

THE NICHOLSON PROJECT:

Exploring new ways of disrupting the digital abuse of family violence victims

It has been reported that **99.3%*** of family violence workers have clients who had experienced technology facilitated stalking and abuse.



* Woodlock, D., Bentley, K., Schulze, D., Mahoney, N., Chung, D., and Pracilio, A., (2020). Second National Survey of Technology Abuse and Domestic Violence in Australia. WESNET.

Technology facilitated abuse is common



Persistent abusive and controlling calling, texting and emailing



Checking text messages, social media or internet activity



Installing spyware on devices



Social media stalking and harassment



Controlling online bank accounts



Sharing intimate or other photos without consent



Using children's devices and social media to monitor partners



This controlling behaviour is incredibly traumatic for women and their children and leaves them at risk of further family violence.

Innovative ways to disrupt technology facilitated abuse

The Nicholson pilot project explored innovative ways of delivering an assessment that screened for the presence of, or vulnerability to, technology facilitated abuse through:

- Remote delivery rather than in person (never been done before in Australia)
- Intervening as early as possible after referral to family violence services



How the Nicholson Project pilot worked

Three month pilot

44 women and their children impacted by family violence and referred to Wayss

Remote technology assessment provided by Protective Group

Rapid early intervention

Screening question about technology facilitated abuse and offer of remote technology assessment made within 24 hours of contact with Wayss

24 hours

Remote assessment conducted by Protective Group within two days

48 hours

Report provided by Protective Group within four days of initial contact with strategies to keep the victim safe from further abuse via technology

72 hours

If during the remote assessment it was discovered there was a likelihood devices may have been placed by a perpetrator in a victim's car or house, where safe to do so, a follow up on site assessment was arranged with Protective Group.

What we learned



Cultural implications including language barriers

Provide interpreters and information in language when conducting assessments.



Practical implications

Gather and charge all devices and ask victims to consider all online accounts that could be impacted before the assessment.



Implications for accompanying children and young people

Include the devices and (where possible) social media use, gaming platforms and settings used by the victim's children as part of the remote assessment as other family members may also be victims and may be used as proxy abusers by the perpetrator.



Implications for lack of awareness

Encourage all victims of family violence, even those who do not believe they are impacted by technology facilitated abuse, to take the assessment, as many victims are unaware it is happening.

Outcomes: pre and post assessment survey results

Participants felt **more confident** that they were not being tracked and abused via technology as well as in their knowledge and ability to manage their use of technology and online platforms.

Safety

28% felt safer

33% felt the same level of safety

11% felt less safe

Confidence

56% felt more confident

17% felt the same level of confidence

6% felt less confidence

Next steps

Expand upon the learnings from this pilot project to provide early access to remote digital assessment for more victims impacted by family violence in partnership with Protective Group.

The ability to deliver the service remotely in the first instance provides huge potential to scale this up to make this kind of support available to more victims of family violence across Victoria and Australia.