abuse is the use of phones and other devices, as well as social media and online accounts, to hurt or abuse someone. There are four main types of this kind of abuse: harassment (humbug and teasing), stalking (following or watching someone), impersonation (pretending to be someone else), and threats. Today I would like to talk to you about what, if any, technology-facilitated abuse against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women you may have seen in your community. Sometimes talking about things like this can be upsetting, so I just want to let you know that we can stop at any time and you don't have to answer any questions or say anything that you don't want to. I'd like to begin by asking a few questions about yourself so I can understand your story a little better. May we start our talk now?

Interview ID #: _____

Name of researcher:_____

Location: _____

Participant's gender: _____

Participant's partner status: _____

Participant's age:_____

Participant's Indigeneity: _____

Level of education: _____

LGBITIQ+ / People with a disability / Single parent

1. Can you tell me about yourself?

   a. Probe: Where do you come from? What do you do for work? Do you like it here? What do you like about it (or don't like about it)? Do you identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander? Who's your mob/what's your language group? How do you identify your gender (female, male, non-binary, transgender)? Are there any other groups i.e. people with a disability, LGBTQ+, single parent, that you identify with? Are you happy to share your age with us? What's the highest level of western education you have completed? Do you have a partner? Do you and your partner live together?

2. Can you draw me how you see technology being used in your community?

   a. Follow-up: Could you explain your drawing to me?

   b. Follow-up: what are some good things about technology and what it is used for?

   c. Follow-up: what are some bad things about technology and how it is used?

   d. Follow-up: how do you feel about technology?

3. Sometimes technology can be used to keep track of or watch women. For example, one man was checking a woman's location on Snapchat and Facebook to find out where she was. He would then go to that place to follow that woman. Is this something you have heard or experienced anything like that?

4. Sometimes technology can also be used to harass or abuse women. For example, one woman was getting lots of phone calls at all times of the day and night. Sometimes the person on the other end of the line wouldn't say anything and other times they would say nasty things. That woman was also getting a lot of text messages, and when she asked them to stop, they didn't listen. That woman was also embarrassed by some photos of her that were shared online that she didn't want other people to see. Have you heard or experienced anything like this story?

5. Sometimes technology can also be used to pretend to be someone else. For example, one young woman found that someone had made a fake Instagram account using her photo. They used the account to send lots of embarrassing messages to other people, and everyone thought it was the young woman sending it. Some people got angry at the young woman because of the messages and when they would see her out, they would yell and start fights. Have you heard or experienced anything like this story?

6. Sometimes technology can also be used to threaten people. For example, one woman received some messages on her Facebook page calling her names and threatening to hurt her. She also received some text messages with threatening images, one was of a weapon saying that they were going to use it against her. Have you heard or experienced anything similar to this story?
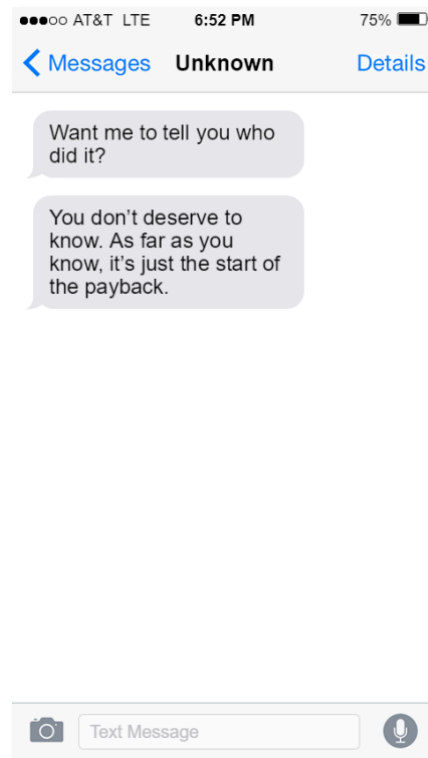
7. When you or other women have experienced things like these stories, what do you do to keep yourself safe?

    a. How can you keep yourself safe online?

    b. Follow-up: if you experience stalking, violence, jealousing through technology, is there anyone that you can talk to or call? Or any place you can go to keep yourself safe?

    c. Follow-up: would you ever report technology-facilitated abuse like in these stories? Who would you report it to?

8. What do you think we need to do to stop technology-facilitated abuse of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women? What is important for us to do so that people can use technology safely?

    a. Prompt: what kinds of support, training, or programs would we need to stop technology-facilitated abuse from happening?

9. Is there anything else you would like to say or add?

Thank you for talking to me today. How are you feeling? Would you like me to put you in touch with anyone?

As I explained earlier, I'd like to use what you told me in a research report (but I won't use your name). If I have any more questions, would it be okay if I contacted you again? If yes: How would you like me to contact you?

How are you getting home today? Can I help you in any way?