

Trigger WARNING: Talk discusses triggering topics such as
Domestic Violence, Sexual Abuse, Stalking

“I really leaned on my community for support”: Barriers, Challenges, and Coping Mechanisms Used by Survivors of Technology–Facilitated Abuse to Seek Social Support

Naman Gupta, Kate Walsh, Sanchari Das, Rahul Chatterjee



Intimate Partner Violence is Gendered

In U.S.A, [CDC '22]

	Overall	Sexual Violence	Stalking
Women	47%	20%	14%
Men	44%	8%	5%

CDC. 2022 National Intimate Partner Violence Survey.

Technology-Facilitated Abuse (TFA)

~70%
survivors experience IPV
through technology [Messing '20]

Exacerbates safety risks, emotional
and psychological distress, physical and
sexual violence... and even loss of life.

Traditional security safeguards fail to protect
survivors



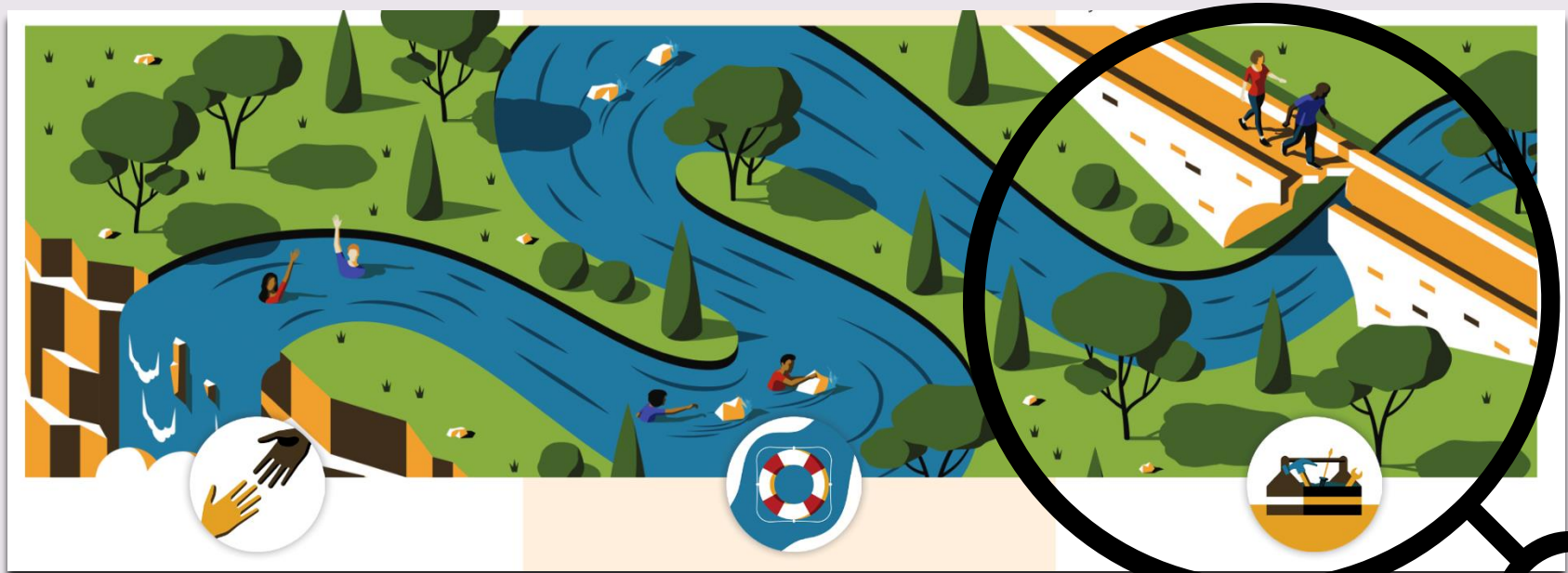
Mitigating TFA needs a
violence-prevention lens

The Upstream story [McKinlay '75]



McKinlay JB. 1975. A case for refocusing upstream: the political economy of illness.

The Upstream story [McKinlay '75]



McKinlay JB. 1975. A case for refocusing upstream: the political economy of illness.



Research Gap

Survivor and Advocate experiences

Freed '17, Matthews '17, Leitao '18, Woodlock '18

Formal Service Provisioning

Chen '19, Slupska '22, Bellini '19

Customer Support

Zou '21

Tech Clinic for IPV Survivors

Havron '19, Freed '19, Tseng '21, '22, Cuomo '23

Our research

Seeking support from the community

Survivors use informal support [Gupta'24]

only 45%

Seek support

93%

Seek informal support

friends, family,
roommates, intimate partner

7%

Seek formal support

university health services, cybercrime police,
geek squad, domestic violence shelter

Gupta, Das, Walsh, Chatterjee. 2024. A Critical Analysis of the Prevalence of Technology-Facilitated Abuse in US College Students.

Research Questions

1. What are the needs of TFA survivors when seeking support?

2. How effective is the support in addressing their needs?

3. What are the socio-technical barriers and challenges survivors face?

4. How do survivors overcome these barriers and challenges?

Qualitative Methodology



Recruit

Social Media
US Violence Shelters
Local spots



Interview

9 Survivors
Abuse experience
Seeking support
Effectiveness



Ethics & Safety

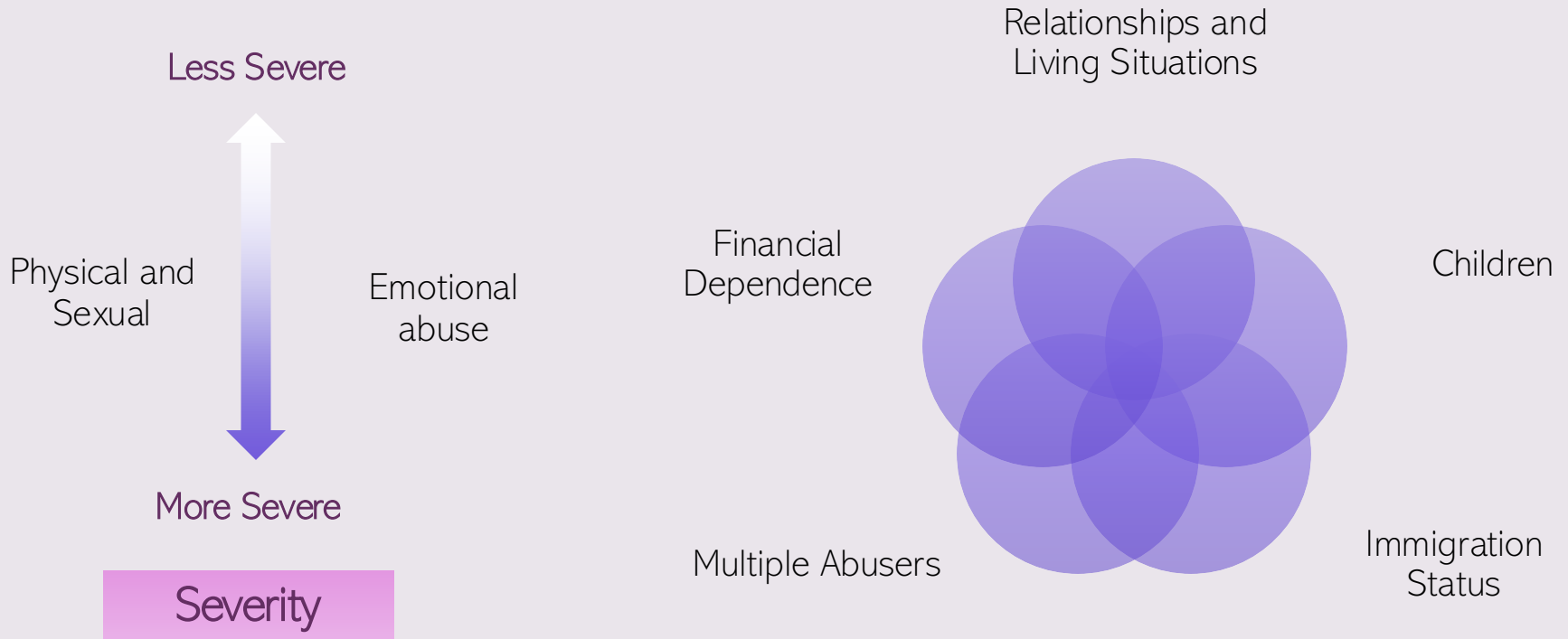
Positionality
IRB
Informed Consent
Trauma-informed lens



Analysis

Collaborative coding
Themes
Codebook

Lived Experience of Abuse is Intersectional



Who did survivors seek support from?

Informal network

- Friends
- Family and community
- Support groups
- Coworkers
- Housemates

Formal network

- Therapists, Counselors or psychologists
- DV organizations
- Customer support
- Title IX and Resident Advisor
- Criminal Justice system

What do the survivors need?

Emotional support & validation > tech concerns

“I really just leaned on my community for support; I needed a lot of **emotional support** because the thing that hurt the most was the betrayal. **The [technical] tips from the friends were not important...** I knew what I needed to do for the technical help.. I knew there’s plenty of resources online; just Google them.”

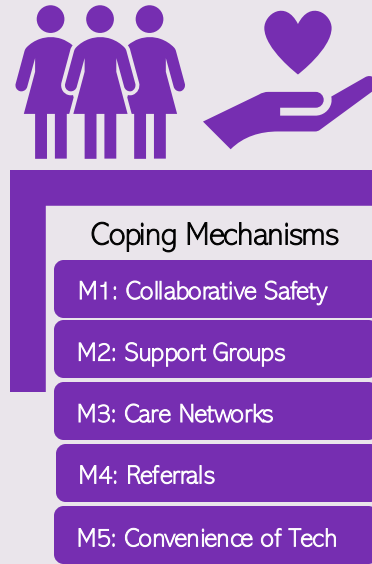
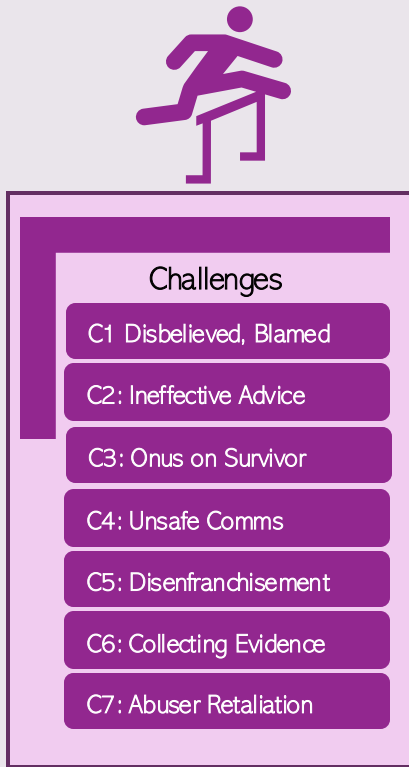
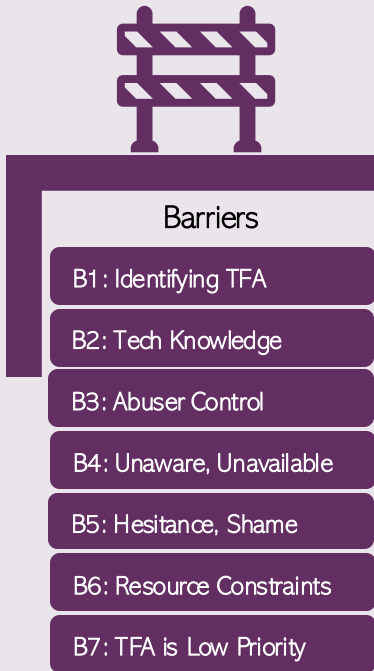
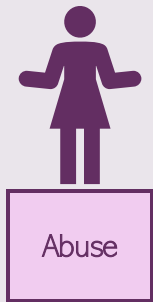
What do the survivors need?

Informal Networks

- Trust and closeness
- Accessible and available
- No power differential

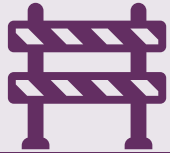
Formal Networks

- Confidentiality
- Legal help (e.g. restraining orders)
- Desperate call for severe abuse



Safety

B3: Abuser controls access



Barriers

B1: Identifying TFA

B2: Tech Knowledge

B3: Abuser Control

B4: Unaware, Unavailable

B5: Hesitance, Shame

B6: Resource Constraints

B7: TFA is Low Priority

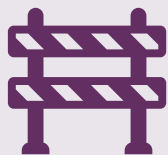
Technology

- Took phone number
- Deleted photos and blocked contacts
- Broke devices

Social Network

- Maligned survivor's image
- Survivor lost family and friendships

B5: Hesitance and apprehension



Barriers

B1: Identifying TFA

B2: Tech Knowledge

B3: Abuser Control

B4: Unaware, Unavailable

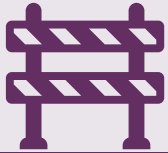
B5: Hesitance, Shame

B6: Resource Constraints

B7: TFA is Low Priority

- Shame and stigma
- Avoid re-traumatization
- Fear of retaliation and escalation
- Worried for the abuser

B7: TFA is low priority



Barriers

B1: Identifying TFA

B2: Tech Knowledge

B3: Abuser Control

B4: Unaware, Unavailable

B5: Hesitance, Shame

B6: Resource Constraints

B7: TFA is Low Priority

- *“Invisibility”* makes it difficult to discover signs of abuse (B1)
[Freed '17, Chatterjee '18]
- No visible body “marks”
- TFA **lower priority** than physical/sexual assault

Freed, Palmer, Minchala, Levy, Ristenpart, Dell. 2017. Digital Technologies and Intimate Partner Violence: A Qualitative Analysis with Multiple Stakeholders.
Chatterjee, Doerfler Orgad, Havron, Palmer, Freed, Levy, Dell, McCoy, Ristenpart. 2018. The Spyware Used in Intimate Partner Violence.

Social Support Needs and Challenges



Safety



Abuse

Challenges

C1 Disbelieved, Blamed

C2: Ineffective Advice

C3: Onus on Survivor

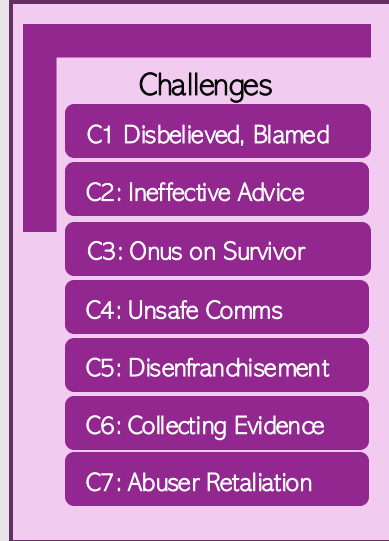
C4: Unsafe Comms

C5: Disenfranchisement

C6: Collecting Evidence

C7: Abuser Retaliation

C2: Ineffective advice & Inadequate resources



- Generic advice
- Inadequate or did not work
- Backfired, abuser retaliated and escalated (C7)

“Most [advised me to] completely block and deal with the repercussions. Some were understanding that I was scared, more scared when he was blocked than any other time...Most people don’t really understand that the neurotransmitters are completely altered by this abuse cycle. So, when we go full cold turkey block, there is so much **fear and anxiety** that it’s debilitating; it’s really hard to go on with your normal life.”

C5: Disenfranchisement



Challenges

C1 Disbelieved, Blamed

C2: Ineffective Advice

C3: Onus on Survivor

C4: Unsafe Comms

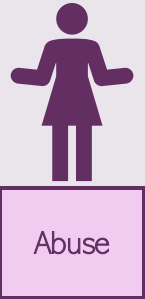
C5: Disenfranchisement

C6: Collecting Evidence

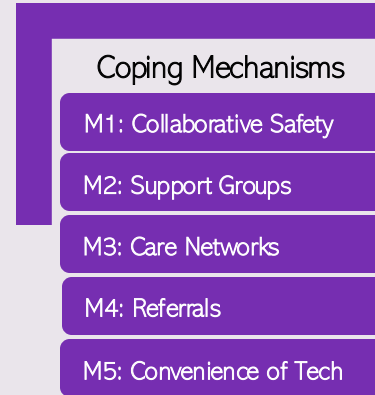
C7: Abuser Retaliation

- **Individuality:** Onus on Survivors [C3]
- Disbelieved and Blamed [C2]
- Unsafe communication
- Deprivation and Disenfranchisement [Woodlock'23]
 - ill-informed and misogynistic
 - rejection and betrayal
 - lost trust in the system

Coping Mechanisms



Safety



M1: Collaborative Safety Planning



Coping Mechanisms

M1: Collaborative Safety

M2: Support Groups

M3: Care Networks

M4: Referrals

M5: Convenience of Tech

- Providers learn about tech alongside survivor
- Debug tech issues and privacy settings

Physical safety and comfort

- Confronted (blocked) the abuser to stop
- Threatened to call law enforcement

M3: Informal Networks of Care



Coping Mechanisms

M1: Collaborative Safety

M2: Support Groups

M3: Care Networks

M4: Referrals

M5: Convenience of Tech

- Joined support groups (M2)
- Supported other survivors from their experience
- Community-oriented support networks

“I now have an opportunity to share my story and create positive change, even support research efforts... I want people to know because it makes it easier for me to seek help when I need it. I ended up becoming kind of a magnet [to] **attract other survivors**. People are .. not sure, and they don't want to ask for help because it's so **embarrassing [and] stigmatizing**. **They talk to me because they know that I won't judge them**”

Co-constructed Recommendations

Tertiary (1)

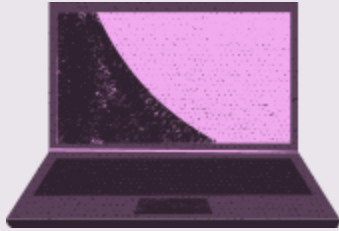
Secondary (2)

Primary (3)



Recommendations

Tertiary (1)
Secondary (2)
Primary (3)



Technology Design

Nudges for support (1,2)

Safer communication (1,2)



Community Engagement

Training & Advocacy (2,3)

Tech-support in DV

hotlines (1,2,3)



Policymakers

Policy for TFA (3)

Empathetic Informational

support (2,3)

Barriers, Challenges, and Coping Mechanisms Used by Survivors of Technology-Facilitated Abuse to Seek Social Support

1. Survivors face barriers, challenges in seeking support
 - Abuser control
 - Tech Abuse is low priority
2. Overcome with Coping Mechanisms
 - Collaborative Safety Planning
 - Informal Networks of Care
3. Community-oriented violence prevention

Questions?

