Domestic Abuse in Tech-Society

Huw Ford
C&YP ICT Manager, Information and Technology
Swindon Borough Council

Lin Williams
Domestic Abuse Lead
Swindon Safeguarding & Community Safety Partnership

Statutory Definition of Domestic Abuse: Domestic Abuse Act 2021

Domestic abuse covers a wide range of behaviours that are used to control, threaten or intimidate victims. Behaviours are classed as domestic abuse if:

- Both the individuals are **over 16 years of age**
- Both the individuals are '**personally connected**' to each other and the behaviour is abusive

Behaviour is considered abusive if it consists of one or more of the following:

- **Physical or sexual abuse psychological or emotional abuse**
- **Coercive or Controlling behaviour** –intimidation, threats, humiliation that is used to punish, harm, isolate a victim and prevent them from enjoying life
- **Economic abuse** –any behaviour that prevents a victim having the ability to acquire, use or maintain money, or obtain goods or services

Statutory Definition of Domestic Abuse: Domestic Abuse Act 2021 - Children & Young People

The definition now also recognises Children and Young People as victims in their own right:

- Any reference in the Act to a victim of DA includes CYP (U18) who:
- a) Sees or hears or experiences the effects of abuse
- and
- b) Is related to A or B

A child is related if:

- a) is a parent of or have PR for the child
- or
- b) the child and the persons are related
- source: Domestic Abuse Act 2021 (legislation.gov.uk)
- Factsheet: Statutory definition of domestic abuse factsheet -GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

Context

Domestic Abuse ruins or takes lives:
one woman in four will experience domestic abuse at some point in her life in England and Wales
2 women are killed every week.

Modern technology gives perpetrators ever-growing ways to stalk, isolate and control victims using the tools of everyday life.
There was a 97% increase in tech abuse between April 2020 & March 2021 reported to the Refuge Charity

- **1 in 6 men are affected by domestic abuse at some point in their life in England and Wales.**
- **Around 30 men are murdered each year.**

- **1 in 3 women will experience online abuse at some point in their lives**
- **Women are 7 x more likely to experience sexual harassment and stalking than men.**

What is tech abuse?

Anything technological that can be used to abuse, control and intimidate a victim

If you have a feeling something isn't right…

- **Tech abuse is real**. Abusers may use technology to control, harass or intimidate.
- They may carry out physical, sexual, psychological, or economic abuse using technology.
- For example,
  - they may hack mobile phone
  - cyberstalk, or
  - use social media, cameras, or other kinds of technology to try to harm or control the victim and their children
- **You have the right to be safe and respected online and in real life.**

Recognising tech abuse

✓Could someone be using technology to harm or control you?

✓Is someone stalking you online or watching everything you do?

✓Is someone harassing you by sending constant messages that upset you?

✓Is someone posting about you online or threatening to share images?

✓Do you feel pressured to share your messages or phone?

✓Is someone controlling or limiting use of your phone? Has someone hacked your phone?

✓Does someone have access to your online accounts and passwords?

✓Is someone trying to get to you through your children's phone or games?

✓Are you being cyberstalked?

Signs someone may be experiencing tech abuse

✓Abuser constantly sends messages or calls?

✓Phone or email has been hacked?

✓Being Cyberstalked

✓Partner or ex-partner checking up all the time?

✓Is someone posting online or threatening to share images?

✓partner or ex-partner show up wherever the victim might be?

✓Is the abuser controlling tech?

✓Ex-partner using the children to get access to the victim?

✓needing to change what behaviour or plans to keep someone calm?

✓The abuser has access to online banking or benefits?

✓Using smart home devices against you?

Source: What is tech abuse? - Use tech safely | Refuge Tech Safety

Role of Professionals to Support

Do you know someone experiencing tech abuse or domestic abuse?

What you can do?
- Listen.
- Believe.
- Refer to specialist services.

You Can:
- Refer the victim to local specialist Domestic Abuse services for support or encourage them to seek support themselves.
- Consider if there needs to be a DASH RIC completed and a referral to MARAC.
- Contact Swindon Domestic Abuse Support Service 24 hour helpline for help and advice.

Learn more about tech abuse:
- Role of professionals to support Supporting survivors of tech abuse | Refuge Tech Safety
- Tips on how to speak with survivors about domestic abuse. You may be the first person the victim has disclosed to: read our tips on how to speak to survivors

Reporting concerns

- Your safeguarding lead in your agency/service
- Police – in an emergency, please call **999.**
- Professional disagreement /escalation [Adults Escalation Policy - Swindon Safeguarding Partnership](#)
- Adult Safeguarding Team - [Report a concern - Swindon Safeguarding Partnership](#)
- Child Safeguarding [- Referral guidelines and MASH contact information - Swindon Safeguarding Partnership](#)
- Consider completing DASH Risk Identification Checklist &
- Referral to MARAC

Legislation

- Revenge Porn – Updated in Domestic Abuse Act 2021
- Stalking and harassment – Stalking Protection Orders (through the Police)
- Coercive and Controlling Behaviour – an offence since 2015. Updated 2021
- Malicious Communications Act 1988

Resources and Helplines

- Swindon Domestic Abuse Support Service - 24 hour helpline 01793 610610
- National Domestic Abuse Helpline 0800 2000 247
- MALE Advice Line – 0808 8010327
- Action on Elder Abuse Helpline 0800 0699 784
- Ann Craft Trust
- Revenge Porn Helpline – 0345 6000 459
- National Stalking Helpline – 0808 802 0300
- Paladin Stalking Advocacy Service - 020 3899 4107
- Galop – LGBTQ+ Helpline – 0800 999 5428

Case Examples

Some case examples can be found on the website

Supporting survivors of tech abuse | Refuge Tech Safety

Stalker, 35, used Amazon Alexa device to 'listen in' on his ex-girlfriend then threatened to throw acid in her face and crashed her Jaguar on the M20

- Stalker used Alexa to listen in on his ex-partner before turning up at her home
- He threatened to throw acid in her face and stab her male friend, a court heard
- Hassan Mehmet, 35, waged a campaign of harassment against Shelby Laidlaw
- He admitted to stalking, dangerous driving and driving without a licence today

By ELENA SALVONI FOR MAILONLINE

PUBLISHED: 17:08, 7 November 2022 | UPDATED: 17:11, 7 November 2022

A stalker used an Amazon Alexa to listen in on his ex-partner before threatening to stab her friend and throw acid in her face, a court heard.

Hassan Mehmet, 35, waged a campaign of harassment against Shelby Laidlaw, who he had been in a relationship with for 13 years before they split in April.

He went on to show her a knife, threatening to stab her male friend, before convincing the terrified woman to lend him her Jaguar, which he then deliberately drove off the M20, the court was told.

MPs fear criminals are spying on homes with Alexa: Warning over smart speakers after sex offender became first person in UK to be convicted of using Amazon device to snoop on his victim

- A sex offender has been convicted of spying with Amazon Alexa device
- Aaron Herschell, 25, admitted using device to listen to victim's conversations
- MPs have warned over the potential dangers of the connected technology

Householders have been given a chilling warning that criminals are using Alexa 'smart devices' to spy on people in their homes.

MPs have sounded the alert after a Scots sex offender became the first person in the UK to be convicted of using an Amazon Alexa device to snoop on his victim.

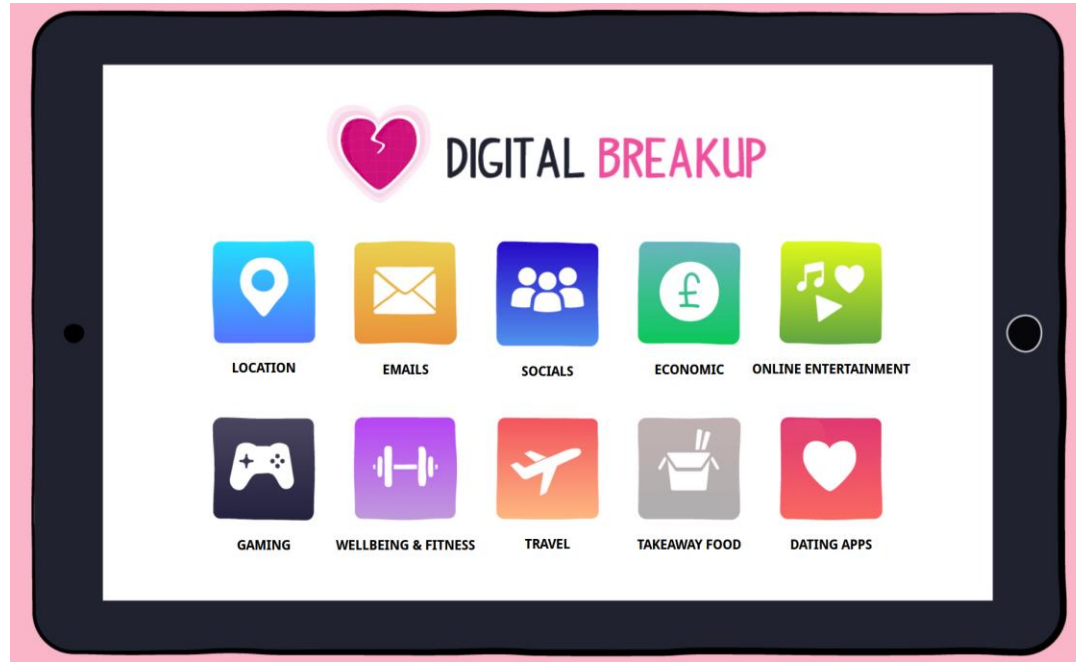The landmark case emerged as a Westminster select committee is holding an inquiry into the growing use – and possible abuse – of smart technology.

Resources

This interactive tool is designed to help spot devices in homes which could be controlled by an abuser and give them simple advice on how to secure these devices.

Home Tech Tool | Refuge Tech Safety

This interactive tool is designed to provide awareness and understanding of the various digital platforms a partner might have access to, whether it's social media accounts, online banking, or live location through apps such as Uber and Strava. The tool also provides the necessary knowledge to help secure digital platforms against potential tech abuse from a partner or ex-partner.

Digital Breakup (refugetechsafety.org)

Resources

Refuge - Information and resources from Refuge:
- Information and support on tech abuse | Refuge Tech Safety
- https://refugetechsafety.org/glossary/
- https://refugetechsafety.org/secure-your-tech/

Safelives - Information and resources:
- https://safelives.org.uk/tech-vs-abuse
- Digital and online safety | Safelives

Swindon Safeguarding & Community Safety Partnership
- Domestic abuse advice information help sheet November 2021 - Swindon Safeguarding Partnership
- Adult safeguarding and domestic abuse guide to support practitioners and managers - Swindon Safeguarding Partnership
- DASH risk assessment checklist - Swindon Safeguarding Partnership

Additional reading/information

SSP/CSP 7 minute and Practice Briefs:

- [SSP practice brief - DASH risk identification checklist and MARAC - Swindon Safeguarding Partnership](#)
- [Clare's Law - Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme (DVDS) - 7-minute brief - Swindon Safeguarding Partnership](#)
- [Coercive control - Swindon Safeguarding Partnership](#)

Other resources:

- [How your smart home devices can be turned against you - BBC Future](#)
- https://theconversation.com/how-tech-is-driving-new-forms-of-domestic-abuse-176187
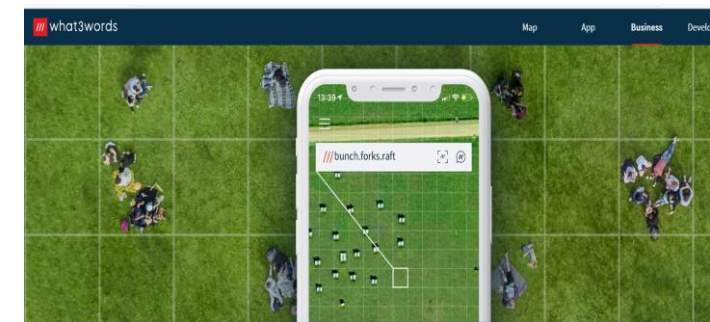
Resources – UK Safer Internet

UK Safer Internet host support services and helplines that offer free advice, support and guidance to victims of online harm. These include:

- Revenge Porn Helpline Support for Intimate Image Abuse
- StopNCII.org StopNCII.org is a free tool designed to support victims of Non-Consensual Intimate Image (NCII) abuse.
- POSH Helpline Professionals Online Safety Helpline, Supporting professionals working with children and young people, with any online safety issue they may be having.
- Report Harmful Content Report Harmful Content can help you to report harmful content online by providing up to date information on community standards and direct links to the correct reporting facilities across multiple platforms.
- Harmful Sexual Behaviour Support Service A support service for professionals in tackling harmful sexual behaviours
- Minerva is a ground breaking new platform that will allow any adult in the UK to log a timeline of evidence relating to any of form of online or associated offline abuse whilst giving them an accessible hub to report and remove harmful, abusive or inappropriate content.
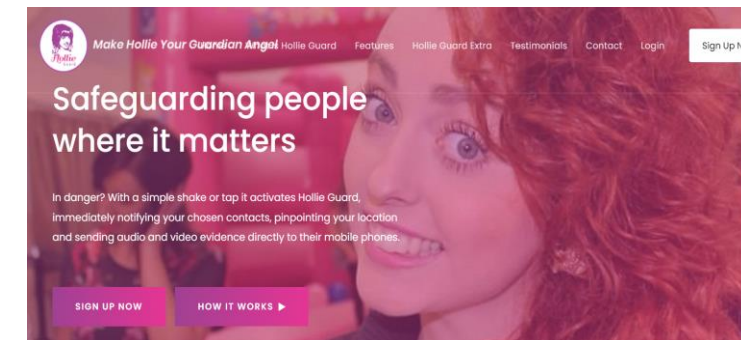
Useful Free Apps
For Apple & Android

Never get lost again

With the what3words app, it's easy to find, share and save precise locations.

- What three words:
https://what3words.com/products/what3words-app

- Holly Guard: https://hollieguard.com/

- BrightSky app: UK says no more Bright Sky - UK SAYS NO MORE