3. Evaluation and Methodology

The research was qualitative and exploratory in nature, involving interviews with domestic and sexual violence practitioners, app developers and domestic violence support organisations. The research aimed to understand and reflect upon the potential and impact of apps in the area of domestic and sexual violence.

4. Findings

4.1. Key Findings

- A range of apps have been developed with varying levels of sophistication and purpose.
- Many apps are aimed at children, young people and domestic violence victims.
- Some apps are designed to be used by perpetrators to monitor and control their partners.
- There is a need for greater awareness and understanding of the potential risks and benefits of apps.
- Practitioners have concerns about the use of apps and their impact on privacy and safety.

4.2. Further Research

- There is a need for more research on the effectiveness and impact of apps.
- There is a need for more research on the ethical and legal implications of apps.
- There is a need for more research on the development and evaluation of apps.

5. Conclusions

The research has identified a range of apps that are being used in the area of domestic and sexual violence. The research has also identified a range of issues and concerns that need to be addressed.

6. References

[References list]

7. Findings

7.1. Findings of the Survey

- A range of apps have been developed with varying levels of sophistication and purpose.
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- Some apps are designed to be used by perpetrators to monitor and control their partners.
- There is a need for greater awareness and understanding of the potential risks and benefits of apps.
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7.2. Findings of the Fieldwork

- A range of apps have been developed with varying levels of sophistication and purpose.
- Many apps are aimed at children, young people and domestic violence victims.
- Some apps are designed to be used by perpetrators to monitor and control their partners.
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8. Conclusion

The research has identified a range of apps that are being used in the area of domestic and sexual violence. The research has also identified a range of issues and concerns that need to be addressed.

9. Contact

[Contact details]

10. Appendix

[Appendix]

11. Appendices

[Appendices]
A systematic search for smartphone applications

Ten interviews were conducted with smartphone
hand, the Digital Age may assist domestic violence victim-experience violence (Mason & Magnet, 2012). On the one
impact of this violence, includes: death and injury; survivors in their quest for safety (Dunlap, 2012). However,
phones - often with limited functionality but benefiting
computers - are a form of evidence gathering function, for example being
available or awareness raising information about domestic
violence an important and growing research area.

The aim of this study was to explore the use of mobile
smartphone applications ('apps') in relation to
domestic and sexual violence. The data collection consisted of three stages:
• A systematic search for smartphone applications through website searches and mobile phone app-stores. These included, Google, Apple app store, Google Play for Android and BlackBerry World.
• Ten interviews were conducted with smartphone app developers involved in the development of relevant apps. The interviews centred on the developers' motivation and concerns, their smartphone apps, to protect potential victims of domestic and sexual violence, with account for the context for the features, capabilities and potential limitations. Interviews were held with companies in Australia, India, United Kingdom and USA.
• Seventeen interviews with practitioners dealing with
domestic and sexual violence (including police, women's support organisations, victim support organisations, perpetrator organisations, and women's campaign and coordination groups) from England, Scotland, Canada, New Zealand and Ireland. Each interview lasted around forty
minutes and covered interviewees awareness and
relating to their use by domestic violence victims still
Practitioners saw some value of information and
messages is your lifeline!'.

A second of the apps contained some form of information, for example facts about domestic violence or information about how to contact the support service.

For further details, see: Safety Work, by which they mean they were exposed to levels of times, in the United Kingdom.

Some apps were basic 'panic buttons' which
identical for electronic panic buttons - emitted a
similar 'phone me' message is available, and national support organisations are also pro programmed. As we noted some apps' status icon is also available that informs circle friends that they are looking up information about healthy relationships and respect but that immediate action is not needed. Just
Practitioners were largely critical of panic alarm/anger alert apps, saying they didn’t work as expected - that a quick text to the same effect could also be sent. Practitioners who were also concerned that apps may reinforce 'victim blaming' attitudes that encourage or worsen perpetrator actions.

I don’t believe apps are the way we should be dealing with sexual violence or domestic violence; using apps to minimise behaviour may perpetuate the myth that it’s the women’s responsibility to stay safe.

In their circulars, Rape Crisis Ireland offers a range of apps. Figure 5 summarises the overlaps with hard copies of information:

FINDING 1 Your circle of 6 friends, family or locals who you feel you can trust, can be your lifeline in an emergency. Call them and let them know you need support. Figure 4. Rape Crisis Ireland

FINDING 2 Pracitioners see some value of information and evidence gathering function, but not necessarily relating to their use by domestic violence victims with the perpetrators.

4. Findings

When cotted by ease functions, it was found that nearly
half of the apps (51%) provided some form of panic alarm/
danger alert system.

This was the largest category. The second largest category was information (7%) about support services available or awareness raising information about domestic and sexual violence. One in ten apps offered some
functionality, including social media, enabling them
to record and store evidence in ‘real time’. An app markets itself as ‘… the smart way to report crime
$user’s current location coordinates. It also offers an
danger alert function that can be customised. In its
t description it describes itself as an ‘Early Warning
system’ in that it makes good predictions such as: ‘the cue that can make a difference!’. Get
Speak to your health care professional to find out, if accurately
information means survival’, and even Red Panic Button
is your lifeline!’. Many of the practitioners interviewed had not heard of any apps specifically designed for domestic and sexual violence. Out of those that had heard of an app, this was most likely to be the Circle of Six apps. In Figure 3 a
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alert system. Three of the apps were basic ‘panic buttons’ —

49% provided some form of ‘panic alarm/danger
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49% provided some form of ‘panic alarm/danger
alert’, requiring a person or organisation to receive a SMS message, for example facts about domestic violence or information about how to contact the support service.
2. Background

An ‘app’ is a small, specialised software program, downloadable and installable onto mobile devices such as smartphones or tablet computers. Apps are frequently designed to solve some specific problem from the point of view of the end user. Some apps may be developed for personal computers—often with limited functionality but benefiting from wide access and wider use. The rise of apps has been propelled by Apple’s ‘App Store’ and also by Google’s ‘Play Store’.

Violence against women is a global public health problem, with 35% of women worldwide experiencing violence, and sexual violence being a common form of such violence. Women are more likely to experience intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence (World Health Organisation, 2013). The impact of this violence includes, death and injury, depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, sexual assault, unplanned pregnancies, and low birthweight. Infection; unwanted pregnancy and abortion; and low birthweight are all consequences of intimate partner violence.

The smartphone has become a ubiquitous everyday device, offering access to powerful computational software that is often multiplatform and cross-platform. ‘Apps’ are an example of this trend. The smartphone has made it possible for anyone to develop an app, and the world of apps is expanding rapidly. The number of app developers has grown rapidly, and so has the number of apps available. As of 2011, there were an estimated 700 million smartphone users worldwide, and this figure is expected to reach 700 million by 2015 (Portio Research, 2011). Furthermore, 40% of UK adults and 39% use their mobile handset to access the internet (Ofcom, 2012). Based on the trends in computer use, it is likely that the use of mobile phones will continue to grow.

3. The study

The aim of this study was to use the exposure of smartphone applications (‘apps’) in relation to domestic and sexual violence. The data collection consisted of three stages:

- A systematic search for smartphone applications through websites, smartphone app stores, and mobile phone app lists. These included, Google, Apple app store, Google Play for Android and BlackBerry World.
- Ten interviews were conducted with smartphone app developers involved in the development of relevant apps. The interviews centred on how apps can help solve the issue of domestic and sexual violence, and how they can be used to promote prevention and intervention.
- Fifteen interviews were conducted with practitioners dealing with domestic and sexual violence in various capacities. These included solicitors, the police, and local community organisations.

4. Findings

When coded to be exactly this, it was found that nearly half of all apps (45%) provided some form of panic or personal safety alert system.

This was the largest category. The second largest category was information (another information support service) available or awareness raising services to enhance awareness of domestic or sexual violence. One in ten apps offered some type of evidence collection function. The research was conducted in 2013, but the data collected indicates that in 2010, 10% of apps offered evidence collection (or a method to collect evidence) at all (Ofcom, 2010). Furthermore, 40% of UK adults admitted to having experienced sexual violence (2% to 12%) in just 12 months (Ofcom, 2011). Based on the evidence collected, it is clear that the smartphone has made it possible to develop an app that can provide support and resources to victims of domestic and sexual violence.

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Practitioners were largely critical of panic alarm/danger alert apps, saying they did not think apps were as effective as other forms of intervention—such as the one called ‘Safe Call’ that a quick text to the same effect could be sent or information quickly shared. They also concerned that apps may reinforce ‘victim blaming’ attitudes that could alienate perpetrators.

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A third of the apps contained some form of information, for example facts about domestic violence or information about how to contact the manchester support service. For example, an app for Rape Crisis Ireland offers information about what to do if you or a friend has been raped, and also provides a map of Rape Crisis Centres (see Figure 4). A particularly innovative app still in development is to allow survivors to easily find information about whether firms to have ‘targeting’ content that might create anxiety, fearfulness, or panic attacks.

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2. Background

An ‘app’ is a small, specialised software programme, downloadable and installable onto mobile devices such as smartphones or tablet computers. Apps are frequently designed to serve users with similar interests. The smartphone has become a ubiquitous everyday device, with many people utilising and relying on the advanced mobile and software capabilities, to the extent that ‘always on’ smartphones are now in the public domain. Meanwhile, the Digital Age may assist domestic violence victim-experience violence (Mason & Magnet, 2012). On the one hand, apps are designed for smartphones and tablet computers - often with limited functionality but benefiting from the context for the features, capabilities and potential limitations. Interviews were held with companies in Australia, India, United Kingdom and USA.

• Seventeen interviews with practitioners dealing with domestic and sexual violence (including police, women’s support organisations, victim support organisations, perpetrator organisations, and women’s campaign and coordination groups) from England, Scotland, Canada, New Zealand and Ireland. Each interview lasted around forty minutes and covered interviewees awareness and ideas in relation to domestic and sexual violence, victim survivors, perpetrators and campaigning.

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In the UK, 30–40% of adults use a smartphone and/or a mobile device with internet access to watch television (Ofcom, 2012). Based on data from the Advanced Mobile and Software Capabilities and services to those that they may access on their home computers - often with limited functionality but benefiting from the context for the features, capabilities and potential limitations. Interviews were held with companies in Australia, India, United Kingdom and USA.

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4. Findings

When coded by main function/s, it was found that nearly half of the apps (50%) provide some form of ‘panic stored danger alert’ system. This was the largest category. The second largest category was information (either information about support services available or awareness raising information about domestic and/or sexual violence). One in ten apps offered some form of evidence gathering (such as ‘the one call that can make a difference!’) which was a way of conveying the app’s data to law enforcement. Just that quick text to the same effect could easily be sent or information quickly searched for online. Many of the practitioners we interviewed had not heard of any apps specifically designed for domestic and sexual violence. Out of those that had heard of an app, this was most likely to be Circle of Six – shown in Figure 3.

Finding 1
The most common app function was a panic button (either a physical panic button, or a panic button on the screen of the mobile device). This was the largest category. The second largest category was information (either information about support services available or awareness raising information about domestic and/or sexual violence). One in ten apps offered some form of evidence gathering (such as ‘the one call that can make a difference!’) which was a way of conveying the app’s data to law enforcement. Just that quick text to the same effect could easily be sent or information quickly searched for online. Many of the practitioners we interviewed had not heard of any apps specifically designed for domestic and sexual violence. Out of those that had heard of an app, this was most likely to be Circle of Six – shown in Figure 3.

Finding 2
Practitioners use some value of information and evidence gathering, but also concern relating to one app – domestic violence apps with victim perpetrators.

Finding 3
A third of the apps contained some form of information, for example facts about domestic violence or information about how to contact the main support service.

Finding 4
Don’t believe apps are the way we should be dealing with sexual violence or domestic violence; using apps to minimise behaviour may perpetuate the myth that it’s the women’s responsibility to stay safe.

Finding 5
Innovation in apps offers a way of gathering/storing evidence, for example the ability to record an incident and to store on one’s mobile device to then pass on to a person or organisation. For example, the Self Evident app marked the first (…) the way to report crime, to allow the victim to provide evidence and witnesses to record and store evidence in ‘real time’.

One in ten apps offered a way of gathering/storing evidence, for example the ability to record an incident and to store on one’s mobile device to then pass on to a person or organisation. For example, the Self Evident app marked the first of (…) the way to report crime, to allow the victim to provide evidence and witnesses to record and store evidence in ‘real time’.

While some practitioners could see benefits of apps such as this, they expressed concern about the safety of women using them; when they were still in a relationship with the perpetrator. Practitioners often said that ‘… a way of non-confronting communication. As an app designer who works with dancers and to (…) it is a thing for poets’. Another interviewee highlighted the issue with easily sharing content.

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Protecting Women’s Safety? The use of smartphone “apps” in relation to domestic and sexual violence

1. Key Points

- The intersection between technology and domestic and sexual violence is an important and growing area of research.
- This research consists of semi-structured app search and interviews with app developers and practitioners to identify ethical concerns and how apps can be used in a detrimental way.
- A recent report has found that some apps can encourage or direct users to take actions that could be harmful.

2. References

- Kelly, L. (2013). Threading the line: what we know about and changing attitudes to the use of the Domestic Abuse Review into Violence and Abuse, Durham University, 10th May 2013.

3. Contact

Professor Nicole Westmarland, Mariann Hardey, Hannah Bows, Dawn Branley, Melissa Chowdhury, Katie Wheatley and Richard Wistow.

4. Findings

- The most common app function was a panic alarm/ danger alert, requiring women to take actions to ‘keep safe’.
- Examples were given by practitioners of ways that perpetrators used their power and control over generic apps e.g. the Facebook app, and apps that were instead used to monitor their partners activities while the perpetrator was absent. These more general apps and social media apps will be considered in more detail in a wider programme of research on violence and technology.

5. Conclusions

This was a short study with a relatively small number of participants. It is interesting that the apps used a ‘panic button’ or other ‘safety’ feature rather than a ‘viewing feature’. Many of these apps are very young and still developing, therefore the study should be seen as a ‘starting point’ rather than a ‘conclusive review’. Many of these apps are highly complex, and the way in which they are designed and used is likely to be quite different from the way in which they are used by domestic violence victims still living with their perpetrators. Practitioners saw some value of information and evidence gathering functions but had safety concerns relating to the commodification of women’s safety.

The intersection between technology and domestic and sexual violence is an important and growing area of research.

References


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Some of the apps were disguised as other, more generic, non-violence and abuse-related apps and others allowed the app to be hidden in different ways. However, a perpetrator could still find them. A majority of app developers were aware of the consequences of this. For example, the interviewee from Self Evident explained that they did not provide a ‘false sense’ as they did not want to provide a ‘false sense’ of security. Self Evident in particular were critical of apps that made grand claims around safety and felt app developers should be cautious about making any features that could unrealistically raise expectations in regards to safety. Therefore, apps may be more appropriately focused at those whose domestic violence relationships have ended and who are still being developed. For example, we know of no criminal cases yet that has relied on evidence gathered through an app. Similarly, the practitioners had not worked with apps that gathered information that were related to the surveillance of women. The app we had most concerns about was one called ‘Track your wife’ (see Figure 5). This app is a discreet application, which means that it covertly runs in the background of the mobile device that it is installed on. The app frequently sends geolocated real-time data from Google Maps to a linked website to enable account holders to know the location of the phone, and by implication, their wife. As of July 2013 this app had over 10,000 installs.

Finding 3
Advocate for mobile technology are opening up new layers of abuse.

6. References


Scottish Women’s Aid

Proof of Concept

Durham Centre for Research into Violence and Abuse (CRiVA).

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6. Conclusions

This was a short study with a relatively small number of participants. This limitation is accommodated in the use of a ‘proof of concept’ than a conclusive review. Many of these apps are very young and therefore data are still being gathered through usage. Finally the practitioners had not worked with apps that gathered information for domestic violence apps. It is recommended that some form of evaluation be built into these apps through the number of downloads. It is also recommended that app developers give more consideration to the issues they are developing in their marketing and to give greater consideration to the ways their apps could be used in harmful ways. Finally practitioners were asking for more guidance to assist in the development of this area, and it is recommended that future apps include domestic and sexual violence practitioners as advisors at the development stage.

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There are a range of apps being used by domestic violence practitioners in particular to assist their own safety and control. Most of these are general ones, but we found a small number that were specifically designed to support the safety of women. The app we had most concerns about was one called ‘Track your wife’ (see Figure 5). This app is a discreet application, which means that it covertly runs in the background of the mobile device that it is installed on. The app frequently sends geolocated real-time data from Google Maps to a linked website to enable account holders to know the location of the phone, and by implication, their wife. As of July 2013 this app had over 10,000 installs.

6. References


Scottish Women’s Aid

Proof of Concept

Durham Centre for Research into Violence and Abuse (CRiVA).

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