Tech vs Abuse:

Research Findings

CHAYN SafeLives Ending domestic abuse SNOOK FUNDED BY COMIC RELIEF

Domestic abuse takes many forms: psychological, physical, sexual, financial, and emotional, with control and coercion at its heart. Its impact on individuals and families is profound and long-lasting.
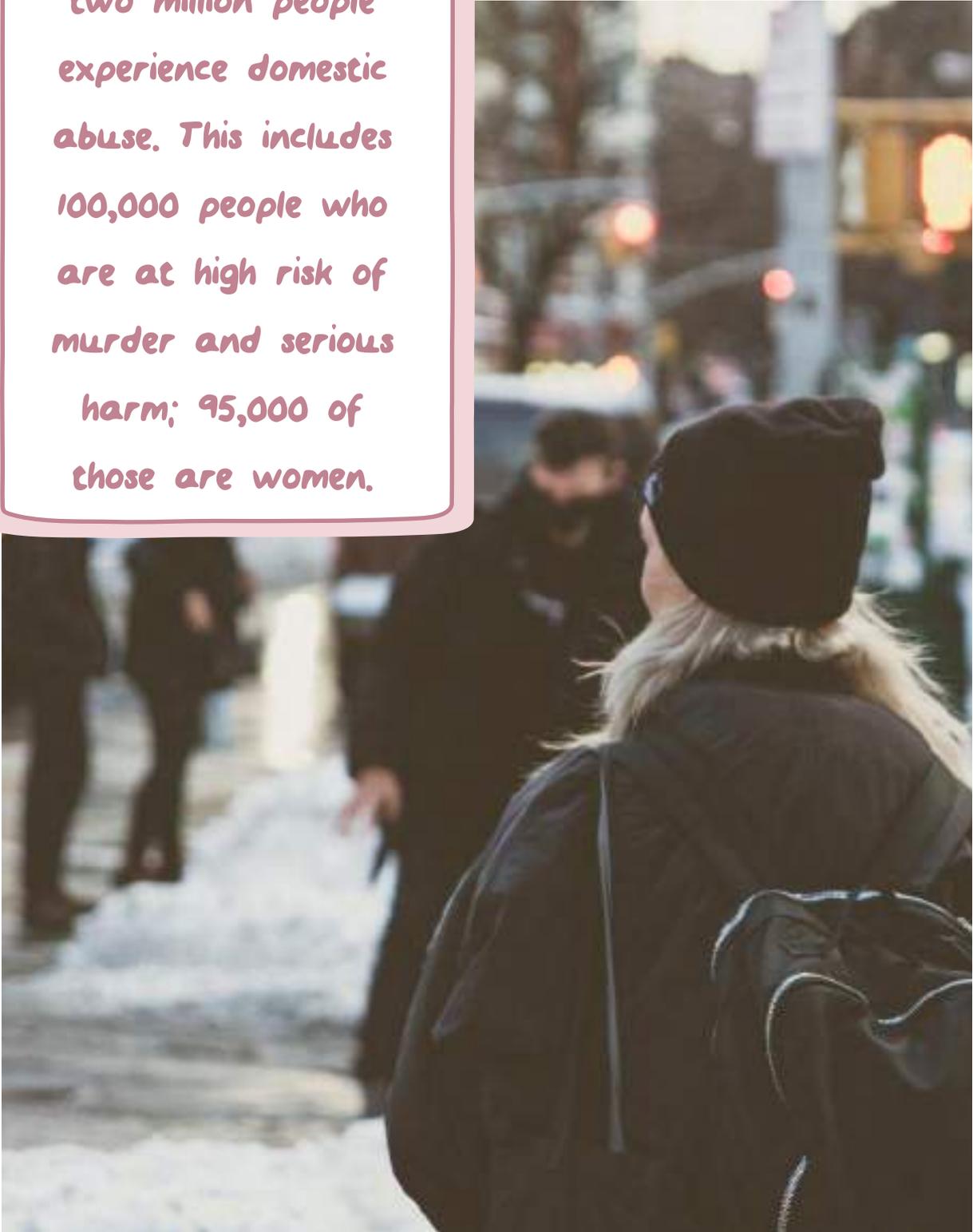
📝 Foreword

Every year, over two million people experience domestic abuse. This includes 100,000 people who are at high risk of murder and serious harm; 95,000 of those are women. There are 130,000 children living in these homes ([SafeLives 2016](#)). Domestic abuse takes many forms: psychological, physical, sexual, financial, and emotional, with control and coercion at its heart. Its impact on individuals and families is profound and long-lasting. Homes are meant to be places of love and safety, yet in every community in the country - there are homes that have become places of fear. Similarly, we are increasingly living our lives online as technology has revolutionised how we communicate, keep in touch with friends and family and manage our lives. Yet these online spaces are also subject to abusive control and coercion.

We know that many people experiencing abuse may not recognise it as such. Others may be fearful of disclosing any information or unsure of what support is available. Some have left the abusive relationship but want to protect themselves from further harm. As a result, they often suffer from isolation and are cut-off from friends and family. Technology and online communications have the potential to tackle this: enabling survivors to make connections and ensuring they have the information they need to make their own choices and rebuild their independence safely and sustainably.

Comic Relief commissioned this research, 'Tech vs Abuse' to better understand the potential opportunities for technology to play a supportive role in the context of domestic abuse and how to minimise the associated risks. This research, undertaken by SafeLives, Snook and Chayn, gathered insights from over 200 survivors of domestic abuse and 350 practitioners who support them. From both, there was a distinct feeling that perpetrators are currently one step ahead. Yet despite the risks, survivors continued to maintain social media profiles, look up the information they needed and resented being advised to live their lives offline. Understandably, there are concerns amongst survivors and practitioners about how perpetrators can use technology to inflict further harm; but by ignoring technology, or asking survivors to remove themselves from social media due to nervousness or lack of understanding, we risk perpetrators staying in control. Every person's experience of domestic abuse and getting support is unique. However, this research found we are missing opportunities to use online tools to better protect and support them at key moments in their journey. The overwhelming finding from this research was the responsibility we all have to ensure victims, survivors and the services supporting them can use technology to their advantage.

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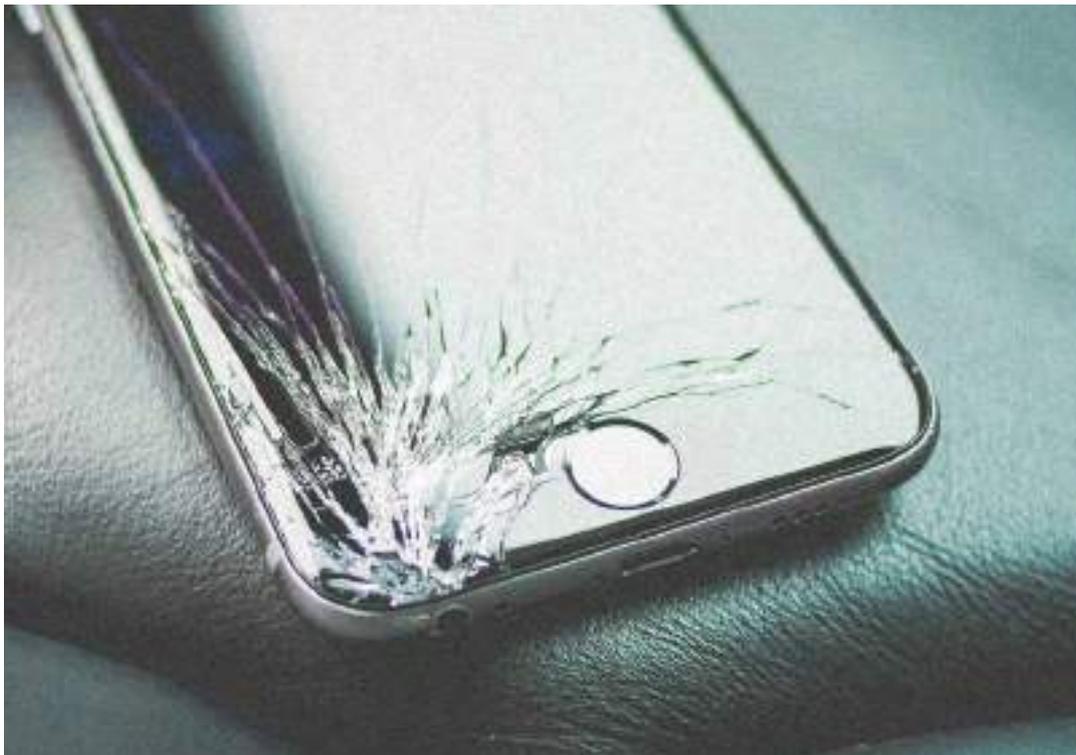
📝 Contents

This research was carried out over six months and set out to explore the potential opportunities, gaps and risks presented by technology in the context of domestic violence and abuse.

📝 Summary

'Tech vs Abuse' is a collaborative research project undertaken by SafeLives, Snook and Chayn, commissioned by Comic Relief.

This research was carried out over six months and set out to explore the potential opportunities, gaps and risks presented by technology in the context of domestic violence and abuse. It achieved this by gathering insights from over 200 survivors of domestic abuse (over 18 years old) and 350 practitioners who support them.

The research included both qualitative user research and quantitative methods. This consisted of online surveys, focus groups, online interviews, informal discussions with practitioners, workshops, and having researchers shadow practitioners and conduct contextual interviews at their workplace. Its aim was to find out how technology could play a supportive role in the context of domestic violence and abuse, and to understand how survivors and practitioners perceived technology in this context.

To best ensure women's safety when designing technology in this space, you have to think as an abuser.

Key Findings

Technology and Control: Almost half of the women involved said they were monitored online or with technology, through trackers, apps or internet blockers and 90% of 307 practitioners surveyed agreed technology was a tool for abuse. Both women and practitioners saw technology as a risk and felt they did not fully understand how to use technology effectively and safely.

Putting Safety First: To best ensure women's safety when designing technology in this space, you have to think as an abuser. Technology needs to be discreet, disguisable and invisible. Technology can also be positive when re-purposed to provide evidence of abuse and to save key evidence and documents securely.

Different Needs at Different Stages and Backgrounds: What people want to know and why is different based on their individual circumstances and their relationship. Technology was a barrier for some and an enabler for others to getting the support, information and advice they wanted. Accessibility, background and circumstances were crucial to how women were able to use technology solutions. There is no 'one size fits all' but there were common uses and experiences of technology.

Getting What You Need Fast: A key gap in current online and technology solutions is the ability for people to find advice and information which helps them make safe decisions in the small windows of opportunity that they have to research, contact services or take action. Technology helped many realise they wanted to access services and support.

Getting the Right Information and Support: Almost half of the women surveyed (47%) reported that connecting with services and support groups was a positive experience they had when using technology, one which could help counteract feelings of isolation.

What Women Search for Online: Financial and legal support was identified as the biggest gap, followed by learning more about abuse and dealing with child protection agencies. Many did not identify with common terms found online, such as 'domestic abuse' if they did not live with their partner. They used different search terms and struggled to find answers to the questions they had.

Key Findings

Transferring Evidence Safely and Swiftly: Almost 1 in 5 women surveyed had already used technology to capture evidence about their abuse, whether this was through using a phone as a recording device or through forwarding incriminating emails. Most agreed it would have been useful to understand how technology can be used as an option to capture evidence.

Practitioners Confidence in Using Technology: Practitioners were confident in using technology every day in their work and most did. However, they appeared less confident in how to support survivors, especially with advanced online privacy settings and needs. They wanted to further understand which tools women were currently using to seek help and support, the implications for safeguarding and to share best practice so that they could provide better support, advice and recommendations to women.

The Potential for Technology: Practitioners were very confident that technology could improve the efficiency of the domestic abuse sector, with 90% of those responding to the survey agreeing they could support clients more flexibly and effectively. However, some were fearful it would detract from face-to face services or be used to justify further funding cuts for staff. There is a recognition that working with diverse partners and in unusual collaborations would have the most impact when developing new technology solutions.

These findings have also been used to inform the development of five key design challenges that could make the most immediate difference to victims and survivors of domestic abuse.

These can be found in the **'Tech vs Abuse: Design Challenges' report**.

Introduction

According to the Office of National Statistics, in 2016, 82% of adults in Britain use the internet every day. In 2006, that figure was only 35%; technology plays an increasing role in our day to day lives. It helps people to stay in touch with friends and family, revolutionising both communication and the way that we gather information. Technology can have a powerful effect in the lives of victims and survivors of domestic abuse, and this can be positive or negative depending on how it is designed and used. However, there has been little formal research to discover how to maximise the gains and minimise the risks.

This 'Tech vs Abuse' research project was commissioned by Comic Relief in order to explore the potential opportunities for technology to play a supportive role in the context of domestic violence and abuse. It was undertaken by Chayn, SafeLives and Snook between May and November 2016. The research gathered insights over 6 months from over 200 survivors of domestic abuse (over 18 years old) and 350 practitioners who support them. The research included both qualitative user research and quantitative methods. This consisted of online surveys, focus groups, online interviews, discussion in survivor-led Facebook groups, informal discussions with practitioners, workshops, and having researchers shadow practitioners and conduct contextual interviews at their workplace. Its aim was to find out how technology could play a supportive role in the context of domestic violence and abuse, and to understand how survivors and practitioners perceived technology in this context.

Technology is defined here in its widest context and includes access to equipment, devices, apps and websites, as well as the ability to communicate digitally through text messages, emails and other media. The focus of this intersectional research was the experiences of survivors who identified as women (including those over 18 years of age) in using technology. Special consideration was given in going to online spaces where women of diverse backgrounds (ethnicity, gender, age, ability, sexuality) were engaged. Whilst this target group helped focus the research, the insights potentially have wider relevance.

Overall, this research identified that technology is playing a hugely positive role for a small proportion of women, as well as those practitioners who feel

Introduction

confident to provide online support or advice on how to use technology safely. However, in the vast majority of cases, both practitioners and survivors could recount many negative experiences in using technology themselves or in perpetrators of abuse using technology.

Based upon the research findings, Comic Relief, together with the research team and in consultation with a number of organisations in the domestic abuse sector, have prioritised 5 key design challenges. If addressed effectively, solutions for these challenges would make the most immediate difference to women's experience of domestic abuse, potentially allowing them to access support earlier and find the information they need to improve their safety. These are detailed in a separate report '**Tech vs Abuse: Design Challenges**' and are briefly detailed in the conclusion below. This also includes a set of design principles created through this research to ensure any solutions are safe and effective. In addition to this, a range of case studies (called **experience maps**) and **scenarios** which illustrate women's experiences are included to help bring their journeys to life.

Finally, the research collated a list of the digital tools available to those experiencing domestic abuse as identified by survivors and practitioners. This is available as an Open Google spreadsheet which can be added to by clicking **here**. It does not provide any analysis, or peer review of the value of these tools, but is intended for further exploration and analysis by those developing similar or new digital solutions, particularly in response to the design challenges.

The focus of this report is the range of views, experiences and uses of technology shared by survivors and practitioners.

Methodology

This project followed a process of user-research, which focuses on understanding key user behaviours, needs, and motivations through contextual interview and observation techniques, focus groups, participation in survivor-led Facebook groups, workshops and other feedback methodologies.

Active survivor-led Facebook groups were chosen to pose open-ended questions to allow women to share their experiences in their own words, in a space where they felt comfortable. The use of Facebook polls in this group was particularly innovative because it created a collaborative atmosphere where women could add their own poll answers and vote on them. To gather deeper understanding of some survivor's experience of using technology, long interviews over Skype were conducted. An extensive online survey was also used and distributed through Facebook, Twitter and newsletters to capture the views of women who were not on these Facebook groups.

Through this process, four distinct stages of women's experiences in an abusive relationship were identified. Whilst domestic abuse is not a linear experience or one which will necessarily involve each of these stages, the research team identified distinct needs for each of these separate stages.

These were:

Unaware: Experiencing abuse but yet to fully identify this as coercive control.

Aware: Recognises that a partner is abusive, but has not made any decisions about what next and may not intend to end the relationship.

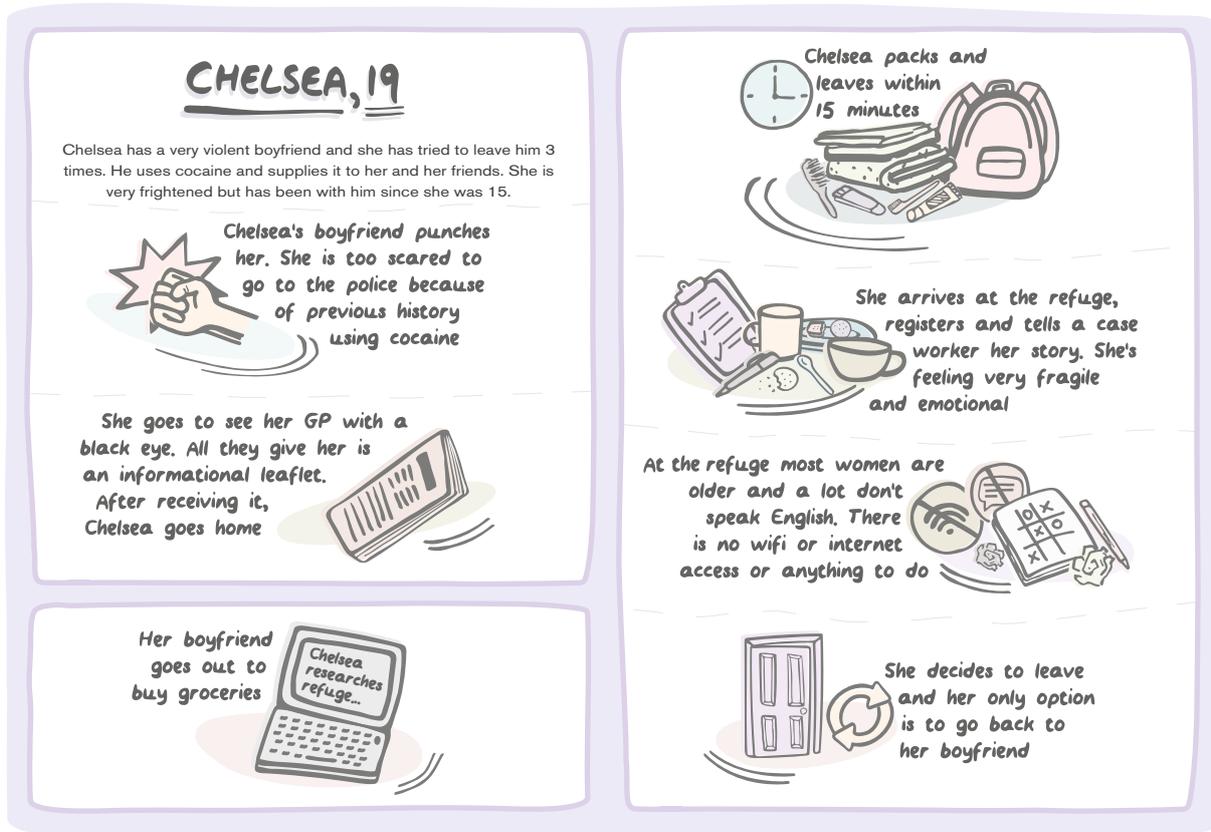**Leaving:** Deciding to end the relationship and working out the best way to do this, including thinking about alternative living arrangements (if relevant)

Recovering: Has ended the relationship and is focusing on the future, but may still be in contact with their abuser, fearful of further harm, considering returning to their ex-partner or potentially at risk of entering into another abusive relationship

Methodology

CHELSEA, 19

Chelsea has a very violent boyfriend and she has tried to leave him 3 times. He uses cocaine and supplies it to her and her friends. She is very frightened but has been with him since she was 15.

Chelsea's boyfriend punches her. She is too scared to go to the police because of previous history using cocaine

She goes to see her GP with a black eye. All they give her is an informational leaflet. After receiving it, Chelsea goes home

Her boyfriend goes out to buy groceries

Chelsea researches refuge...

Chelsea packs and leaves within 15 minutes

She arrives at the refuge, registers and tells a case worker her story. She's feeling very fragile and emotional

At the refuge most women are older and a lot don't speak English. There is no wifi or internet access or anything to do

She decides to leave and her only option is to go back to her boyfriend

One of Tech vs Abuse *'experience maps'*

The research process created a range of **'experience maps'** relating to one or more of these stages, which were subsequently retested with survivors and practitioners to ensure their relevance. They allowed us to listen to and understand how every person's experience of domestic abuse and getting support is unique, whilst identifying the key gaps and opportunities which would make it easier to get support safely. It was also important to use in order to reflect the different nature of access, and circumstances that shape the experiences of women in marginalised groups such as LGBTQI, and migrant women.

Moreover, they help to understand the different ways in which women were already using technology, ranging from what they were searching for online to the types of   s they downloaded. In turn, it helped identify what issues exist with this usage.

Whilst these do not form the focus of the research findings or this report, they provided a useful method to frame discussions with survivors and practitioners.

They were also used to develop and frame a series of design challenges to help address the gaps in online information and access to services and support, which are detailed further in the 'Tech vs Abuse: Design Challenges' report.

During the first phase of the research SafeLives held three focus groups with practitioners and another three with women who had experienced domestic abuse. They also collated the views and experiences of 307 practitioners through an online survey. This asked about the technology they currently use, how confident they are in using it, and their opinions about how technology can help or hinder the safety of victims. The survey was emailed out to contacts from SafeLives and the research team involved, as well as being advertised through social media. Respondents were primarily frontline practitioners (39%) or managers (20%), however there were also domestic abuse coordinators (7.5%), health practitioners (6%) and police or community safety officers or commissioners (3%). Other respondents varied, including safeguarding leads, youth workers, probation workers and social workers.

Alongside this work, Chayn undertook video interviews, online surveys and open questions on survivor-led Facebook groups to engage women and girls with experience of domestic abuse. Snook shadowed six members of different departments at an organisation dealing with domestic abuse, as well as holding informal interviews through Skype with a practitioner and a digital professional.

'Experience maps' provided a useful method to frame discussions with survivors and practitioners.

Methodology

The qualitative and quantitative findings from this phase of the research were brought together in a synthesis workshop and combined analysis (**Afsa 2016**), informing the second phase of the research.

The second phase of the research involved a **market scan** of the digital tools available to those experiencing domestic abuse. These were discovered through the research and the research team's involvement within the sector and collated in an **online Google Sheet**. This was subsequently shared with and discussed in the survivors and practitioners' workshops, with further tools added in the process. It does not however provide any analysis, peer or user review, nor their value or represent an endorsement of those tools. Instead, this resource was set up to help inform the team and those involved in the research about what currently exists. It was also intended to inform the design challenges and the development of future technology in this space.

The final phase of the research consisted of a workshop with survivors to discuss the findings, engage with the user cases and give further insights into the opportunities for technology to add value to their journeys and experiences. A further workshop was held with practitioners, digital product developers and designers to discuss the findings and generate ideas for potential solutions. These were invaluable methods to test the validity of the findings and to prioritise which had the most traction as potential risks, gaps and opportunities for technology to better support women.

At all stages of this research, informed consent was sought and recorded from research participants. This included explaining the purpose of the research, how their insights would be used and anonymised as well as how to contact us and how to access further support. In addition, fully trained support workers were present at the survivors' workshop. Participants were able to withdraw from the research at any time. At no point in this research have personal details of survivors of domestic abuse involved in the research been shared between the research team or stored (such as names and locations or very specific experiences). Where visuals from online forums were taken, the names of contributors have been obscured before they were shared with the team and will not be kept by any of those undertaking the research. All information in this report has been anonymised and is published with consent.
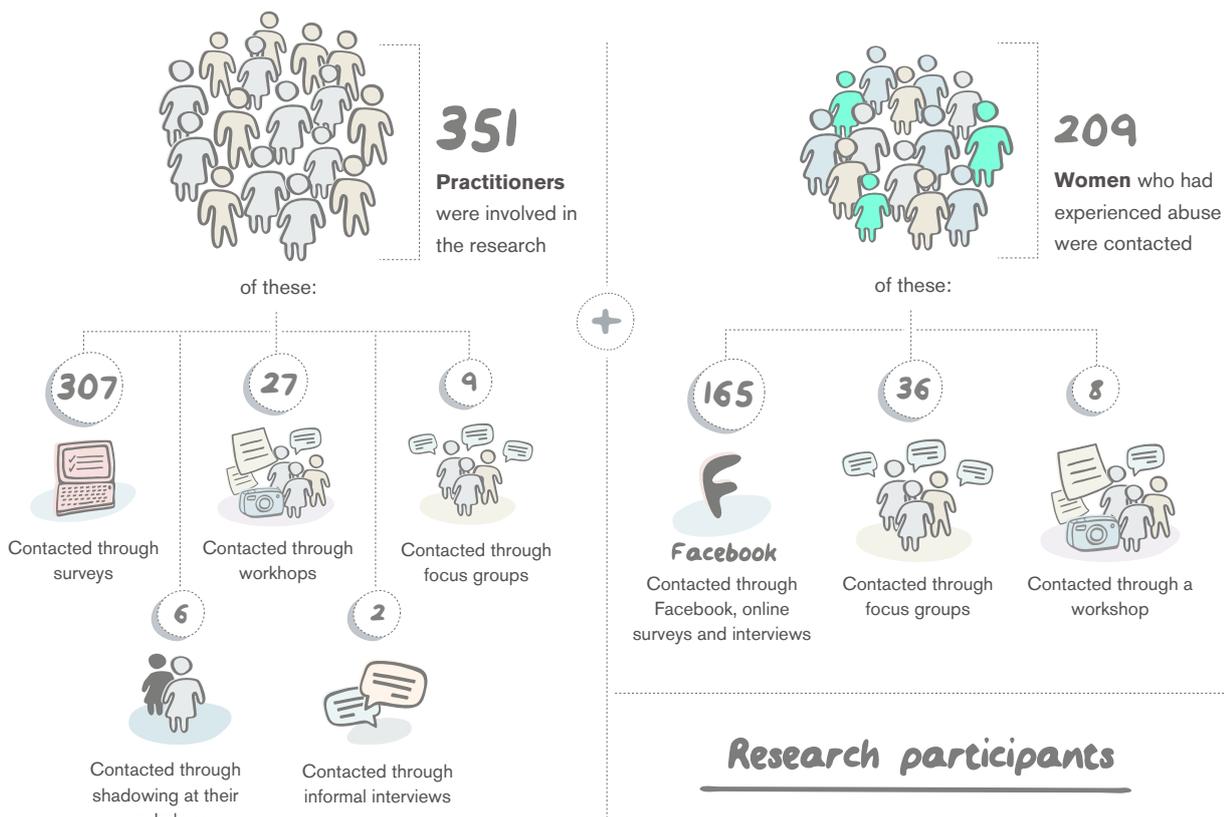
Additional research outputs include:

Tech vs Abuse project website, collating the reports, communicating key findings and connecting to additional resources. See **www.techvsabuse.info**

Horizon scanning document, collating a list of current digital tools used by survivors and practitioners. Available online **here**.

'Tech Vs Abuse: Design Challenges' report. Based on the research findings, Comic Relief, together with the research team and in consultation with a number of organisations in the domestic abuse sector, have created 5 design challenges. These have been prioritised on the basis that if addressed effectively and safely, these solutions would make the most immediate difference to victims and survivors of domestic abuse. This report includes a set of design principles to ensure any solutions are safe and effective, alongside a range of case studies (called **experience maps**) and **scenarios** which illustrate women's experiences are help bring their journeys to life.

351
Practitioners were involved in the research

of these:

307
Contacted through surveys

27
Contacted through workhops

9
Contacted through focus groups

6
Contacted through shadowing at their workplace

2
Contacted through informal interviews

209
Women who had experienced abuse were contacted

of these:

165
Facebook
Contacted through Facebook, online surveys and interviews

36
Contacted through focus groups

8
Contacted through a workshop

Research participants

1

Frequently, victims and survivors' activities are monitored, controlled, tracked down and harassed through technology
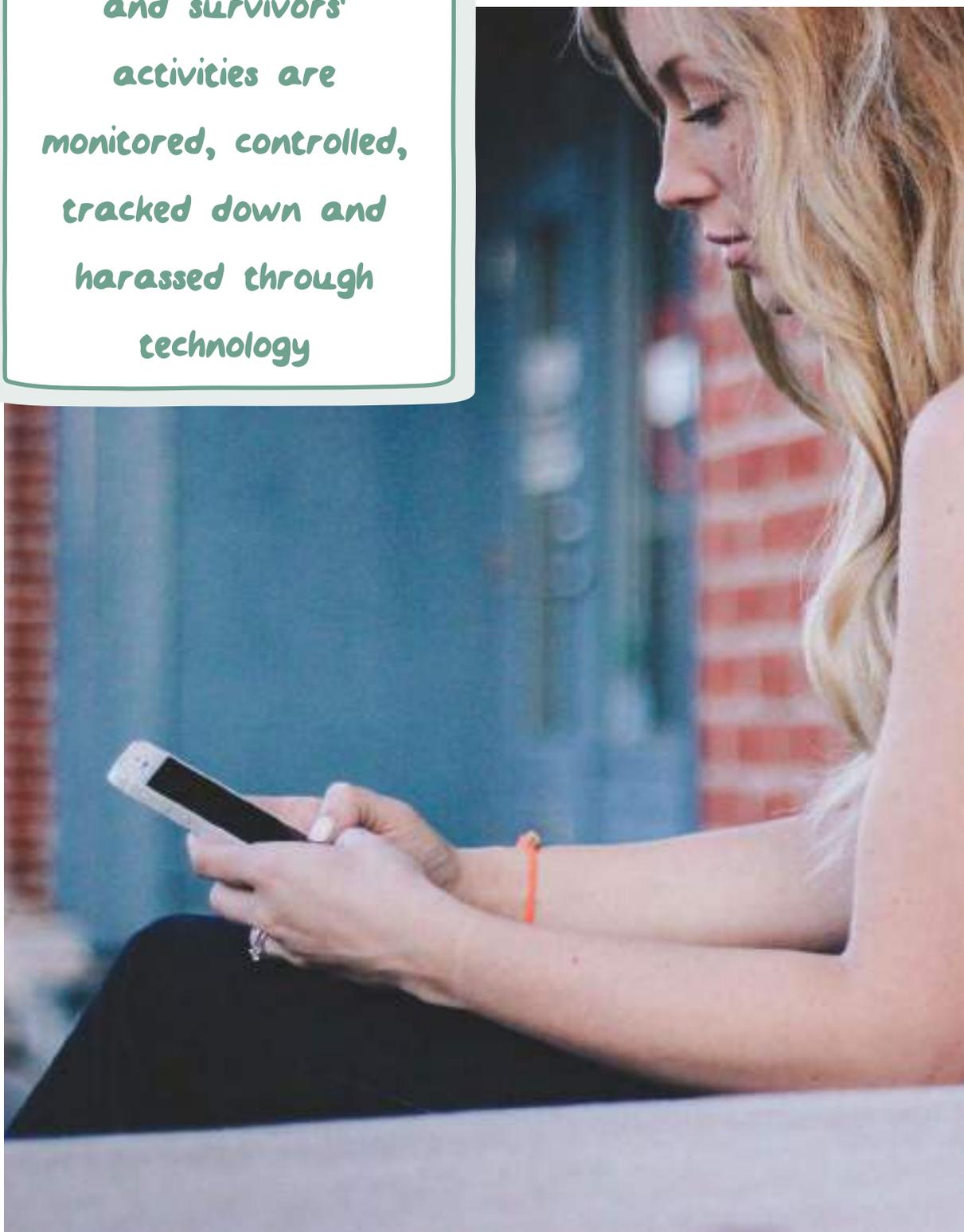
Findings

1

Part 1: Avoiding the Risks Technology Could Create in Domestic Abuse Situations

1.1 Technology and Control

A lot of domestic abuse is routed in control, and this can leave the person experiencing abuse isolated and with real difficulties when trying to get help. If the perpetrator of abuse insists on accompanying the victim to meetings such as doctor's appointments, this can look like caring behaviour to the outside world, but can prevent the person experiencing abuse from getting help or information, or from alerting someone to what is going on. This control also happens through technology.

This research uncovered many negative stories from women and practitioners about the ways in which perpetrators had used technology. Frequently, victims and survivors' activities are monitored, controlled, tracked down and harassed through technology – most commonly through internet use, social media profiles and linked online accounts such as bank statements. This included perpetrators controlling women's social media interactions, monitoring their locations and for those who tried to leave, tracking them through technology and finding their children. Many had been traced, either through social apps such as Facebook, through dedicated tracking apps, or through online bank statements and phone bills. In extreme cases, tracking devices were placed in cars and cameras were placed around the house.

In the online survey of women who had experienced abuse, only 1 in 5 said their online activity was not monitored by their partner. Almost half (47%) said that they were monitored, and a quarter said they did not know. This

supports the findings from a survey conducted by **Women's Aid (2014)** which reported that 45% women experienced some form of abuse online during their relationship, and 48% experienced harassment and abuse online from their ex-partner once they'd left the relationship.

A lot of women across the research reported their partners demanding passwords from them. One woman said a peer blocker was used to shut down the internet when the perpetrator was not there. Most women who had experienced domestic abuse were wary of using phones as they had previously been traced, tracked or monitored.

Figure 1 highlights the range of concerns practitioners had over the ways in which technology increases their clients risk. They were particularly concerned about 'tracker apps' and devices that can be installed on someone's phone or car without them being aware of it and many shared stories of how these were used to monitor and find their partners. These do not have to be designed for sinister reasons, and can be as seemingly harmless as apps to find a lost phone, but become powerful tools in the hands of a tech-savvy perpetrator. Some allow abusers to see texts, emails and phone calls made from a phone in question, as well as their location. There were also concerns about the potential for further coercive control made possible by the 'internet of things' within people's homes, which allow the remote control of utilities such as gas and heating.

Overall, there was a sense that the perpetrator was always one step ahead. This resulted in a lasting fear of using technology, both by survivors and practitioners. They viewed technology as potentially dangerous, both during abusive relationships and during recovery. Consequently, many survivors of domestic abuse and practitioners feel perpetrators were always one step ahead of them technologically. Women choose to or were often advised to remove all technology from their lives. This left them further socially isolated and with less control over their lives.

For those involved in the research, one of the biggest opportunities for technology to help victims and survivors is to alleviate the risks of being monitored, controlled and tracked down. Technology can target these risks directly, for example, participants in this research were keen on a solution that could scan or check mobile phones to see if they were being watched, whether this was a standalone solution or one which a support service could

provide. There was also a desire for a service that could help people to see how 'stalkable' they were. Overall, these solutions and all the additional opportunities for technology identified all highlighted the need for safety to be at the forefront of design and operation of all solutions.

"What every victim wants [is] a safe place to go. That should include online."

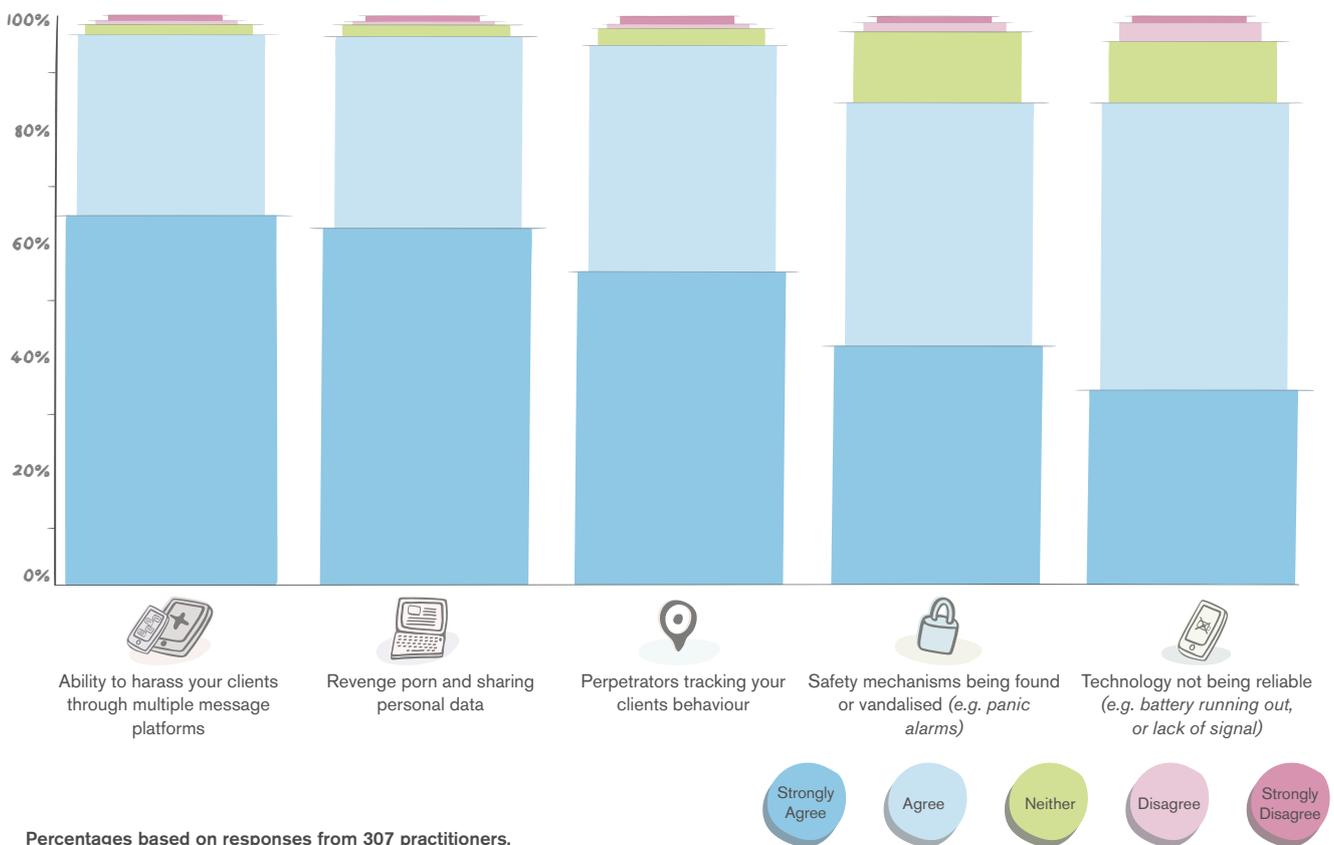## How strongly do you agree that technology increases your clients' risk?

Ability to harass your clients through multiple message platforms

Revenge porn and sharing personal data

Perpetrators tracking your clients behaviour

Safety mechanisms being found or vandalised *(e.g. panic alarms)*

Technology not being reliable *(e.g. battery running out, or lack of signal)*

Strongly Agree · Agree · Neither · Disagree · Strongly Disagree

Percentages based on responses from 307 practitioners.

Figure 1: How Strongly Do You Agree That Technology Increases Your Clients' Risk?

1.2 Putting Safety First When Designing Solutions

Given the potential for abuse, technology should be developed with safety being its primary goal. The key design principle raised by all those involved in the workshops and many of the interviews was the need to consider how technology can be hidden from perpetrators, and make sure that their solution cannot be used against victims and survivors.

"You have to think as an abuser"
[digital professional, informal interview]

The key attribute that respondents wanted from technology was that it could be easily hidden from perpetrators. Some had positive experiences with wearable panic buttons that contact the police (such as TechSOS by Vodafone), which had been easy to disguise or hide. Others expressed an interest in the development of new devices that could be sewn into clothes or put in everyday objects, such as lipstick or tampon cases.

There was a similar concern about the visibility of information and technology solutions on phones and computers, where a tech-savvy perpetrator could find it. There is therefore a requirement that technological solutions are able to support people without leaving any traces, as these can be found and lead to an intensification of the abuse. Numerous creative ideas were developed in the workshops about how this requirement could be met.

For instance, cloud-based technology makes it possible to store information securely and make this available without anything being accessible on victims' phones or computers. This could be particularly useful for the kind of information that particularly helps women who are leaving or in recovery, such as passport or national insurance numbers and evidence of abuse.

Technology could also hide people's activity on phones or computers, meaning everything would look normal until the software in question was accessed. Anything used or accessed internally would be non-searchable externally.

Software could also be disguised. For example, it could look like a calculator or a cookbook, with the user having to type in a secret code or go to a particular recipe to access it. In addition, technology could automatically delete numbers of helplines from phones and search history from browsers, as many of the

women reported that discovery of these sites and phone numbers by their abuser had made their situation worse in the past. For this reason, services such as Snapchat, where everything is automatically deleted from the user's phone, was used as an example of how a service could be delivered in real-time, whilst ensuring users safety is not compromised.

However, the challenge this creates for those designing technology interventions is how to let victims know they exist without perpetrators finding out as well. Ideas raised included advertising that automatically came up on the sidebars of commonly used websites was felt to be less suspicious, as it could be proved that nothing was searched for or clicked on to make it be displayed. Advice could also be disguised as or amongst an email newsletter from an everyday brand.

1.3 Getting What You Need, Fast: the 15 Minute Window

Women experiencing abuse often do not have much time to themselves to find information and work out the best course of action. Some will often only have a small window of opportunity when they are alone and can cover their tracks. During the research, this concept was named the '*15 minute window*', although it may often be less time than this.

A key gap in current online and technology solutions is the ability for people to find advice and information which helps them make safe decisions in the small windows of opportunity that they have to research, contact services or take action.

> "Googling 'is my partner abusive?'
>
> is not going to take me anywhere"

There are a lot of dead ends when looking for information online, and Google searches can lead down '*rabbit holes*' of information that is factual but not that helpful. A lot of information is duplicated across many sites. Some women felt it was rare that online information and resources connected people to offline support.

Part 1: Avoiding the Risks Technology Could
Create in Domestic Abuse Situations

"Bad websites make me have a very bad experience. You go round in circles finding information and that can become very frustrating. Both user journey and not finding what you're looking for. Realising that this is just a website. This is the worst part for me. It's only a website with a number that doesn't work. I had nasty experiences and they make you feel desperate at the point."

It is even more important to provide relevant information quickly when women have reached a point of crisis, so that they can be empowered to make an informed choice. Services need to be informed of any contact without delay, so they can get back to women whilst they are still at this point of crisis. Technological interventions – such as providing legal advice or help looking for a refuge – should be accessible at the point of crisis when victims most need support and advice.

"I needed to escape as he became really physically aggressive. Googled 24hrs support when he was away for the weekend and found local service in Basildon on Sunday afternoon. I emailed them as there was an email address. I didn't get a reply and he was coming back on Sunday evening so I needed to escape quickly. I had family nearby and my brother picked me up that night. I received an email back the next day saying not to leave without an escape plan but I had already left. The escape plan was great but didn't help receiving it a day after I've escaped."
[survivor, workshop]

These urgent situations require an immediate response. Domestic violence organisations normally do not have the funds to provide a round-the-clock service. Yet many women's *'15 minute window'* falls outside of normal office hours. There is a requirement for technology to help women get the information that they need when they most need it. This is one reason that Facebook support groups are often very popular with women: there is normally someone online who has had similar experiences at most hours of the day, and they can respond to a cry for help or give advice and support. It is worth noting that the most common answer that women gave when they were asked what made them use a particular technological solution was that it was easy to use.

A key gap in current online and technology solutions is the ability for people to find advice and information which helps them make safe decisions in the small windows of opportunity that they have to research, contact services or take action.
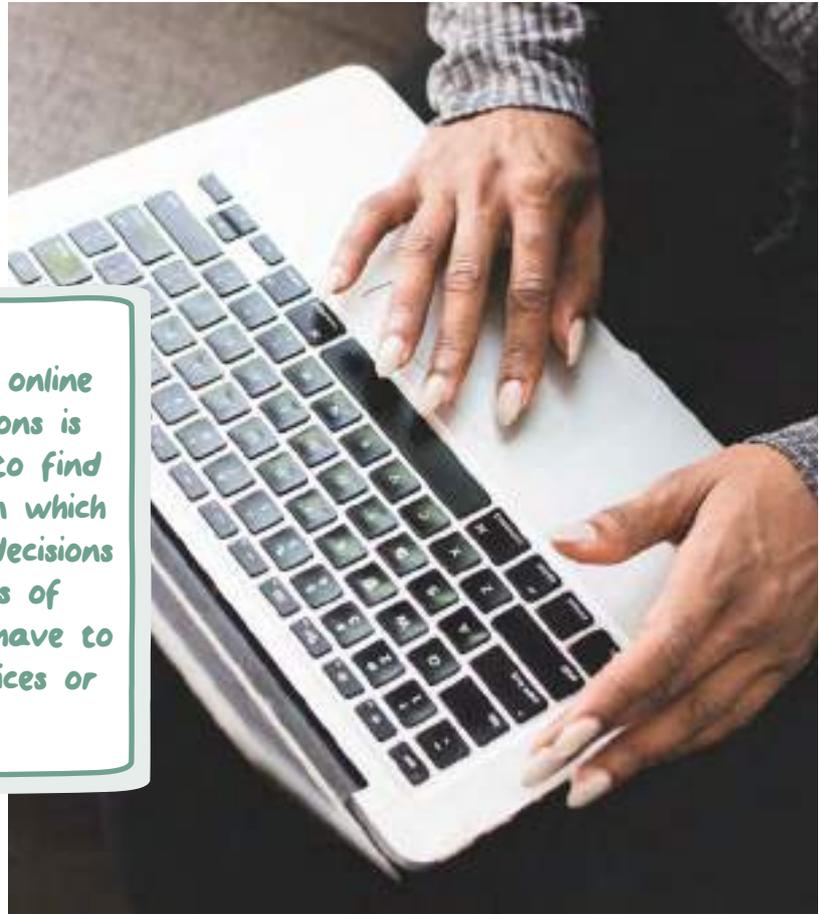
1.4 Different Needs at Different Stages

Having limited time means that technology solutions must be simple, focussed and easily accessible. However, there is a tension between delivering quick, simple information, and the requirement that it is tailored, detailed and varied enough to suit every one's distinct and unique range of needs. This means there is a requirement for technology to help people navigate the available information so that they can find what is relevant to them quickly.

"Because things are so particular and all different, how do we create something which helps everyone?"

This research found that each woman will also have different needs depending on what stage of an abusive relationship she is in (***Unaware, Aware, Leaving, Recovering***). Technology can empower women in recognising abuse, and provide them with information to help them access support. In order for women not to be alone on this journey, they need tailored safety planning, support and information. It is never a case of 'just leaving'.

Women who need to leave immediately have a requirement for urgent information to help them make a plan to escape safely. If they are not at the stage of leaving, technological solutions still need to find out what it is that person requires so that they get an appropriate response. This can be difficult because some victims are afraid to give away too much detail regarding their situation, worrying that they could perhaps be exposed and end up suffering further.

Just under half of the women interviewed found online support groups and forums very useful, especially with regards to understanding their own situation and discussing their personal experiences with the police or with the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service. Almost half of women (43.5%) used technology to connect with other survivors and read their stories. Facebook groups were particularly popular, and are used as a way to discuss problems and get emotional support. In one group, there is an average of a post every 2-3 minutes, and some posts receive over a hundred comments in support. The second most common answer when women were asked what made them use a particular technological solution was that it was connecting.

However, others found that online interactions were not enough, and made them realise they needed further face-to-face support. Whilst information and advice were key throughout each journey, as time went on, they voiced the need to meet in person with other women in the same situation, or with people from various services.

I don't need stats. I need people."

"[I wasn't so much researching] about what domestic violence was (although that was useful) but more looking for contacts to SPEAK to somebody. It wasn't very helpful in that: no direct place to go to."

In other words, technology was found to be an incredibly useful tool to seek advice, information and support, but it did not replace or substitute for face-to-face meetings with services or other survivors. Ideally, tech solutions need to be able to find out quickly where people are in their journey, so they can then get the information and support that they need at that moment.

1.5 Different Requirements for Different Backgrounds

People's needs are not just determined by what stage of their journey that they are at, but also by who they are and what their background is. There is no typical victim of abuse, and each person has different barriers that can prevent them from getting help.

Part 1: Avoiding the Risks Technology Could
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Technology solutions should consider the needs of these diverse groups, and be clear on who they are targeting. There is rarely a 'one size fits all' solution. Whilst technology might naturally help some people, it could create further barriers to others. Developers and support agencies should be mindful of the primary target audience for a technology solution to ensure its effectiveness (rather than trying to meet everyone's needs). In turn, further consideration should be given to those who are likely to use a solution but are not necessarily the target audience (such as men affected by domestic abuse) as well as what other support is available to those who are not the target audience.

This is especially relevant if they are targeting traditionally marginalised communities, such as migrant women, disabled women or members of the LGBTQI community. People experiencing abuse may not have English as their first language, and some may have low literacy levels. They may not have family members nearby, or even in the country, who can help them whilst leaving or during recovery. Some have a fear that their immigration status or history of substance abuse might get them into trouble or prevent them from getting help.

People with disabilities can also be aided or restricted by technology, depending on their abilities. Having sight impediments can make some technology harder to use, whereas schizophrenia could make talking apps problematic. On the other hand, chatbots or messaging services can help deaf people in a way that helplines cannot.

It is also important to remember that hard-to-reach or 'silent' groups are no more likely to be vocal just because technology is there. It takes a deliberate effort to break down the barriers that prevent these groups from seeking help. For example, many of us and particularly older people can be alienated by an increasingly online and digital based response, as can those living in parts of the country with poor internet connections and phone coverage.

On the other hand, young people can be more comfortable using services such as Facebook Messenger, WhatsApp or Snapchat, rather than offline contact. Teams working with children and young people are often more likely to get a response to online messaging than from phone calls:

"We don't post anything. We contact young people to check if they're okay. If a young person is not replying or hasn't been on Facebook, it can be a sign something is going wrong."
[practitioner, shadowing]

Many practitioners responding to the survey and attending workshops also raised the crucial need to better use technology behind the scenes so that services can become more accessible to these demographics. In this way, technology can enable support, and should not be seen only in terms of replacing human contact. Another issue that came up during the research was that the language and terminology used by services online to describe domestic abuse and the support they offer. Many reported that this was in itself a barrier preventing them from recognising what is happening to them.

"The language sometimes can be a barrier - 'a victim of domestic violence'. What [does] domestic [mean]? I didn't live together with my partner."

"We should remove the ' What can I do for you?' question... Tired of hearing this."

As discussed earlier, the repetition of information and key phrasing designed by those providing services is echoed across different websites. The result was not only a difficult experience for users, it also meant that the language could become irritating and make people less likely to engage with official sources of advice, information and support. This was particularly pertinent for younger people, those that did not live with their partners and many women in support forums used very different words to describe and understand their partner's behaviours which could not be found on the websites for the support services they were involved in (such as *'gas-lighting'*).
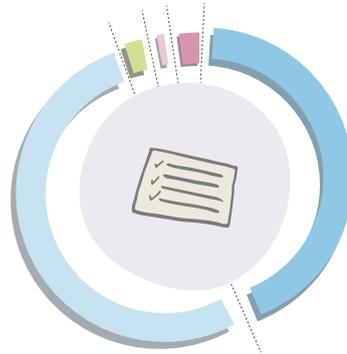
Overall, it is vital that all online sources of support and advice are better designed with the language, questions, behaviours and motivations of those who seek to use them.
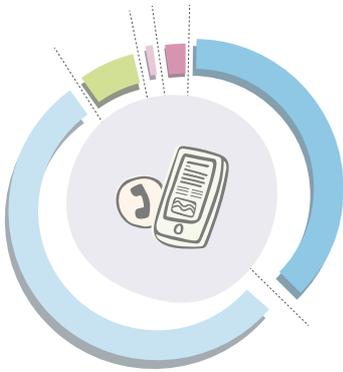
How strongly do you agree that technology could help your clients with the following?
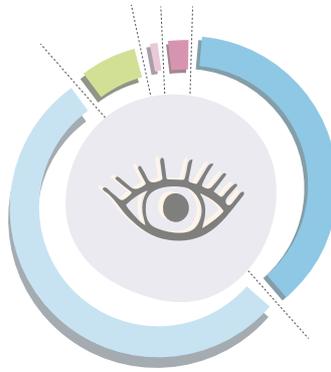

Locating local and national support services around domestic abuse

Sharing tips on how to stay safe

Improving communication between your clients and local service providers

Helping everyone recognise the signs of domestic abuse
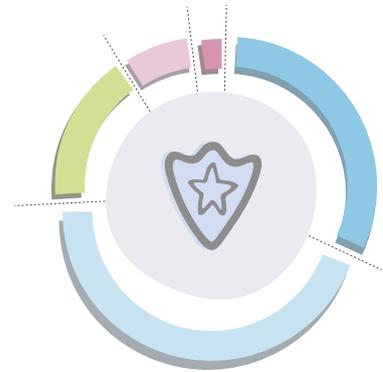
Improving the immediate safety of clients
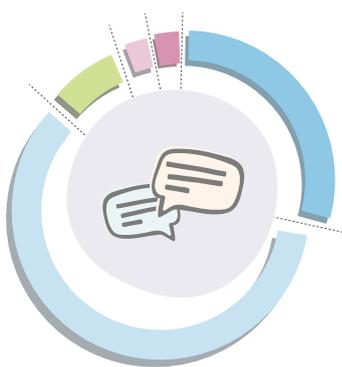
Provide opportunities for peer support groups and communications
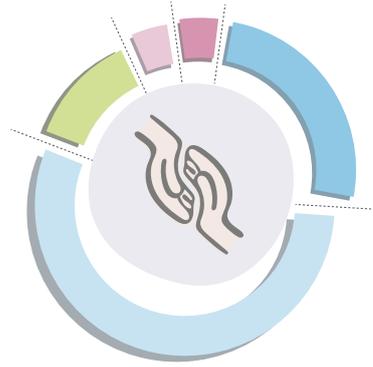
Providing ways family and friends can support your clients

Strongly Agree

Agree

Neither

Disagree

Strongly Disagree

Percentages based on responses from 307 practitioners.

Figure 2: Practitioners, How Strongly Do You Agree That Technology Could Help Your Clients with the Following?

Findings

Part 2: How Can Technology Help?

On average high-risk victims live with domestic abuse for 2.3 years before getting help and medium-risk victims for 3 years (**SafeLives 2015**). It is in this context, that both practitioners and survivors of domestic abuse strongly agreed that technology, despite the risks, could prove incredibly helpful to women's experiences, in getting support earlier and in the way they need it, enabling them to engage more effectively with services. As Figure 2 highlights, practitioners felt there were opportunities for technology to help women locate support services, share tips on staying safe, recognise abuse, communicate more easily with services, improve their own safety and to seek peer support. When combined with the views of women, several key gaps and opportunities emerged where technology could add most value to their journeys.

2.1 Getting the Right Information

Women in this research turned to online sources to find many different kinds of information. As figure 3 highlights, women involved in Facebook survivor groups identified a range of common online searches, with the most popular including "different stages of relationships and recovery, what is the process of police and how to deal with depression", "how to help deal with children who have witnessed abuse" and "advice about dealing with abusive man". Support services and survivor groups are able to help with many of these requests. However, two large gaps were identified: what financial support is available and key information regarding legal issues. In some cases, these became significant factors in the decision to remain or leave an abusive partner. When combined with survey findings and interviews, figure 4 highlights

Part 2: How Can Technology Help?

the five key types of information women search for: help and support, legal information, general information on abuse, children and crisis moments (finding support). Here, a key opportunity for technology development (particularly for the domestic abuse services) was how to ensure women could find this information quicker and easier, in a way that makes sense to them and answers their questions. As one of the practitioners reflected in a workshop:

"It took me 15 clicks to find the information on a local refuge. If you only have 5 minutes alone, that's at least 10 clicks too many."
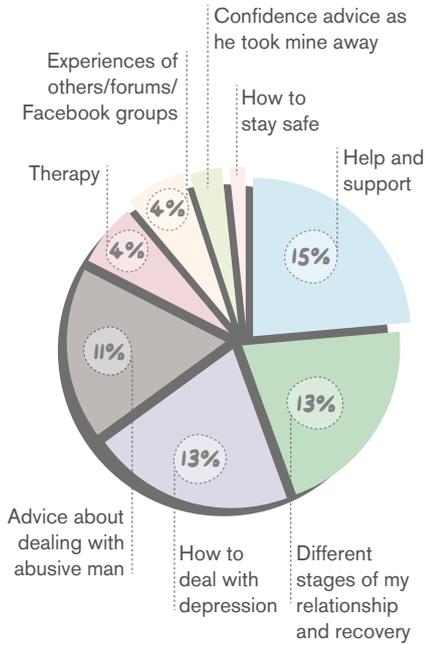
[workshop participant]

created a poll.
14 June at 22:54

Ladies! You helped me so much ♥ last time I asked you a question about the research I'm doing about how we survivors use technology to cope with abuse for Comic Relief. The results of this research will help funders give money to charities who make use of technology to help women in our situations from small local charities to big ones. It also helps everyone understand what information is missing. I wanted to ask you about what kind of information you look up on the internet? Feel free to add more suggestions! I've added the things I've searched and my friends going through abuse are doing but I'm sure this doesn't include everything.

different stages of my relationship and recovery	+20
what is the process of police	+20
how to deal with depression	+20
How to help deal with children who have witnessed abuse	+18
advice about dealing with abusive man	+17
social services	+15
finances	+14
Criminal justice system and the crown court process	+13
legal aid	+12
finding charities	+12
finding nearest shelter	+11
definition of abuse	+9
can I take my kids to holiday / do I need his permission	+7
Personality disorders	+4
definition of child abuse	+4
what divorce law is	+4
Confidence advice as he took all mine away	+3
deed poll/passport	+3
Contact, cafcass and the family courts	+2
+ Add an option...	

Figure 3: Facebook Poll with Victims and Survivors

What kind of information do you look up on the internet?

Help and support
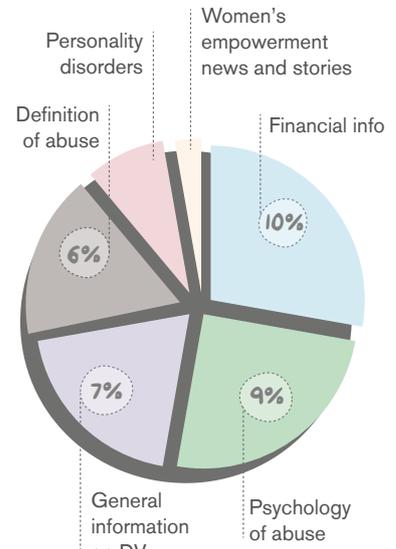### Based on 96* responses

- Confidence advice as he took mine away
- Experiences of others/forums/Facebook groups
- How to stay safe
- Therapy
- Help and support — 15%
- 4%
- 4%
- 11%
- 13% — Different stages of my relationship and recovery
- 13%
- Advice about dealing with abusive man
- How to deal with depression

Legal information
Based on 63 responses

- Deed poll/passport
- Contact, Cafcass and the family courts
- What Divorce law is
- What is the process of police — 14%
- 3%
- 5%
- 8%
- 9% — Criminal justice system and the Crown Court process
- Legal info
- Legal aid
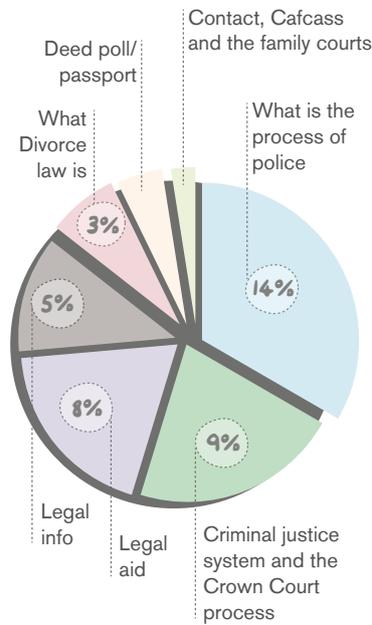
Information
Based on 52 responses

- Personality disorders
- Women's empowerment news and stories
- Definition of abuse
- Financial info — 10%
- 6%
- 7%
- 9% — Psychology of abuse
- General information on DV

Children
Based on 46 responses

- General information about children
- How to help deal with children who have witnessed abuse — 12%
- Definition of child abuse
- 3%
- 5%
- 10% — Social services
- Can I take my kids on holiday? Do I need his permission?

Crisis
Based on 23 responses

- Finding nearest shelter
- 7%
- 8%
- Finding charities

Percentages based on responses from 66 survivors. *Some questions allowed multiple answers.

Figure 4: Survivors, What Kind of Information Do You Look up on the Internet?

2.2 Information on Financial Support

There was a lack of financial information available despite it being seen as a key topic that many people searched for. For women with joint bank accounts, or women who experience financial abuse, it can be unclear how they will be able to afford to live if they leave. Some of the key questions women asked included:

- Is there any financial support or help available?
- What is financial abuse and what can I do about it?
- How quickly can I access financial help?
- How will I support myself financially after I leave?
- Is there any information on finances when leaving an abusive relationship?
- What should I do about my partner controlling my bank account and finances?
- What is the process for receiving child maintenance?
- Can I get financial support if I'm on a Spouse Visa or my immigration status is illegal?

"One thing that's missing is finances. What financial help is available. If you have… had financial abuse then knowing what's out there, what you are entitled to and how quickly you can access it, for many people who can't or won't [go] to [a] refuge money is the biggest factor when leaving and more importantly staying free."

"I was lucky I stayed at my mum's after I escaped with my son. Because my ex was arrested for a serious crime declaring myself homeless and applying for housing was easier because the crime was obvious which in [a] majority of cases isn't the case. Took me 6 weeks to get benefits sorted after I was blocked from the joint account. If it wasn't for my family keeping us I don't know how me and my son would have survived. Not everyone is as lucky as I was."

2.3 Information Regarding the Legal System

Women reflected they were most keen to turn to online sources of information to find out more about the legal system, the law, children, divorce, police and social services all being among the top subjects that women searched for. They looked to sector-specific and official sources of information, with 23%

of women searching on legal websites and 12% on police websites. Key questions they wanted to answer included:

- What is the process for getting the police involved, and what happens then?
- How does the criminal justice system and the crown court process work?
- How do I get legal aid or find charities?
- Will my children be taken away from me?
- What rights does he have? Can I take my kids on holiday? Do I need his permission?
- What are the divorce laws?
- What is the definition of child abuse?
- Where do I stand on my immigration status if I leave?
- I have previous criminal convictions, who will believe me?

Figure 5 shows that when women with experience of domestic abuse were asked, "How do you think technology can be improved to help survivors?" the most popular answer (14.7%) was to be able to ask lawyers questions online without making appointments. Some women felt let down by the legal system:
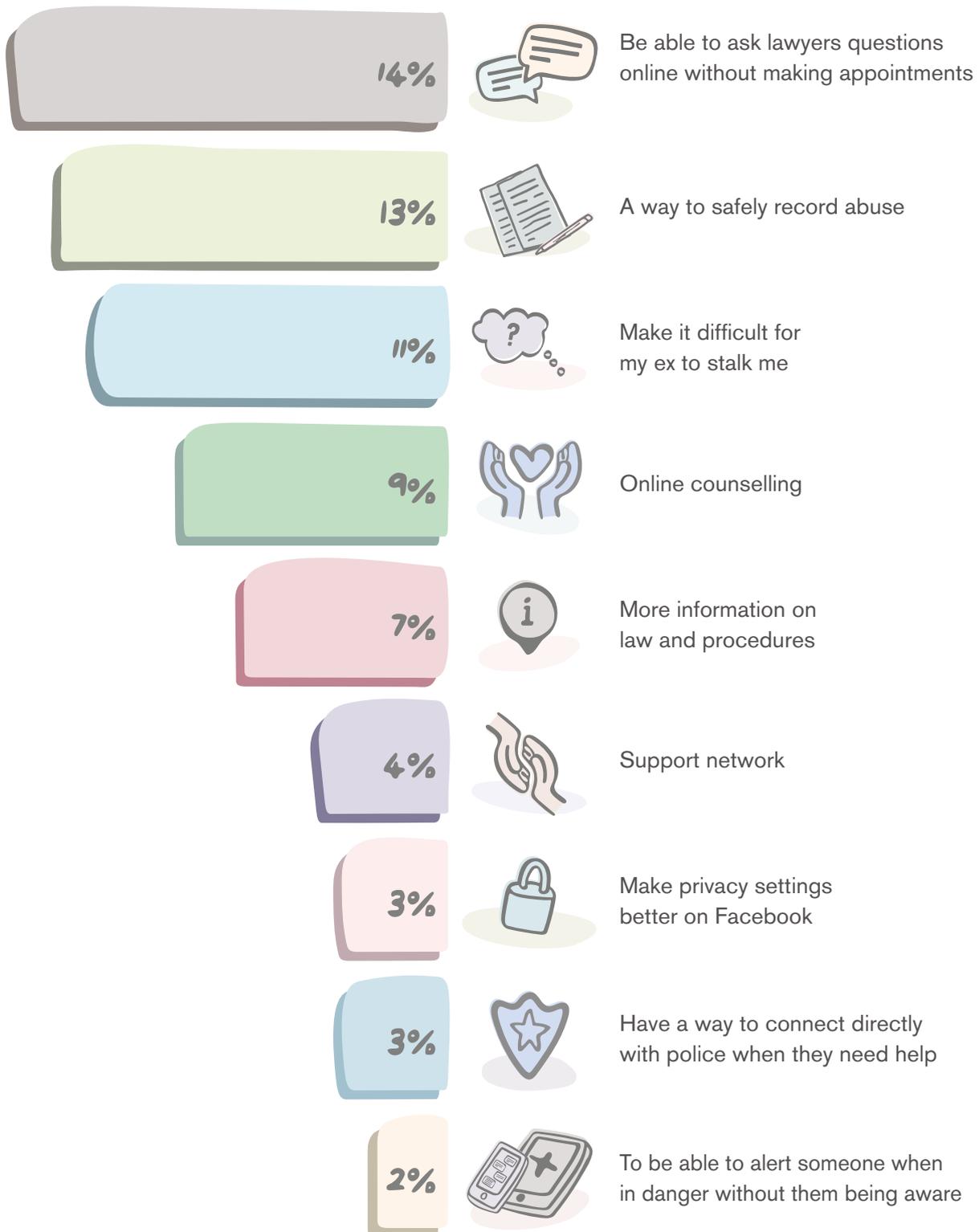
"You have good organisations but once you get into the law arena... it's [an] old school boys' game"

Women who had children had even more questions about the legal situation. They wanted to know what was likely to happen with regards to social services, whether the father would have rights to see the children, and whether they had a right to take the children out of the country for a holiday. It was also common to try and find ways to support children who have witnessed abuse.

"Once you have children, you can't get away"

Finally, there was also a discussion about the possibility of videos and legal tutorials for women staying in refuges, acting as a method of empowerment. There was an opportunity for technology to help women prepare themselves for the types of issues that could come up whilst progressing through the legal system, such as when fighting for custody or pressing charges. Women wanted to be able to understand their situation and think things through for themselves and feel more in control, rather than just waiting to see what happened.

How do you think technology can be improved to help survivors?

14% — Be able to ask lawyers questions online without making appointments

13% — A way to safely record abuse

11% — Make it difficult for my ex to stalk me

9% — Online counselling

7% — More information on law and procedures

4% — Support network

3% — Make privacy settings better on Facebook

3% — Have a way to connect directly with police when they need help

2% — To be able to alert someone when in danger without them being aware

Percentages based on responses from 92 survivors.

Figure 5: Practitioners, How Do You Think Technology Can Be Improved to Help Survivors?

2.4 Transferring Evidence Swiftly and Safely

Figure 5 highlights that when women with experience of domestic abuse were asked, "How do you think technology can be improved to help survivors?" the second most popular answer (13.3%) was to be able to safely record abuse. Practitioners agreed that there was a need to provide advice and support on how to collect evidence discreetly and safely, including how to store it online. They also needed more clarity on whether covertly collected evidence – such as that collected by hidden microphones – would stand as valid evidence of abuse if criminal proceedings were taken to court.

"We're really missing [an] opportunity here. If we had evidence on whether he uses a tracker on the car, then we'll have evidence against him"
[practitioner, shadowing]

Most women agreed that having a way to record situations would have been useful if it had been offered to them. Almost 1 in 5 women surveyed had already used technology to capture evidence about their abuse, whether this was through using a phone as a recording device or through forwarding incriminating emails.

Another issue that arose was how to help women who have handed over their technology for evidence to stay in touch with services or their support groups, friends and family. Almost half of the women surveyed (47%) reported that connecting with services and support groups was a positive experience they had when using technology, one which could help counteract feelings of isolation.

One woman reported having to give up her phone and laptop to the police for over three months whilst they monitored her for stalking. However, without those devices, she was unable to use social media, so the stalking they were meant to be monitoring stopped. If technology could provide a swift, easy way to get evidence to the police it would make this process much easier.

"Police took my phone for evidence and I was left without any forms of communication. Took me a few days to buy another cheap phone but it wasn't a smartphone so I couldn't email my local services to ask for further support."

2.5 Technology in Refuges

A refuge is a safe house where women and children who have experienced domestic violence can live in safety, with support from specialist trained staff. In 2015-16, more than 12,200 women and their children were supported to access refuge accommodation via the National Domestic Violence Helpline, which is ran in partnership by Women's Aid and Refuge (Women's Aid 2015). Some of the women involved in this research had experience of moving into a refuge to escape domestic abuse. Aside from wanting to research what life would be like in a refuge (including what to pack, what would happen next and how to stay safe en route), many of the women wondered if technology could support them when they were there.

"When I go into a refuge, I wanna know what it's going to be like. It's like that with going anywhere"

Many found it overwhelming just to talk about their experiences and stories, and felt isolated in a refuge. They reflected on whether technology could help at this stage and whether there were creative ways to do something fun (offline or online) whilst re-building their self-esteem and self-worth. Some found themselves in refuges doing research on the types of personalities that can lead someone to abuse in an attempt to find out why this had happened. There was also a desire for motivational content that could be provided online.

Practitioners also felt that refuges could do more to support women through advice on technology. For example, if refuge staff could access more resources and training on how to support women to stay online safely, such as how to change privacy settings on phones and Facebook then they could help. Children in particular need advice. Participants reported perpetrators asking children to send photos of refuges, and being able to find out their location via the geographic information that is automatically embedded in images, or via the location settings of Facebook updates.

"He's asked the kids to take photos of where they are. Then, he knows where the refuge is..."
[practitioner, shadowing]

The fear of this happening and the lack of confidence in technology (discussed below) meant that women were often advised to delete all online profiles and accounts and to live their lives offline. However, this was largely a negative

experience for women and their ability to rebuild their lives normally. Overall, practitioners reflected there is a current gap in technology capacity and staff knowledge within refuges.

2.6 Recognising an Abusive Relationship

Recognising early signs of abuse can be very difficult and over 1 in 5 women surveyed said that technology had helped them realise they were in an abusive relationship.

They had reached this conclusion by searching online, but were confused about what to search for. They reported frustration at the lack of educational resources, useful information or relevant advice on what constitutes abuse. This was particularly crucial for those who were beginning to recognise some worrying behaviour by their partner but were yet to realise this was abusive. Language and terminology was a key barrier in discovering this information.

"It took me 4 years to learn what was happening"

[survivor; victims and survivors workshop]

"There's no one around you to tell you [whether] this behaviour is okay?"

During the research, there was lots of discussion about how technology could help more people - especially younger women - to recognise abuse earlier by illustrating unhealthy relationships which mirror situations that women find themselves in, as well as how these compare to healthy relationships. This was identified as a key opportunity and current gap in capacity within the sector, which could be addressed by technology in a range of creative ways such as by gamification, online interactive magazine style quizzes or social media campaigns. These aim to help women have the 'light bulb' recognition moment, and to have it earlier on in abusive relationships.

3

Organisations could save valuable time and effort by sharing their learnings and examples of good practice
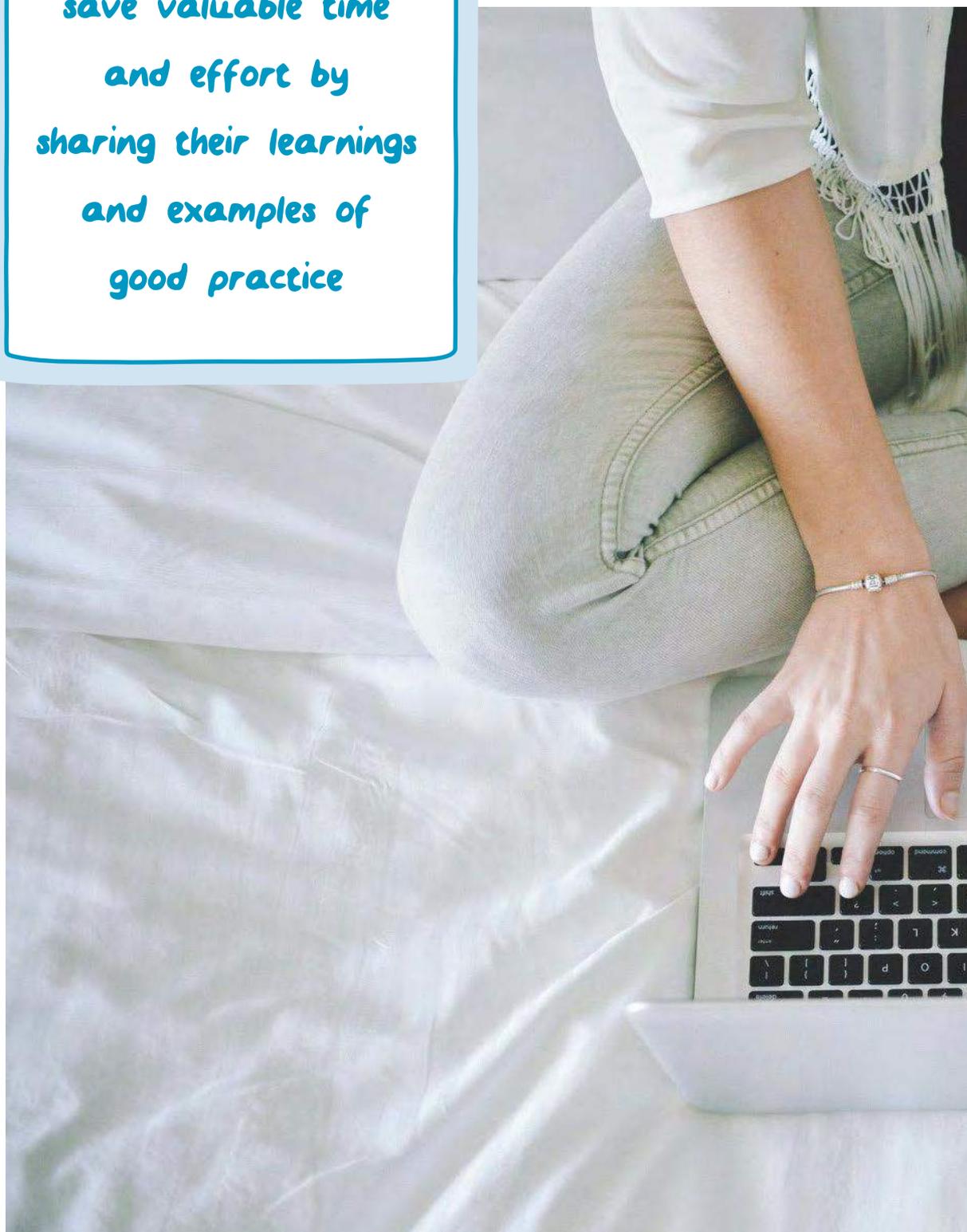
Findings

3

Part 3: Practitioners' Perceptions of the Role of Technology

Amongst practitioners there was a great deal of interest in this research, with more than 350 actively participating, including 307 who filled in the survey. Overwhelmingly, they were confident there was a place for technology to help victims, alongside a high awareness of the risks posed to victims due to the perpetrators use of technology. When the insights from survivors and practitioners collated in the first phase of the research were shared in the practitioners' workshop, there was little surprise about the fears surrounding technology. However, there was surprise that more progress had not been made in how to best support those experiencing domestic abuse with their safe use of technology, and at the vast number of tools that already exist and are actively used. Overall, there was a great appetite for more knowledge and sector collaboration on this issue.
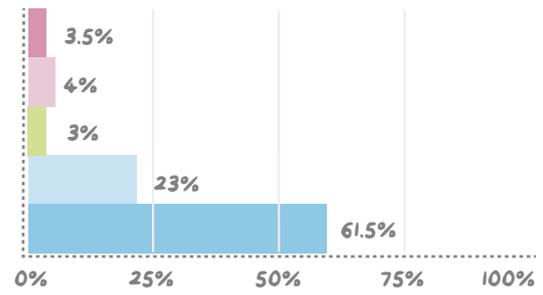
3.1 Confidence in Using Technology

Nearly all of the practitioners who completed the survey (96%) had access to a computer with internet access at work, 60% had a smartphone with internet (30% had a mobile phone with no internet), 24% had access to a tablet and 9% had access to safety apps. Overall, as Figure 6 highlights, practitioners were comfortable with everyday tech, such as accessing websites, using emails, phone apps and technology generally (mostly 75%+ confident with these methods). They were also relatively confident using social media and online forums to plan meetings or use chat forums (50% or more were confident). However, they were least confident on the ways in which
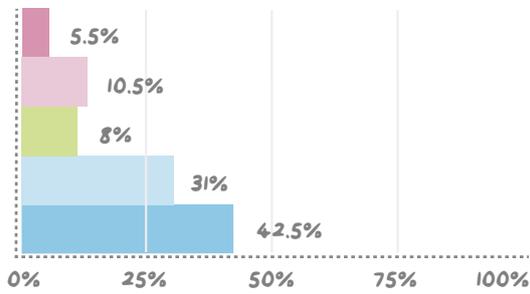
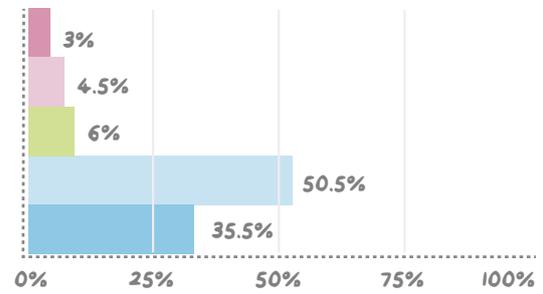# How confident are you in using technology?
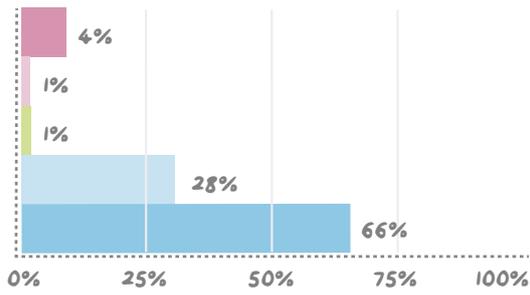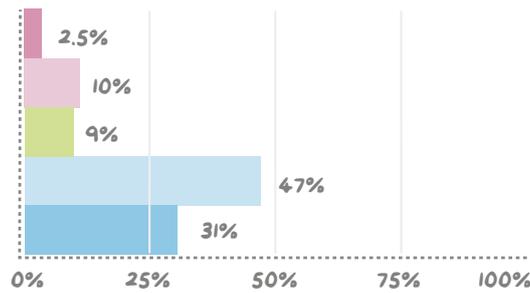
Accessing and logging into websites
- 4%
- 1%
- 1%
- 28%
- 66%

Using your phone for accessing emails
- 3.5%
- 4%
- 3%
- 23%
- 61.5%

Using phone apps
- 5.5%
- 10.5%
- 8%
- 31%
- 42.5%

Using any technology
- 3%
- 4.5%
- 6%
- 50.5%
- 35.5%

Storing files digitally
- 2.5%
- 10%
- 9%
- 47%
- 31%

Legend:
- Very confident
- Confident
- Neither
- Unconfident
- Very unconfident

Percentages based on responses from 307 practitioners.

Figure 6: Practitioners, How Confident Are You in Using Technology?

technology could connect together (such as mobile phones and tablets) and wearable technology such as the use of covert devices (less than 50% with confidence in this). In other words, they were confident in everyday use of technology in their work, but less confident in how to set up technology and how it might work, positively or negatively, for the people they supported.

3.2 The Desire for Training and Knowledge Sharing

Practitioners were particularly surprised by the huge array of technology in use by victims and survivors identified in the **market scan**. This recognition of their own lack of knowledge led to further concerns and an immediate desire to know what solutions exist as well as having a way to appraise them and form a judgement on their safety and value. They were keen to be able to recommend and use the right tools, and find out whether there was something better than what they, or the people they support were currently using and there was some interest in a kite marking system for practitioners or women to help all keep abreast of best practice. They were therefore keen to receive training and education on how perpetrators manipulated women through technology and on the best ways to use it to support victims and survivors. Frontline workers have a requirement for a basic advice kit: simple and standardised guidance about how to use technology that they could understand and pass on to people experiencing abuse.

"There's a lack of capacity and lack of confidence which is not a priority although it's recognised as an issue"
[digital professional, informal interview]

Practitioners agreed that technology was not a common topic for knowledge sharing in their profession. There was enthusiasm for having this conversation more often, particularly in terms of sharing resources, knowledge of different technologies being used and experiences, but few practitioners involved in the research thought that this was currently a part of their daily working life or professional development.

"We talk about safeguarding all the time… but never in relation to technology"

Although practitioners felt that some of the currently existing apps were very good, there was also a worry that without any coordination more technology

Part 3: Practitioners' Perceptions
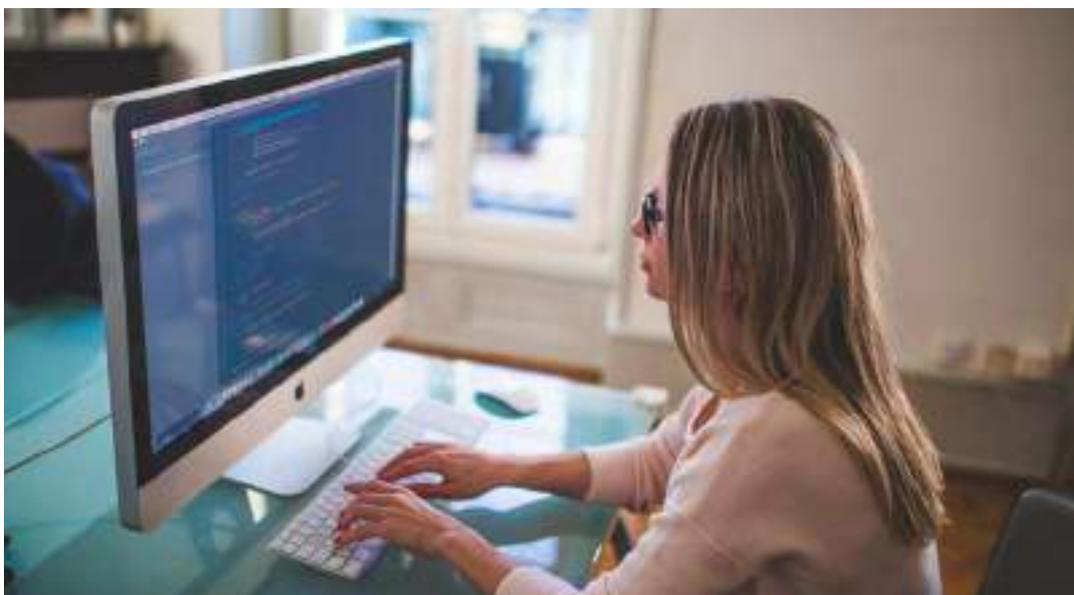of the Role of Technology

solutions simply added to the noise and repetition that was already a problem. There was a need for a cohesive strategy that meant services worked together, minimising repetition and helping victims to find what they wanted within the time limits they had.

"Tech does have a part to play for better services but [we] need to get our heads together nationally to use services in a consistent way rather than coming up with ideas in different areas and duplicating what's already there. We need a national digital strategy."
[practitioner, informal interview]

Sharing information could also help organisations to keep up with the rapidly changing technology landscape. Whilst training days and webinars covering technology updates were considered useful, each organisation already has a great deal of information about what technology perpetrators and women are using, as well as women's experience of using it. There is a need for something that facilitates sharing this information between organisations, so that the learning benefits everyone.

Working together also has the advantage of making organisations more efficient. Organisations could save valuable time and effort by sharing their learnings and examples of good practice. For example, if an organisation found using a particular data management service useful then sharing this with other organisations could be very helpful, and this in turn might help bring about further sharing of information.

3.3 The Role of UK Practitioners Leading Technology Development

Whilst practitioners lacked confidence in their own skills and knowledge around technology, they were confident in the role technology could play to help victims. It was felt that technology could help locate local and national support services, share tips on how to stay safe, improve communications between clients and services, and help everyone recognise signs of abuse (90%+).

The market scan identified numerous wearable technology solutions as a key trend for technology development thus far in domestic abuse situations. However, the survey of practitioners found that there was much more scepticism around the value of wearable technology and the ways that this could help improve the immediate safety of clients, or provide a way for family and friends to support victims (around 20% were either not sure or did not think it could help).

The market scan also found that private companies in America had developed much of the technology that could help in situations of domestic abuse. As a result, practitioners were particularly concerned about technology being appropriate or safe for women. On the one hand, there was a strong desire amongst practitioners for sector leadership on which technology solutions they should trust. For others, this was about the sector leading when developing new technology or replicating existing options, or at least having an input into the design and delivery.

However, the challenge here is that domestic violence services simply do not have the confidence or capacity to fully engage with technology. They often lack digital skills and the majority were reliant on external design and technology partners to deliver interventions which made use of existing technology, let alone develop new ones. Some of the digital experts involved in the research were keen to emphasise that there was no requirement for everyone to become an expert on technology development, neither was there value in them being so:

"They [staff] are not trying to become technologists – let's allow them to focus on their expertise and others on digital expertise"

[digital professional, informal interview]

Part 3: Practitioners' Perceptions
of the Role of Technology

Similarly, practitioners were divided as to the value this could have in their primary role and priority - which was to provide one-to-one support to help keep people safe.

"We can't rely on technology for support. It's all about a friendly face and a cup of tea - the priority is to get the right support at the right time."
[practitioner, informal interview]

Figure 7 highlights that whilst practitioners were concerned that technology could detract from their service provision 90% of those responding to the survey were also confident that technology could improve the efficiency of the domestic abuse sector, helping practitioners support clients, potentially more flexibly and effectively. For some, the fears surrounding technology were also borne out of funding difficulties in the current context of cuts to statutory services. The interview and shadowing days with practitioners found that this nervousness around using technology was tied to fears around losing funding for face-to-face services or being expected to deliver more in their services for less money and in turn, that online solutions may provide further ammunition for face to face services closing. Overall, funding for technology (whether this is capacity building knowledge or new technology development) was seen as the key barrier to adopting technology advice and use in the sector:

"Technology - is it a priority when services are closing? We've got commitment but not investment"
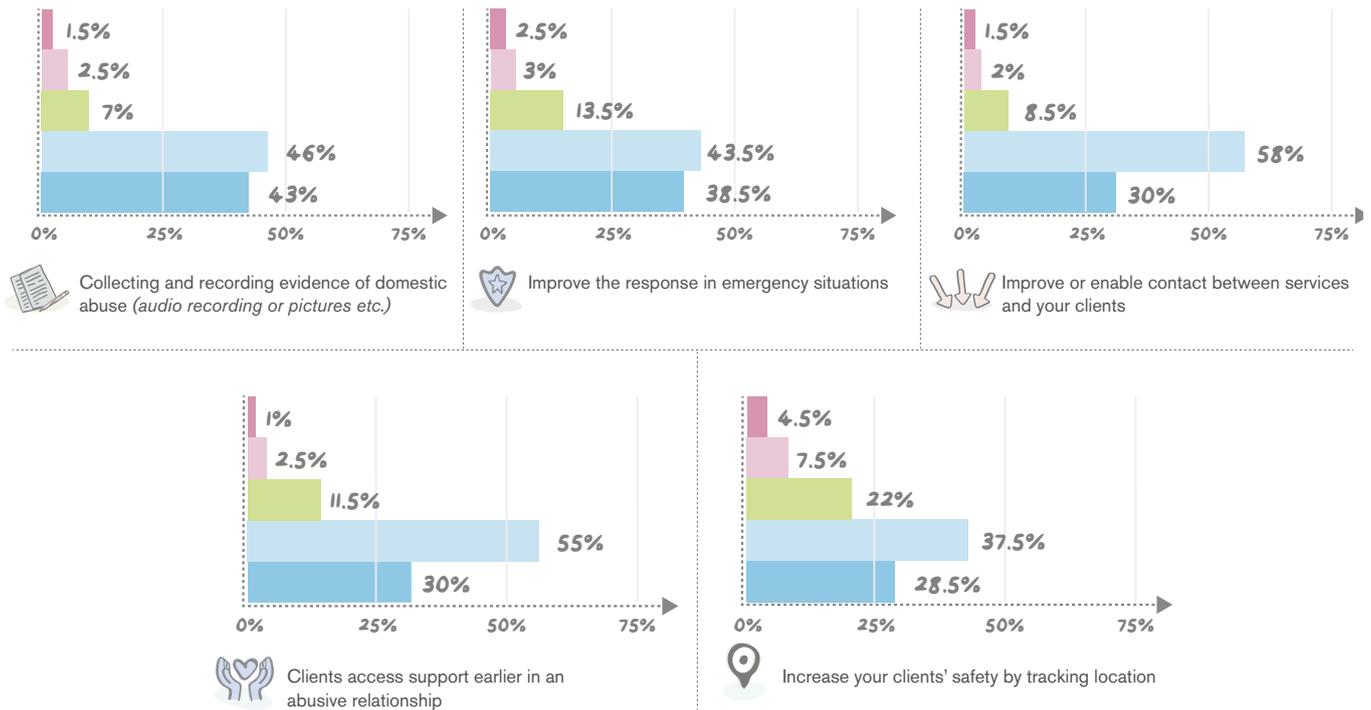[practitioner, informal interview]

"If we had funding and knowledge, we would provide advice on car tracking devices"
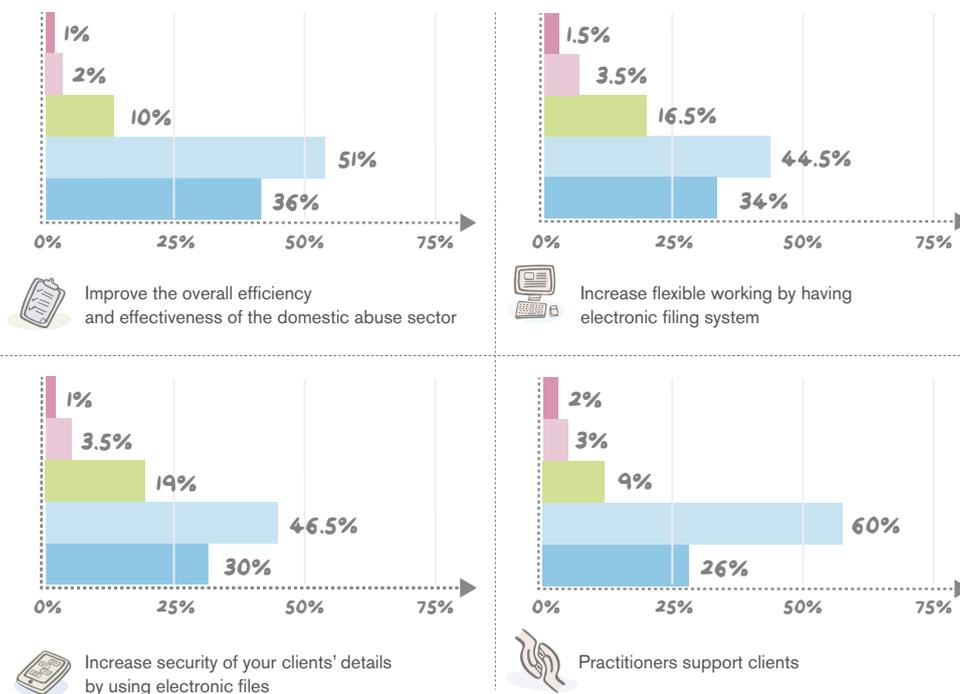[practitioner, shadowing]

3.4 Joined Up Solutions and Partnerships
Practitioners reflected in the research that co-operation was not just necessary between organisations but also for multi-agency collaboration between all stakeholders, including local authorities, police, and domestic violence services, using technology. They felt that there is currently a lot of specialist knowledge which is not shared efficiently. Counsellors get lots of information

How strongly do you agree that technology could help victims?

Collecting and recording evidence of domestic abuse (audio recording or pictures etc.)
- Strongly Disagree: 1.5%
- Disagree: 2.5%
- Neither: 7%
- Agree: 46%
- Strongly Agree: 43%

Improve the response in emergency situations
- Strongly Disagree: 2.5%
- Disagree: 3%
- Neither: 13.5%
- Agree: 43.5%
- Strongly Agree: 38.5%

Improve or enable contact between services and your clients
- Strongly Disagree: 1.5%
- Disagree: 2%
- Neither: 8.5%
- Agree: 58%
- Strongly Agree: 30%

Clients access support earlier in an abusive relationship
- Strongly Disagree: 1%
- Disagree: 2.5%
- Neither: 11.5%
- Agree: 55%
- Strongly Agree: 30%

Increase your clients' safety by tracking location
- Strongly Disagree: 4.5%
- Disagree: 7.5%
- Neither: 22%
- Agree: 37.5%
- Strongly Agree: 28.5%

How strongly do you agree that technology could help services?

Improve the overall efficiency and effectiveness of the domestic abuse sector
- Strongly Disagree: 1%
- Disagree: 2%
- Neither: 10%
- Agree: 51%
- Strongly Agree: 36%

Increase flexible working by having electronic filing system
- Strongly Disagree: 1.5%
- Disagree: 3.5%
- Neither: 16.5%
- Agree: 44.5%
- Strongly Agree: 34%

Increase security of your clients' details by using electronic files
- Strongly Disagree: 1%
- Disagree: 3.5%
- Neither: 19%
- Agree: 46.5%
- Strongly Agree: 30%

Practitioners support clients
- Strongly Disagree: 2%
- Disagree: 3%
- Neither: 9%
- Agree: 60%
- Strongly Agree: 26%

Legend: Strongly Agree, Agree, Neither, Disagree, Strongly Disagree

Percentages for both infographics based on responses from 307 practitioners.

Figure 7: Practitioners, How Strongly Do You Agree That Technology Could Help Victims and Services?

about perpetrators that never reaches the police. Workers in the sector also have very nuanced knowledge that currently is not shared. Practitioners wondered if there were technology solutions that could automatically share this or make it more widely known. Examples given included understanding how to spot *'bad character'* behaviour before perpetrators officially become offenders, or helping victims recognise that their phone battery may be draining fast because there is tracking software running on it.

For instance, the idea of a national database that could track perpetrators was discussed as a route to aid co-operation between organisations. This could initially be used to track the evidence on the most dangerous cases discussed at MARACs, and would be particularly useful if it could track *'bad character'* evidence. Taking this further, it would be very helpful if systems and databases could connect case management locally, regionally and internationally, but practitioners acknowledged the challenges involved in such a task. The challenge here however, is that many of these agencies similarly struggle to engage with digital tools and methodologies to deliver their services:

"Police are so reluctant to engage with digital... they're more likely to engage with revenge porn digitally because it's straightforward"
[digital professional, informal interview]

There was also some discussion around the role of everyday contacts with workers and whether technology could provide training to such a large group. Doctors and midwives naturally have opportunities for private contact with women, but some practitioners wondered if people like hairdressers could be trained to spot warning signs of abuse as well. Many women felt that the whole community could benefit from some form of awareness raising. Whilst it might not be feasible to train everybody personally, it would be beneficial if there were a technological solution that could help give people the skills to recognise and pass on warning signs.

"The services needs education on domestic violence, I've found myself where I've been told 'what did you do to get punched?'"

"Everyone should open their eyes & ears"

Numerous practitioners mentioned the idea of partnering with private companies to distribute advice and aids like panic buttons, rather than having standalone products and apps. These partnerships could work as a route to the market by providing some of the needed finance through corporate social responsibility budgets, and by being able to contact the people who need these solutions without drawing suspicion, such as through a normal newsletter. Suggestions were also made that partnerships with banks or other financial organisations could be explored in order to track patterns in personal finances that could indicate controlling behaviour. Online banking security and the security of Google accounts was a source of concern as well, as 10% of women surveyed had had their location revealed either through the perpetrator breaking into their accounts, or through having their accounts automatically synced.

It would be beneficial if there were a technological solution that could help give people the skills to recognise and pass on warning signs.
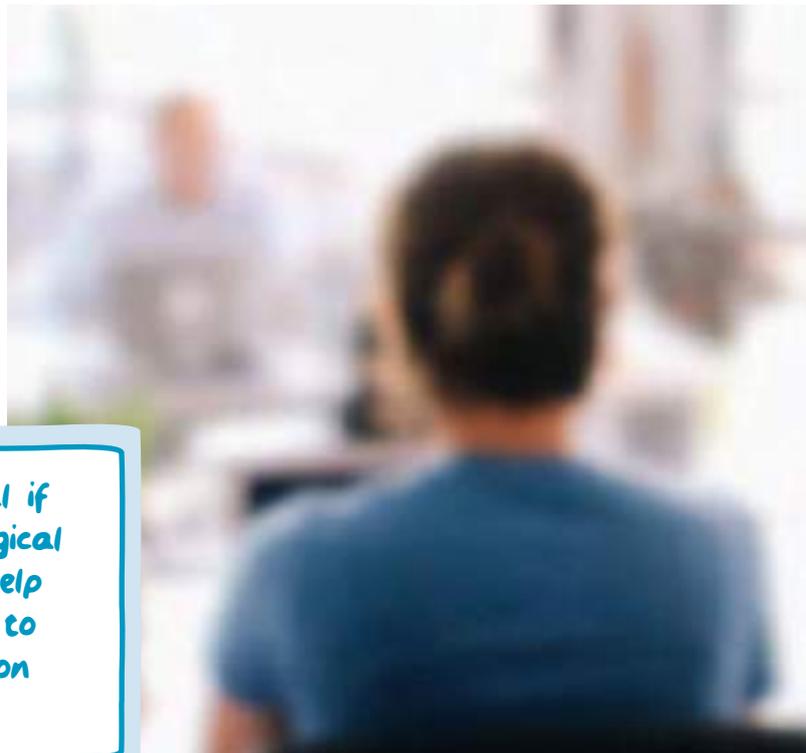
Women have very little time to find what they needed and yet much information was duplicated, hard to find and did not answer their key questions.
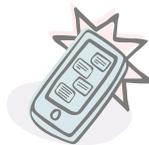
Conclusions

This research is first and foremost focused on how technology could play a positive role in women's abilities to stay safe from domestic abuse. It has however, discovered many potential risks and negative experiences with technology from both survivors and practitioners. Perpetrators remain one step ahead in re-purposing technology to their advantage.

Practitioners lack confidence, knowledge, funding and leadership around technology and yet they too see the potential value this could add to their face to face services, in helping women find them and in helping intervene earlier to allow women to recognise they are experiencing abuse. In the meantime, women are continuing to use technology to search for the advice, information and support they need, despite the risks.

A key finding of this research is the desperate need to improve the way in which information is currently organised and curated online. It found that women have very little time to find what they needed and yet much information was duplicated, hard to find and did not answer their key questions. Furthermore, a key gap in this information was about legal and financial issues, meaning women were unable to adequately prepare themselves for what happens next. They also lacked awareness about how to cover their tracks online and how to stay safe online and keep their location confidential. Technology also had the potential to help victims recognise that they are in an abusive relationship earlier, which would help them overcome what is a key barrier to them getting support.

Conclusions

Many practitioners felt that there was an urgent need for further training on what technology was available and whether it was reliable and trustworthy. There was a need for standardised advice that they could pass on to women to keep them safe, but there was concern about how fast the world of technology changes, and how to keep pace. There was recognition that although organisations were aware of the importance of technology in abusive relationships, and had a desire to do something about it, it was not a focus of daily working life. Finally, practitioners recognised the value of working together, whether through sharing resources, better organising information or by creating new technology in collaboration to avoid duplication. Working together could also help make organisations more efficient and able to share vital information more easily, whether between themselves or with partners such as the police.

Overall, technology in domestic abuse situations has the potential to have both a positive and negative impact, depending on how it is designed and used. It is both part of the problem and the solution. However, in order for this to happen it is important that tech solutions are designed to be safe, intersectional, accessible and relevant.

Any tech solutions have to be designed with the safety of the person using them as their primary objective, with the consideration of how it might be used in the hands of an abuser. Women should feel in control of their online interactions and technology should enable them to be safe enough and feel confident, rather than worried, about the consequences of living their lives and using web based services.

There are numerous great opportunities for technology to make substantial differences in the lives of people who are being abused. If they are grasped, they can help technology change from being another method of control and isolation to one of liberation.

Acknowledgements

SafeLives is a national charity dedicated to ending domestic abuse, for good. We combine data, research, and insight from services and survivors to find out what makes people safe. Domestic abuse is not acceptable, not inevitable and together - we can make it stop. SafeLives wants support for people to be early, effective and consistent - wherever you are, whoever you are. We do this by providing training, analysing data, providing support to frontline services, creating a platform for survivors to be heard and testing new interventions that do things differently. We want solutions, not short-term fixes. The statistic and stories continue to shock, and they're not getting any better. We must commit to finding what works to stop it, for good, for everyone.

See: **safelives.org.uk** @safelives_

Snook is an award-winning service design agency working globally across the public, private and third sectors. We've been transforming services and organisations since 2009: working with companies across the world to ensure the products, campaigns and services they deliver work for people. Within our team, we have dedicated researchers who focus on uncovering people's needs, using a range of design ethnography methods and tools. Our researchers work closely with our design and events teams to translate these into design principles for services and products to be developed in the future.

See **wearesnook.com** @wearesnook

Chayn is a volunteer-led open source project that leverages technology to empower women against abuse and oppression. Started in 2013, the project now supports several projects that includes crowdsourced platforms for support, how to guides, hackathons to create new solutions and running digital services. Chayn is 100% volunteer-run with a motto of 'building with, not for' survivors. Chayn was named one of Nesta's 'New Radicals' in 2016, as one of the projects radically changing Britain for good.

See **chayn.co** @chaynHQ

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Tech VS Abuse website **www.techvsabuse.info/**

Tech VS Abuse: Design Challenges **www.techvsabuse.info/design-challenges**

Tech vs Abuse:

Research Findings