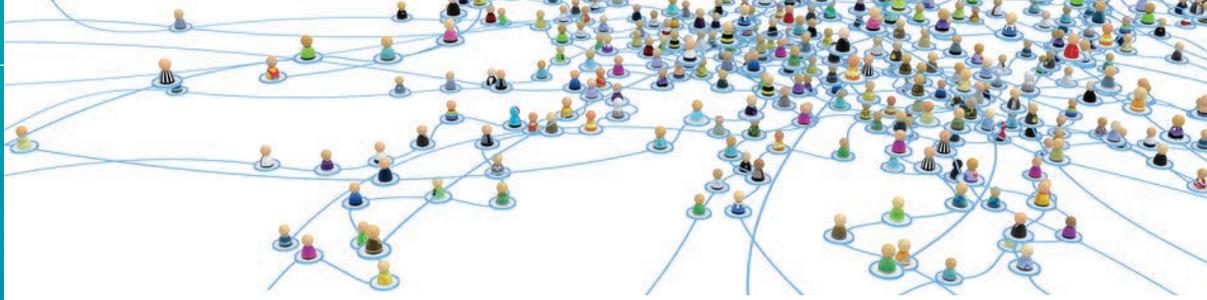


Facilitate.

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Technology-Related Violence Against Women

An unprecedented number of Canadians use information communication technology (technology) to share, distribute and gather information, and communicate (e.g., computers, telephone, internet, mobile phone technology, satellite communications).

Technology-related violence affects children and adults. It can be perpetrated by females and males and both can be victims/survivors of this violence. All technology-related violence is concerning and unacceptable. Given the mandate of the Learning Network, our focus is on violence against women (VAW). Within this context, the implications of the rapid advancements in and accessibility of technology are both positive and negative for women.

Technology is playing a role in all categories of violence against women (e.g., sexual violence, harassment and stalking, intimate partner violence). Telephones, computers, and the internet can be used to harm women. While the dynamics of violence largely remain the same, technology extends the reach and creates new forms of abusive behavior. Technology-related violence erodes a woman's sense of safety: it threatens the geographic and spatial boundaries of a "safe distance" or a "safe place." Regardless of whether technology is used, the root causes of violence against women are inequality and discrimination, and a woman's experience of violence is shaped by her social location (e.g., intersecting factors such as class, race, age).

The UN estimates that 95% of aggressive behaviour, harassment, abusive language and denigrating images in online spaces are aimed at women and come from current or former male partners. ([The Association for Progressive Communications, p. 1](#))

When considering the advantages of technology for women, we must remember that its potential value is impeded by factors related to gender inequality and discrimination. Further, technology only benefits women in social locations where it is accessible (available and affordable) to them. Accessible technological applications and devices can facilitate communication and foster safety. Access to social media may connect, inform and reduce isolation. The internet creates opportunities for online counselling, training, and public education campaigns.

Research has shown an increase in the number of victims/survivors of VAW who are using the internet to access support. ([Survivors of Intimate Violence Seek Help Online: Implications of Responding to Increasing Requests](#))

In this Issue, we highlight key information on technology-related VAW, the use of technology to support women with lived experience of violence, and the use of technology to prevent violence against women. Be sure to check out the links to additional information/resources.

81 Percent of [Canadian households with internet use](#) from home in 2011

70 Percent of [Canadian households with cellular telephones](#) in 2011

45 Hours per month [Canadians spend online](#) (Canada leads the world in online engagement)

16 Percent of time spent on [social networking sites](#) for Canadians

What Distinguishes Technology-Related VAW?

[Voices from Digital Spaces: Technology Related Violence Against Women](#) (2011, p. 26 & 27) identifies 5 characteristics that distinguish technology-related VAW:

- **Anonymity** – abusive person can remain unknown to victim/survivor
- **Action-at-a-Distance** – abuse can be done without physical contact and from anywhere
- **Automation** – abusive actions using technologies require less time and effort
- **Accessibility** – the variety and affordability of many technologies make them readily accessible to perpetrators
- **Propagation and Perpetuity** – texts and images multiply and exist for a long time or indefinitely

Potential Consequences of Technology-Related VAW

While technology-related VAW is constantly evolving, its consequences appear to be similar or amplified when compared to violence not involving technology. As with all VAW, the nature and severity of its consequences are shaped by a woman's social location and may affect every domain of her life. Potential consequences include:

- **Psychological impacts** (e.g., sadness, shame, depression, stress/anxiety, fear)
- **Health impacts** (e.g., health concerns related to stress)
- **Privacy concerns** (e.g., embarrassment or fear associated with the belief that one is or has been watched or monitored; use of a woman's personal information against her)
- **Social effects** (e.g., compromised sense of security; social withdrawal; isolation; compromised productivity at work; loss of income; loss of reputation)

53% of young adults who encountered abuse online found the experience deeply upsetting ([2011 AP-MTV Digital Abuse Study](#))

Categories of VAW where Technology Plays a Role

[Voices from Digital Spaces: Technology Related Violence Against Women](#) (2011, p. 22) groups VAW into five broad categories in which technology is used.

- **Harassment and Stalking** generally consists of repeated conduct that is carried out over a period of time and causes a person to have reasonable fear for their safety or the safety of someone they know
- **Intimate Partner Violence** the abuse and/or assault of adolescents or adults by their intimate partners
- **Sexual Violence** violence, physical or psychological, carried out through sexual means or by targeting sexuality
- **Culturally Justified VAW** promoting culture or religion as a justification for VAW, or to create a culture of VAW
- **Violence Targeting Women's Groups/Communities** targeting women's groups/communities because of their gender, sexual identity, or political views

7	Percent of Canadian adult (18 yrs and over) Internet users who experienced cyberbullying in 2009
13	Percent of Canadian adult females who experienced cyberbullying by a classmate or co-worker
15	Percent of Canadian adult females who experienced cyberbullying by a current or former family member or spouse
41	Percent of U.S. young adults (aged 14-24) in a relationship who have experienced some form of digital dating abuse

Types of Technology-Related VAW

Below are six broad categories that encompass many forms of technology-related VAW.

Hacking – using technology to gain illegal or unauthorized access to systems or resources for the purpose of acquiring personal information, altering or modifying information, or slandering and denigrating the victim and/or VAW organizations. *e.g., violation of passwords and controlling computer functions -- freeze the computer, log off the user*

Surveillance/Tracking – using technology to stalk and monitor a victim's activities and behaviours either in real-time or historically. *e.g., GPS tracking via mobile phone; tracking keystrokes to recreate victim/survivor's activities on computer*

Impersonating – using technology to assume the identity of the victim or someone else in order to access private information, embarrass or shame the victim, contact the victim, or create fraudulent identity documents. *e.g., Sending offensive emails from victim's email account; calling victim from unknown number to avoid call being blocked*

Harassment/Spamming – using technology to continuously contact, annoy, threaten, and/or scare the victim. This is ongoing behaviour and not one isolated incident. *e.g., persistent mobile calls/texts; filling up voicemail with messages so no one else can leave a message*

Recruitment – using technology to lure potential victims into violent situations. *e.g., fraudulent postings and advertisements (dating sites; employment opportunities); traffickers using chat rooms, message boards, and websites to communicate/advertise*

Malicious Distribution – using technology as a tool to manipulate and distribute defamatory and illegal materials related to the victim and/or VAW organizations. *e.g., threatening to or leaking intimate photos/video; using technology as a propaganda tool to promote violence against women*

[Learn More.](#)

Using Technology to Support Women

Technology is used to support victims/survivors and prevent VAW. It increases the accessibility of supports, information, and resources. It also creates opportunities for communication among victims/survivors and with service providers. Perhaps the greatest benefit of technology is that it increases women's sense of security.

93% of women felt safer and 85% felt more independent because of their mobile phone ([Women & Mobile: A Global Opportunity](#))

APPs & Technology Devices for Safety

The advancement of technology has enabled women experiencing violence to access support and information immediately from any location. GPS devices and mobile applications (apps) can help locate, identify, respond to, and support victims of violence and reduce their risk of further harm.

Eyez-On



Select Victim Services agencies partner with [Eyez-On](#) to provide women experiencing high risk intimate partner violence with a GPS safety device. The device has an emergency button that when pressed pinpoints the exact location of the device. When the button is pressed, police will be immediately dispatched to her location. The light weight device can be taken anywhere and can be transferred to other family members. There is no charge to women in high risk situations.

Not Your Baby



[Not Your Baby](#) is a smartphone app designed to generate ideas on how to respond to situations of sexual harassment. Responses are based on survey input from 238 people. The app is interactive allowing women to share their personal stories and suggestions for responses. A discreet mode is included that darkens the screen making it harder for others to see. The app was developed by the Metropolitan Action Committee on Violence Against Women and Children (METRAC) in partnership with TAKE ACTION games.

YWCA Safety Siren



YWCA Canada launched the [YWCA Safety Siren](#) app. This innovative smartphone app sets off a screeching alarm when the Safety Siren button is pressed or when the phone is shaken. When set off, the app sends an SOS call to a pre-set safety contact and an email with the geo-location of the phone on a map. The app provides health and safety information for women. Since its launch in 2010, the app has had over 10,000 downloads with over 50,000 users logging on and viewing the app.

One Love Lite



The [One Love Foundation](#), with Dr. Jacqueline Campbell, developed the [One Love Lite](#) app. Based on the [Danger Assessment](#), a tool that helps women assess their level of risk for lethality in an intimate relationship, the app asks a series of questions to determine risk. If identified as high risk, the app provides resources for immediate support. Information is provided for family, friends and professionals who may know someone experiencing intimate partner violence. For safety, the app will disable itself after one use but can be downloaded as many times as needed.

[Learn More.](#)

[Technology Safety Quick Tips \(2009\)](#) [National Network to End Domestic Violence](#)

Training to Promote Safety from Technology Related VAW



The [Technology and Woman Abuse online training](#),

offered by the Ontario Association of Interval & Transition Houses (OAITH), provides a series of e-presentations that raises awareness of how technology can be used to abuse women and their children and how to implement technology safety strategies to minimize this risk of abuse. The training also provides a number of resources including a technology power and control wheel, technology safety planning with survivors, and a data security checklist. Our Learning Network team found the user-friendly training could be completed in an hour.



[Safety Net Canada](#), housed at the BC Society of Transition

Houses, offers the Technology Training to Enhance Women and Children's Safety initiative to anti-violence workers across Canada. The training discusses how technology impacts the safety of women, and their children, who are staying in housing programs. To date, Safety Net Canada has delivered this in-person training to law enforcement, anti-violence workers, and members of the justice system in British Columbia, Alberta, Manitoba, Quebec and Ontario. Safety Net Canada can be contacted at safetynetcanada@bcsth.ca.

[Other Training Resources](#)

9 Notable VAW Facebook Groups from Ontario

Inspired by the [Pixel Project's "16 Notable Facebook Pages by Anti-Violence Against Women Organizations"](#), the Learning Network team presents [9 Facebook Pages](#) dedicated to ending violence against women in Ontario. These pages present information such as info-graphics, articles, upcoming events, VAW tools and resources, and forums for discussion. Check out these 9 Facebook groups and the criteria we used to select them. We look forward to adding more notable Ontario based pages to this group. This is only a start! Give us your feedback on the [Learning Network Facebook Page](#).

Public Education Campaigns



The Manitoba Department of Family Services and Labour developed a public education campaign that addresses the use of technologies to perpetrate violence against women. The campaign features a cell phone with abusive texts indicating that they are not messages but rather threats. The poster provides a number to a 24-hour domestic violence information crisis line.



Take Back the Tech! reclaims technology to end violence against women. The campaign accompanies the [16 Days of Activism Against Gender Violence](#) and calls for action on each of the 16 days to raise awareness and prevent VAW using technology. Past actions included changing default homepages in internet cafes to women's rights websites; raising awareness by creating short videos, making digital postcards; and producing audio-casts. Information and toolkits are provided to create local campaigns. See the campaign [video](#) by [Tech San Violence!](#), the Quebec counterpart.



The [Pixel Project](#) is a global, virtual, nonprofit organization that uses various online channels to deliver viral awareness campaigns to end violence against women. The organization began with its "Celebrity Male Role Model Pixel Reveal Campaign" to raise awareness and funds for anti-VAW agencies around the world. The Pixel Project has since developed numerous other innovative online awareness programs/campaigns including Music for Pixels; Paint It Purple; 30 for 30; Wall of Support; and 16 for 16.

Now Available on vawlearningnetwork.ca

It Shouldn't Be This Hard.

Learning Network Brief 01 (December 2012). Pamela Cross for Luke's Place Support and Resource Centre for Women and Children

NGOs and Human Trafficking: Tensions, Blind-spots and Power.

Learning Network Brief 04 (March 2013). Sue Wilson

Do Not Harm: A Human Rights Approach to Anti-Trafficking Policies and Interventions.

Learning Network Brief 05 (March 2013). Annalee Lepp

Understanding Technology-Related Violence Against Women: Categories and Examples.

Learning Network Brief 06. (March 2013). Linda Baker, Marcie Campbell & Elsa Barreto

Information Communication Technologies and Trafficking in Persons.

Learning Network Brief 07 (March 2013). Marcie Campbell & Linda Baker

List of links to [Resources](#) on Technology-Related VAW

Glossary of Technology-Related Violence Terms

Coming soon

- Listen to a woman's lived experience of technology-related intimate partner violence. Learn from the steps she took to be safe. Available on the Learning Network Website May 2013.
- Guidelines for Information Communication Technology (ICT) Safety. Learning Network Brief 08
- Technology Safety Checkup for Women

For additional resources and information related to this issue go to www.vawlearningnetwork.ca

Next issue

Engaging Men in VAW Prevention

Contact the Learning Network:
vawln@uwo.ca

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