



Helpdesk Research Report

Digital tools and improving women's safety and access to support services

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Question

What digital tools have been proven to improve women's safety and access to domestic and family violence support services?¹

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1. Overview

Whilst great expectations have been placed on information technologies as tools for transforming women's lives and as an enabler of empowerment, relatively little is known about how, when, and why such transformations occur. The literature on (non-digital and digital) ICTs (Information and Communication Technologies) and women and girls' empowerment is relatively large, but most studies focus on women's economic empowerment, and these rarely draw connections between women's economic power and their voice and influence in society or politics, or initiatives to improve women's safety and access to domestic and family violence support services.

¹ This report explores *Digital tools and improving women's safety and access to support services* and is the second report of a two part query. The full list of queries is provided below and reports should be read in conjunction:

1. What are the most effective tools developed for digital platforms (social media, mobile phone apps and websites) that have been successful in changing behaviour in relation to violence against women?
2. What digital tools have been proven to improve women's safety and access to domestic and family violence support services?

This rapid help desk review provides an overview of academic, policy and practitioner literature that examines the extent to which digital tools can improve women's safety and access to domestic and family violence support services. It is broadly accepted that digital media and the internet can provide new forms of communication and engagement for women that make networking easier, increase their social capital and facilitate the creation/growth of women's movements. Technology can also be used to mitigate gender-based violence and improve women's safety in a number of ways:

- electronic monitoring systems are allowing violence prone areas to be identified,
- Short Message Service (SMS) based alert systems can alert advocates to abuse,
- Information sharing sites, and Social networking service (SNS), SMS based support groups, are all potential avenues where technology can support survivors of violence.

It is, however, important to note that significant barriers exist for women and girls accessing digital tools in many contexts. Currently, in those countries with disproportionately lower income levels, women face greater constraints than men in a number of areas:

- **Access and use of ICTs.** Research has demonstrated that there is no correlation between the saturation of ICTs in a country and women's access to those ICTs.
- **Usability and literacy.** Access to education continues to be a greater barrier for women than men; an estimated two thirds of the world's illiterate are women.
- **Development and design.** Much of the content on the Internet has not been developed to address the needs of women and girls in developing and developed countries nor is it available in the languages they speak.

It is also important to note that much of the 'success' attributed to digital tools that have improved women's safety and access to domestic and family violence support services is anecdotal and requires further interrogation and triangulation with other research. That being said a number of features emerge as common across case studies. These include:

- **Integrated and cross platform approaches:** The use of digital tools works best when specialist support services are directly involved in the design, provision of information or facilitation of online discussion.
- **Engaging with specialist partners** both at the national level, but also at the local level by making campaign materials and information available free or at a minimum cost can provide women and girls with the correct information more efficiently and cost effectively.
- **Connecting online and offline activities,** for example by using digital support services to connect women vulnerable to, or experiencing violence with counsellors or support staff is more efficient than pursuing purely online or offline initiatives.
- When deploying ICT to engage with issues of VAWG, it is important to assess **which medium is most appropriate** to which target audience.

2. ICT, gender inequality and women and girl's empowerment

Whilst great expectations have been placed on information technologies (including a range of digital tools e.g. social media, mobile phone apps and websites) as tools for transforming women's lives and as an enabler for empowerment, according to Wheeler (2008), relatively little is known about how, when, and why such transformations occur. The World Wide Web Foundation (2014: 4) comment that there is a need for evidence based research based on how women currently access and use web-powered Information Communication Tools (ICTs), and the nature of the gender digital divide² that persists despite growing global statistics on mobile phone and web-enabled ICT use. ICT is an umbrella term for the many devices that can be used to communicate information. These include older technologies, such as radio, television and video, and newer ones, such as computers, mobile phones and the internet.

Despite these concerns it is broadly accepted that digital media and the internet can provide new forms of communication and engagement for women that make networking easier, increase their social capital and facilitate the creation/growth of women's movements, including feminist movements. Cummings and O'Neil (2015) highlight that ICTs, including digital tools, are particularly useful in connecting geographically dispersed women, within countries and through the development of transnational movements. There are also tools that can contribute to building solidarity between women locally through the sharing of ideas and information. This can also encourage non-digital and offline mobilisation (Cummings & O'Neil, 2015).

It is important to note that women may have access to a range of ICTs, and these may complement each other e.g. locally produced radio broadcasts could be combined with the global reach of the internet, thus increasing their impact (Asiedu, 2012). Digital ICTs hold the possibility that larger numbers of women and girls can both communicate and receive information and ideas.

However, digital ICTs and media also represent a commercial space, influenced by private sector interests. Existing patriarchal attitudes towards gender can be reproduced as well as challenged in the online environment in ways that can limit the potential of ICTs to be tools for women's empowerment (Cummings and O'Neil, 2015: 1; Gurusurthy, 2013).

Many studies present ICTs as tools to overcome gender inequities and for women and girls' empowerment more generally. However, authors do not always set out the assumptions and theory on how digital ICTs lead to increases in women's power. The majority of studies assume, implicitly or explicitly, that ICTs afford women and girls more opportunities to participate in public affairs, access information and form advocacy networks. Such claims need further interrogation. Cummings and O'Neil (2015) identify seven findings on the broader potential benefits of women's use of digital ICTs:

1. The process of learning to use digital ICTs can **increase the self-confidence** of women and girls and enable them to critically reflect on traditional gender roles and their role in a global society.
2. Use of digital ICTs can expose them, and their communities, to **alternative representations of women**. Presenting women in non-traditional roles can influence existing social attitudes towards women, on the part of men and women, and change women's personal aspirations.
3. Learning digital ICT skills and the use and ownership of ICT can **increase women's social status**.
4. Gaining skills and access to digital ICTs can provide women and girls with **alternative channels for self-expression and engagement in public affairs**, regardless of physical location and if they experience gender-based constraints on their voice locally.

² Commonly understood as, the gulf between those who have ready access to computers and the Internet, and those who do not.

5. ICT use can **increase the independence of women and girls**, giving them a sense of greater freedom and power to pursue activities, such as education and enterprise, including those outside their traditional gender roles.
6. Using ICTs can be a way for women to **access opportunities in the public sphere**, such as providing access to information about, and online access to, education or business services. Through this, women and girls can develop greater control over their own lives.
7. ICTs provide a **channel of communication and engagement that makes networking easier**, increase social capital and facilitate the creation/growth of women's movements, and ability to exercise oppositional voice. Sharing ideas/information online can improve offline mobilisation.

Beyond ICT and digital tools

The following sections of this report should be caveated by the need for further research to fully understand the complex issues of women, gender, and ICTs. Much of the information that extolls the virtue of extending access to ICTs is anecdotal or country specific, making generalisations a common challenge (Melhem & Tandon, 2009). The research that exists relating to ICTs is also more prevalent from developed than developing countries.

In most, if not all, contexts there is a need to provide further support for educational approaches to change gender stereotypes and sexist cultural norms that underpin inequality and can lead to violence against women and girls (British Council, 2016: 3).

3. Digital tools, women's safety and access to support services

Cummings and O'Neil (2015: 5-6) identify three common themes that are of importance to understanding how women and girls use digital tools and thus concomitantly how to access information and services:

- Literature on women and girls' use of digital media focuses on how women in repressive societies can use online media to express themselves publically, access uncensored information and form virtual networks, including for campaign purposes. These studies' subjects are usually educated women who have ICT skills but whose autonomy and power is constrained by social norms that limit their freedom to form associations, participate in formal governance structures and access public information.
- Literature on women's access to services and enterprise in rural areas considers how poor, marginalised and/or geographically isolated women use digital ICTs to connect to information, knowledge and people outside their immediate locality. The benefits of ICT use is discussed in terms of increased self-esteem, greater respect from others and decision-making power within the household, new micro-business opportunities and easier access to public information and services.
- Literature on e-governance and data looks at how the government/public sector and civil society use digital ICTs to gather data on service users and provide public information through digital platforms so as to deliver public services more efficiently and effectively. The literature does note, however, that e-governance innovations are not necessarily designed with women's specific needs in mind, and who has access to data is critical to its impact on women's voice and influence. This literature is potentially important in terms of women's engagement with, and influence over, public services and decisions, but is largely separate from studies discussing the

other two themes and tends not to analyse e-governance in terms of its impact on women's influence in politics and governance.

Many women know the importance of information and the power that these technologies hold in terms of breaking out of systematic discrimination and gender violence in the household, workplace and village. Is this a standalone point or connected to the above? Maybe this goes at the top of this section?

Mobile phones, women's safety and access to support services

Mobile phone ownership is considered a gateway to a world of mobile services that can improve the lives of the unconnected (GSMA, 2015). However, ownership is only the first step in taking advantage of mobile services. Once women own phones, they need to use a range of features and services to reap the full benefits of phone ownership. Mobile phones give individuals access to multiple forms of communication, such as voice, text, mobile internet and entertainment, the ability to access information such as news and media, as well as life-enhancing, value-added services and mobile money (GSMA, 2015: 26). The ability to access such information is therefore dependent on the literacy of the individual using the technology,

GSMA (2015) highlight that technology can also be used to mitigate gender-based violence and improve women's safety in a number of ways:

- Electronic monitoring systems are allowing violence prone areas to be identified.
- SMS based alert systems can alert advocates to abuse.
- Information sharing sites, and SNS based support groups, are all potential avenues where technology can support survivors of violence.

Radio, women's safety and access to support services

The literature frequently highlights radio as an avenue for women's voice that may be more accessible than newer technologies. Asiedu (2012) comments that the majority of women in Sub-Saharan Africa live in rural areas, are poor and may have limited literacy, thus rendering many new technologies redundant in such contexts. Radio is likely to be easier for them to access and use because it can broadcast programmes that have been made locally and are in local languages. Radio is also relatively cheap and can be used while doing other activities and so may be a more effective tool for women to increase their power and knowledge.

In a similar vein, a study of women's organisations in Turkey noted that women's organisations generally do not use digital technology, in part because many Turkish women lack ICT access and skills (Torenli, 2006). Although some of the larger organisations have email lists and forums, even the most popular group, Women's Committee, only has 335 members. Torenli (2006) concludes 'an increase in links, connections and bandwidth does not equate with an increase in information, communication and activity. Whilst content on the web is useful, until poorer women are able to use ICTs, they are of limited use for mobilising a broad spectrum of women to campaign on women's issues or to provide access to support services'.

Digital tools and new forms of VAWG

A number of commentators highlight that digital tools and ICTs more broadly have multiple uses and effects, and can simultaneously be used by abusers to deepen their control, by survivors of violence to connect to help, or by women's rights defenders to inform, denounce and strategies to end violence. The impact of ICTs shapes our sense of spatial, temporal, and social relations with each other including relations across gender. ICTs have become a tool in the way gender based violence is played out. For example, there has been an explosion in the creation, capture, and sharing of multimedia and personal information through the Internet, while privacy and security technologies are still based on economic models to protect financial identities. Social Networking Services (SNS) have the potential for discrete public monitoring while mobile phones can be tools for harassment, threats, and stalking. According to Association for Progressive Communication (2010: 1):

- 95 percent of harassment, abusive language, and derogatory imagery in online spaces is aimed at women.
- Both men and women are affected by cyberstalking, but a survey in India found that victims aged 18-32 were predominantly female.
- Research in Argentina shows that a woman's mobile phone is one of the first items to be destroyed by a violent partner.

Regressive and patriarchal groups can use digital ICTs as a tool to subordinate women. Cases from Pakistan demonstrate how ICTs have been used to violate, harass, threaten, subjugate or dishonour women (Sarwari et al., 2013: 187). The increasingly widespread use of mobile phones and the internet has increased women's vulnerability to public character assassination, which is especially dangerous in societies where women who are dishonoured face extreme risks to their security, including honour killing (ibid.).

Women and girls may also face increased risk of control and violence when they use digital ICTs. By taking advantage of new technology, women and girls may be seen as transgressing gender norms, threatening men's position and power in the family or society (Cummings & O'Neil, 2015). Where ICTs give women access to means of private communication, they may lead to men's control and surveillance over women. A study by Intel (2013) found men to express several concerns about use of the internet by their wives or daughters, including concerns about loss of control, their safety online and in internet cafes, access to pornography, and that paying for women's internet use was not a good use of household resources. Survey data from six West African countries³ in 2006 also found men often 'feel threatened' by women's use of mobile phones or the internet as they perceive this to be 'inappropriate' for women and 'destabilising to relationships' (Hafkin & Huyer, 2007: 31).

Barriers to accessing digital tools

Between 2013 and 2016, the global internet user gender gap grew from 11% to 12%. The gender gap in access is the biggest in the least developed countries (LDCs), where it currently touches 31% (APC, 2017: 5). Market forces are not automatically closing this gap. In the 48 poorest countries, internet growth rates are slowing despite 85% of the population still being offline. These populations are "found in more remote, rural areas, and consist disproportionately of poorer, minority, less educated, and often female, members of society." (APC, 2017: 5) According to the Global Fund for Women, access to technology, control of it, and the ability to create and shape it, is a fundamental issue of women's human rights. Worldwide, it is estimated that 200 million more men than women have access to the Internet, and

³ Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Mali, Mauritania and Senegal

women are 21 percent less likely to own a mobile phone—a key resource in the global south where phones provide access to safety, organising networks, early warning systems, mobile health care, and money transfers⁴. Women face a number of barriers related to owning a mobile phone, purchasing credit, and using it for basic and value-added services. The GSMA Women 2010 report identified four broad categories of barriers: cost, lack of perceived value, technical literacy, and cultural issues. GSMA (2015) have expanded upon these with regards to mobile access in their report *Bridging the gender gap: Mobile access and usage in low and middle-income countries*. Whilst focused on mobile phone usage, these would also be broadly applicable to other forms of ICT.

Figure 1: Barriers influencing women’s access and usage of mobile phones

Barriers from the customer perspective				Systemic barriers	
Income and affordability	Incentives to own and use	User capability and design	Infrastructure	Lack of gender-disaggregated data	Lack of focus on women
Handset cost	Value	Technical literacy & confidence	Network quality & coverage		
SIM cost	Family Uncomfortable		Agent service		
Credit cost	Security & harassment		Agent access		
Battery charging cost	Operator/agent trust		ID		
			Battery charging access		

Source: GSMA (2015: 40).

Gender is not necessarily the most significant factor in determining a woman’s access to digital ICTs. Factors such as income, location, age, occupation and education level may be as, if not more, important. Torenli (2006: 437) comments there are two types of division that feed in to the digital divide, the social divide and the democratic divide: “The social divide concerns the gap between the information rich and the information poor in the nation, and the democratic divide emphasizes the difference between those who do or do not use Internet resources to engage and participate in public life”. Well-educated and elite women mostly use and benefit from ICTs – so increased ICTs usage is likely to promote their interests rather than the needs and voices of poor, marginalised and/or uneducated women, which may go unheard (Torenli, 2006).

Currently, in those countries with disproportionately lower income levels, women face greater constraints than men in a number of areas (Melhem & Tandon, 2009: 5-7):

- **Access and use** of ICTs. Research has demonstrated that there is no correlation between the saturation of ICTs in a country and women’s access to those ICTs. Social and cultural factors limit women’s access to shared ICT facilities such as cybercafés, or tele-centres which often become meeting places for young men, and hence deter women’s absorption and adoption of ICTs to access information and knowledge. Because women and girls often do not control the finances of the home or do not have sufficient personal income, they may lack the financial resources to purchase radios, televisions, or computers or to pay Internet service providers (ISPs) for monthly

⁴ <https://www.globalfundforwomen.org/our-approach/initiatives/technologyinitiative/#.WXhdHYTyvIW>

access to the Internet. Girls and boys may have differing access to computer skills training in primary and secondary schools. Anecdotal evidence suggests boys will often get priority access where computers are equally available. Finally, for the large numbers of women employed in the informal sector, there is no possibility for using office computers to access the Internet, a possibility that is more accessible for formal economy employees.

- **Usability and literacy.** Access to education continues to be a greater barrier for women than men; an estimated two thirds of the world's illiterate are women. Education in science and technology is considered a male domain in many cultures. Training in ICT skills is rarely gender sensitive or tailored to women's needs and is sometimes delivered by a male trainer who has embedded perceptions about women's capabilities inconsistent with a research-based understanding of women's competencies and contributions in these fields. Familiarity with basic computer use, including the ability of the user to establish an email account, communicate via email, navigate the Web, understand the basic etiquette of using the Web, download useful and sometimes life-saving information, use CD ROMs and other interactive materials, and the ability to use electronic forms of communication for distance education are basic learning and communication skills needed for workplace tasks by women as well as men.
- **Development and design.** Much of the content on the Internet has not been developed to address the needs of women and girls in developing and developed countries nor is it available in the languages they speak. Digital technology has also been used for harassment and sexual exploitation of women and girls in the form of pornography, trafficking and predatory e-mails. While gender sensitive men have done much to promote gender-equitable content design, fully addressing these issues can only be done when more women become software engineers, content producers and entrepreneurs. There is a growing commercial market, yet significantly underserved in the developing world, to be supplied by women entrepreneurs and employees who can both capture women's knowledge for the marketplace and develop knowledge and resources to serve women, their families and communities in ways in which the male dominated field has not yet considered.

4. Case Studies

The following case studies have been highlighted as having some success in improving the safety of women or enhancing access to support services. These include country specific examples, international campaigns and initiatives that have used popular media to convey messages regarding VAWG. It is important to note that much of this 'success' is anecdotal and requires further interrogation and triangulation with other research. That being said a number of features emerge as common across case studies. These include:

- **Integrated and cross platform approaches:** The use of digital tools works best when specialist support services are directly involved in the design, provision of information or facilitation of online discussion.
- **Engaging with specialist partners** both at the national level, but also at the local level by making campaign materials and information available free or at a minimum cost.
- **Connecting online and offline activities,** for example by using digital support services to connect women vulnerable to or experiencing violence with counsellors or support staff.

- When deploying ICT to engage with issues of VAWG, it is important to assess which medium is most appropriate to which target audience.

This is Abuse/Disrespect Nobody Campaigns: Home Office (UK)

The UK government has had strategies in place since 2009 to counter VAWG and to provide access to information and services. The UK strategy is led by the Home Office and brings together key players across government, ensuring co-ordination, funding and monitoring of an annual action plan. It also encompasses the long-running *This Is Abuse* and *Disrespect Nobody* campaigns to prevent teen abuse, which have linked into multiple media platforms but not as yet integrated into schools.

All campaign activity signposts the 'This is Abuse' website⁵ as a place for teenagers to get further information on what abusive behaviours are, and to help them understand the myths around abuse and rape. The 'need help' section on the website also signposts other organisations which provide help and support (Home Office, 2015: 6).

The project explicitly recognises the need to provide teenagers with specialist support and advice at the point of contact, which would be more beneficial than just signposting them onto another organisation. Following a tender, run by the Government Procurement Service in November 2013, the Home Office appointed Respect (men's advice line) and AVA (Against Violence and Abuse) to provide trained specialists to moderate the online discussion forums, which ensured teenagers were receiving expert advice at point of contact. Comments and detailed discussion on the site suggests that providing a credible, safe place to discuss abusive behaviour is key and since the campaign launched in 2010 the website has received over 2 million unique visitors. Over the years the website has built up credibility amongst our teenage audience and encouraged more teenagers to access discussion forums on the website to seek help about abusive relationships and ask if what they were experiencing was actually abuse (Home Office, 2015). The specialist support provided by Respect and AVA ensured teenagers received the right information and support at the initial point of contact.

Professionals who work directly with teenagers have an important role in extending the reach of the campaign as they are able to talk, in more detail, directly to teenagers about these issues. By providing them with support materials, which included posters, postcards and a DVD of the campaign adverts. The reach of the campaign was also extended by giving partners tools to start to facilitate these discussions. Since the campaign launched in 2010, professionals have ordered over 900,000 of these support materials which have been distributed free of charge. Campaign adverts were identified as a good prompt for teenagers to think about these issues and also start to identify with them, but the adverts cannot continue the conversation alone. Working with partners the initiative developed a discussion guide for professionals which sets out common misconceptions which teenagers hold when it comes to their attitudes towards abuse, controlling behaviour and consent within their relationships and provides guides and tips on how to use the campaign support materials in discussions with teenagers on these issues. In 2013, the PSHE Association quality assured the guide and said it was an excellent resource for professionals (Home Office, 2015: 7).

As well as using the support materials the campaign has also galvanised partners to use the outdoor and TV adverts to run their own localised campaigns. Making the adverts available to partners meant they could achieve better value for money from their local budgets as they didn't have to pay for the development of campaign creative and could concentrate their budgets on paying for advertising space.

⁵ www.thisisabuse.direct.gov.uk

3-2-1 Service: HNI and Airtel (Madagascar)

While the constitution of Madagascar protects women, there is a lack of awareness among Malagasy women of their rights. 3-2-1 is a free on-demand mobile information service provided by HNI and Airtel in Madagascar which provides gender based violence (GBV) information to listeners, such as what the law says is unacceptable behaviour, and where to seek help. Fieldwork has revealed the positive impact of the 3-2-1 service (GSMA, 2015). Men in focus groups reported learning about the different types of actions they did not previously realise constituted violence (e.g., emotional, verbal violence), and also reported behaviour change. The story of one female interviewee in particular illustrates how the service can have a powerful impact on social norms. When Georgette, a victim of domestic violence who was unaware of her rights or GBV resources, discovered the 3-2-1 gender empowerment content, she borrowed her sister-in-law's mobile handset (her husband had previously destroyed hers) and made her husband listen to it. She now feels there has been a change in his behaviour towards her. The violence has not resumed, and he now gives her more freedom to go out by herself—a change she attributes to the 3-2-1 service they have both listened to. Even her son has remembered the information: Georgette recounted a time when her son told his father, “If you beat Mom, we’ll go to Grandma’s, because the phone lady said we can go.” (GSMA, 2015: 61).

Hello Sakhi: Kutch Mahila Vikas Sangathan & Mahila Police Cell of Gujarat Police (India)

Kutch Mahila Vikas Sangathan (KMVS), a non-profit organisation founded in 1989 with the objective of empowering rural women of Kutch, launched a helpline “Hello Sakhi” in 2010 in partnership with the Mahila Police Cell of Gujarat Police for immediate response to cases of domestic violence (MSBC, 2016).

The help line functions round the clock and uses a toll free number attended by trained volunteers. A female sub-inspector is available at the helpline at all times. Two volunteers sit with two cell phones in the office of the female sub-inspector — one to receive calls and the other to make calls when required. In the field, Hello Sakhi has one woman legal counsellor in each block supported by several para-legal trained women in slums, villages and panchayats. Operators of the helpline are authorised by the District Superintendent of Police to intervene in domestic disputes (MSBC, 2016: 34).

The volunteers listen to the caller and record the details in the prescribed form/register and initiate appropriate action. They coordinate with the female sub-inspector for guidance and sharing. If necessary, counsellors are connected with the victims to figure out their accurate needs and take appropriate actions. In case legal aid is required, they utilise the e-Kanoon software and post their query to reach a panel of subject-specialised lawyers who revert back with legal provisions and steps. In case the victim needs direct legal aid, she is linked with a lawyer.

The helpline is now available across both urban and rural areas of the Kutch district. Extensive penetration of mobile phones has enabled access to the service by a significant number of women. Many who hesitated earlier to talk about violence issues now use the helpline. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the helpline has changed the mind-set that husbands have control over their wives and can beat them at their will. So far, the helpline has addressed more than 1500 cases and has benefited more than 3400 beneficiaries. The project is considered economical with a fixed cost for one-time training of Rs. 35,000 and other recurring cost of Rs. 65,000 for one district (MSBC, 2016: 35).

Fightback: Tech Mahindra (India)

FightBack, an initiative of Tech Mahindra, is a mobile based application that is specifically designed for women safety. The FightBack app allows the user to press on a panic button whenever she feels unsafe. It tracks her location using GPS and alerts chosen contacts, security agencies and nearby police stations. The app is available on Android and Blackberry platforms. Based on captured data, the mobile app also analyses alert data and highlights unsafe places, so that women can check unsafe locations. These accessory items are embedded with a GSM-based chip that can track the user's location and send SOS messages to selected contacts in case of an emergency. FightBack uses GPS, SMS, location maps, GPRS, email and individuals Facebook account to inform contacts in case of danger (MSBC, 2016: 118).

Tech Mahindra is currently bearing the cost of this initiative, which comes to roughly \$70 for each device. Fightback has links with a number of NGOs working for Women and Child welfare activities and the app is being offered to public through various platforms. The app has also been offered to various corporate employees for example Microsoft Hyderabad and Qualcomm Hyderabad (MSBC, 2016: 119).

Little Sisters project: Society for Nutrition Education and Health Action and UNDP and the Vodafone Foundation (India)

Mumbai based SNEHA (Society for Nutrition Education and Health Action) launched Little Sisters project to help women tackle the social issue of domestic violence through mobile phone technology. Funded by the UN development programme, the project trained 160 local women called Sangini to identify and report incidents of gender violence using Android smartphones. At the press of a button they can raise an alert and register a case with complete details of the perpetrator. The project uses smartphone for crowdsourcing notification, tracking and response coordination system for domestic violence. It uses smartphone survey form using the Open Data Kit to increase reporting and map domestic violence incidents. The system is linked with EyeWatch, an emergency alert system that is integrated with its response coordination system of field staff. This helps in live tracking, mapping raising emergency response and video-audio recording. The Sangini's next step is intervention which she does either by giving home counselling or by bringing the victim to the SNEHA counselling centre (MSBC, 2016: 184).

Presently, the project is active in Dhravi region of Mumbai, Maharashtra. So far, 255 survivors have benefitted and the project has addressed 5,000 cases of violence. SNEHA has received funding from the UN Development Program (UNDP) and Vodafone Foundation for Little Sisters project. Little sister is a crowd source platform that will identify, quantify, map violence and provide timely intervention to prevent ongoing and recurring violence (MSBC, 2016: 185).

Safe Nodia: Social and Development Research and Action Group (India)

Social and Development Research and Action Group (SDRAG), a Noida based non-profit organisation, has developed the Safe Noida mobile app that aims to fill the gap between information and civil society, particularly connecting organisations with vulnerable women and girls.

The App was designed to provide women the information on *whom?*, where and how to register complaint, and to provide young people with an interactive platform to share their experiences and concerns. It spreads awareness on laws, rights and provisions provided by government on violence against women. The app is equipped with necessary information for women in the district Gautam Budh Nagar in the state of Uttar Pradesh. In an emergency, women can immediately call the nearest police station by pressing the police station icon and pressing Near Me button that will show the contact details

of the nearest police station from user's current location. The mobile app also provides safety tips, do and don'ts when women are traveling alone in public and private vehicles, etc. To redress the issues of domestic violence, there is a section that provides information how to file an FIR (First Information Report), its importance and protocol (MSBC, 2016: 194).

Take back the Tech!: Association for Progressive Communication (International)

Take Back the Tech! was initiated in 2006 by the APC Women's Rights Programme and has grown into a diverse movement of individuals, organisations, collectives and communities. It is the result of research papers published in 2005 that looked at the connection between ICT and VAWG⁶. After sharing the findings with women's rights and communication rights advocates in different spaces, APC found this to be a critical issue that compelled further attention and deeper engagement. The project sets out to:

- Create safe digital spaces that protect everyone's right to participate freely, without harassment or threat to safety.
- Realise women's rights to shape, define, participate, use and share knowledge, information and ICT.
- Address the intersection between communication rights and women's human rights, especially VAW.
- Recognise women's historical and critical participation and contribution to the development of ICT.

The campaign has been taken up, adapted and owned by individuals, groups, networks and organisations in places such as Bangladesh, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brazil, Cambodia, Canada, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Germany, India, Kenya, Macedonia, Mexico, Malaysia, Pakistan, the Philippines, Rwanda, South Africa, Uganda, the UK, Uruguay and the USA. One initiative to share information and survivor stories saw the compilation of YouTube videos⁷.

Addressing VAWG through popular culture

In 2014 the daily BBC Radio 4 show *The Archers* began a domestic violence and rape storyline. The show, with 4.7 million weekly listeners, was advised on the plot by domestic violence experts from Women's Aid and Refuge (British Council, 2016: 36). The story has been praised for its realism, with the daily format allowing for the slow development of controlling, coercive behaviour and isolation of Helen from work, friends and family, in a seemingly 'nice' community. Coinciding with a new law to criminalise coercive control, the show has been credited with raising awareness. Related content appeared across BBC platforms from *Woman's Hour* to *Countryfile*. The National Domestic Violence Helpline cited a 20 per cent increase in calls linked to the storyline in February 2016.

Popular television programming in the UK has a record of portraying violence against women and girls and seeking expert advice on these storylines: Channel 4 soap *Hollyoaks*, which appeals to a younger demographic, partnered with the Home Office *This Is Abuse* campaign in 2013, and there was a 2015 rape storyline in *EastEnders*. While highlighted as a success story, this remains a developing area for

⁶ <https://www.takebackthetech.net/>

⁷ <https://www.takebackthetech.net/survivor-stories>

programme makers and it is clear that the complex nature of these issues requires specialist advice to avoid unintended damage from inaccurate or prejudicial representations (British Council, 2016).

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About this report

This report is based on four days of desk-based research. It was prepared for the Australian Government, © Australian Government 2015. The views expressed in this report are those of the author, and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of GSDRC, its partner agencies or the Australian Government.

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