

Beyond Technology-Facilitated Abuse: Domestic and Family Violence and Temporary Migration

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the importance of moving beyond a narrow examination of technology-facilitated abuse (TFA) and domestic and family violence (DFV). Drawing on findings from two studies that capture the experiences of over 300 temporary visa holders in Australia, we detail how technology is one tool used within the context of patterns of control and isolation. We detail the experiences of TFA in our sample and then examine the importance of locating TFA within the broader context of structural inequality. We argue that the position of temporary non-citizens must be the foreground to identify the structural conditions that are sustained by the state and leveraged by perpetrators, rather than the specifics of the tools that are used to enact DFV.

KEY WORDS: Temporary migrant women, domestic and family violence, technology-facilitated abuse, temporariness, migration status

INTRODUCTION

Technology-facilitated abuse (TFA) has been firmly established as a key focus area in the broader work on violence against women. TFA is a term that is used to describe the ways that violence and abuse are increasingly carried out in online spaces and facilitated by the proliferation in digital technologies (Rogers *et al.* 2022). Attention to the incidence of TFA in the context of intimate partner relationships and domestic and family violence (DFV) has resulted in the increased recognition of these practices among researchers and policymakers with a focus on technology as both a growing platform for exerting control, violence and abuse and as a mode of resistance or protection (Maher *et al.* 2017; Harris and Woodlock 2019; Yardley 2021; Rogers

et al. 2022). Findings from a recent national survey indicate that one in two Australian adults will experience TFA in their lifetime and that these experiences are most likely to occur within the context of a current or former intimate partner relationship (Powell *et al.* 2022). We seek to build on growing recognition that such data and much of the broader literature describing TFA is limited in two key ways. First, the role of technology in DFV is often disconnected and/or siloed from other forms and patterns of violence and abuse (Harris and Woodlock 2019; Harris 2020). Second, explorations of TFA are often focused on the interpersonal to the exclusion of examining TFA as a tool weaponized within the context of structural inequality (Bailey and Burkell 2021; Yardley 2021). Drawing on findings from two studies that capture the experiences of over 300 migrant women on temporary visas who experienced DFV in Victoria, Australia, we illuminate the TFA experiences of temporary visa holders. We posit that any examination of TFA or DFV more broadly must recognize the ways that women's experiences are connected to structural inequality that is facilitated and sustained by the state, and that action to address violence must start with state responsibility.

As non-citizens, women on temporary visas who experience DFV have no long-term rights to continue living in Australia based on their victimization, with the exception of partner visa holders who can pursue the Family Violence Provision (see Segrave 2017; Vasil 2023).¹ Temporary non-citizens who experience DFV have restricted or no access to legal, social and economic support; this includes the right to work and to access government entitlements (e.g. healthcare, education as well as settlement, legal, housing and financial support) and leaves women with little to no safety net. Qualitative research exploring the specificity of TFA for migrant and refugee women, including temporary migrants, is only now emerging (Zamora *et al.* 2022). We seek in this paper to advance this field of inquiry, bringing comprehensive data from two separate projects together. We focus on the specificity of temporary visa holders' experiences of DFV that may, at first glance, be best described as TFA, but take the analysis further to examine social isolation and how the patterns of temporary visa holders' experiences within the context of their relationship to the state, that is as non-citizens, both contributes to and sustains the conditions of DFV. We argue that this results in a qualitatively different experience of TFA, because the implications of threats and actions via technology are contextualized within cross-border relationships and familial settings, and the status of victims as non-citizens for whom support options are specifically and deliberately limited. We draw on Bumiller's (2008) argument that in relation to sexual violence specifically, an amalgamation of forces is responsible for producing a dominant understanding of the social problem of violence. Bumiller (2008: 12–13) explains that the state's interest 'in controlling violence is powerfully driven by social control priorities' which 'mandates intervention for the purposes of containing crisis and managing harm, not to address women's systematic oppression'. Here we focus on temporary visa holders who, we argue, following the work of others, are structurally disempowered as non-citizens by the 'gendered harms produced by migration systems and regulation' which 'empowers perpetrators' and '[denies] women access to safety' (Segrave 2021: 27; see also Anitha 2011; Anitha *et al.* 2018; Jayasuriya-Illesinghe 2018; Voolma 2018; Bhuyan and Bragg 2019). We also draw on the recognition that we need to address the context within which TFA is occurring rather than focus on the technological component alone or separate the analysis and implications. Indeed, Bailey and Burkell (2021: 532) argue that: 'Responses to the structural reality of gender-based TFV [technology-facilitated violence] must move beyond mere critique and reactive individualistic responses toward responses aimed at disrupting ... underlying and intersecting systems of oppression.'

1 The Provisions provide an alternate pathway to permanent residency for migrants on specific visas who would have obtained a permanent visa had their relationship not broken down due to DFV.

In what follows, we provide an overview of scholarly research that examines TFA for migrant and refugee women. We then outline the methodological approach of the two studies that are examined in the findings of this paper and the thematic approach to data analysis. The implications of the findings and analysis that follows, we argue, is that responding to specific forms of DFV has significant limitations: providing technology where women have been denied access to it (or where it has been compromised), for example, does not address the vulnerability that is sustained via the inequitable access to support more broadly for non-citizens, who can be at risk of deportation if they come forward to authorities. This analysis and our argument lay the ground for focusing more broadly on structural inequality sustained through state systems including the migration system.

TFA, ISOLATION AND STRUCTURAL HARM IN THE CONTEXT OF DFV

TFA is an umbrella term used to capture a range of behaviours and practices that occur in online spaces and/or through the use or misuse of technology (Henry *et al.* 2022; Rogers *et al.* 2022). While research about TFA has in recent years become predominant, critics have questioned the extent to which existing scholarship attends to the diversity and complexity of lived experience and can account for the ways that experiences of TFA are shaped by intersecting structural inequalities at a range of levels, including at the level of the state (Bailey and Burkell 2021; Yardley 2021; Rogers *et al.* 2022). In this review, we provide a brief overview of the field, focusing first on the intersections between DFV and TFA, before considering what is currently known about the specific experiences of migrant and refugee women, including temporary visa holders, and the importance of attending to structural inequality in the analysis of women's experiences.

Within the context of research on DFV, TFA has, according to Douglas *et al.* (2019a: para 2), emerged as a 'new breed of domestic violence' via technology (such as mobile phones, SMS, email, tracking apps and social media) where the intent is to *control, monitor and harass*. To some extent this claim highlights how TFA can be understood as a form of abuse, running the risk of focusing on it in a way that is decontextualized from the complexity of abusive relationships. This is evident in some of the growing research in this area with recent scholarship across jurisdictions including Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States (US), seeking to document the prevalence, nature and impacts of different forms of TFA, such as image-based abuse, incessant texting or calling, social media facilitated abuse and the use of surveillance apps or tracking devices, which often occurs in the context of current or former intimate partnerships (Rogers *et al.* 2022). This is not to suggest there is no place for this research. In Rogers *et al.*'s (2022: 12) scoping review of the extant literature focused on TFA and its impacts in the context of DFV they argue that

It is salient to highlight the distinctiveness of TFA. We are living in a digital world in which we can be connected to others at all times of the day, from all corners of the world. This means that perpetrators of IPV can transcend temporal and physical world boundaries to covertly and/or overtly enact a wider range of abuse from anywhere, at any time. Thus, the scope and opportunities for TFA perpetration are considerable.

However, Rogers *et al.* (2022) also note the absence of close interrogation of the experiences of people from minority groups, including migrants and refugees. The importance of this examination, we would argue, is not to focus simply on population experiences, but to recognize that there is deeply embedded structural inequality that contributes to all aspects of DFV including but not limited to TFA.

In *Zamora et al.'s (2022)* scoping analysis for existing empirical literature on TFA and DFV, they echoed *Rogers et al.'s (2022)* concern that there is 'limited comprehensive knowledge' of CALD women's lived experiences, but that there is existing scholarship that indicates the very specific isolating effects of TFA in the context of DFV for 'CALD women [who] depend on technology to connect with support networks in their home country'. This echoes findings from other studies including *Douglas et al. (2019b)*, *Henry et al. (2022)*, *Louie (2021)* and *WESNET (2018)*, where the consistent observation was that while there are similarities between migrant women's experiences of technology-facilitated domestic abuse (TFDA) and the experiences of women who are not migrants, migrant and refugee women experienced forms of TFDA that were distinctive. *Louie (2021)* found factors, such as migration status, women's financial position, language issues as well as digital literacy, can play a role in heightening the ways migrant women are vulnerable to TFDA in Australia and can also '[make] their experience more complicated' (2021: 447). Across these studies there is a call to illuminate the intersections between migration status and *social isolation*. *Henry et al.'s (2022: 9)* findings of TFA experienced by migrant and refugee women suggested that technology provides 'an "extended platform" ... to amplify the multiple forms of abuse women experienced'. This collective research points to the importance of any considered analysis of TFA to also draw upon the extant literature on social isolation in the context of DFV for migrant and refugee women, and the examination of structural inequality and harm linked specifically to the status of temporary migrant.

Social isolation features prominently in the broader literature on DFV for migrant and refugee women (*Abraham 2000a; 2000b; Menjivar and Salcido 2002; Vaughan et al. 2015; Erez and Harper 2018*). Existing scholarship has positioned isolation as a specific form of DFV that can be connected to women's status as migrants and is enabled by the ways they can be dependent on male partners and other family members for social interaction (*Abraham 2000a; Menjivar and Salcido 2002*). Women's experiences of social isolation are known to be exacerbated by migration processes as their distance from their social networks (family, friends, colleagues) can limit the nature and extent of emotional and practical support they can rely on in countries of destination (*Abraham 2000a*). *Abraham's (2000a: 227)* seminal work has demonstrated that 'isolation tactics are deliberately used' to 'increase ... power and control' over women in social environments that can be unfamiliar to them and to cut them off from their networks or prevent them from establishing new relationships. The effects of these tactics are often intensified for some women, such as marriage migrants, international students, women who are newly arrived and lack permanence and those who are legally or economically dependent on male partners (*Anitha 2011; Parson and Heckert 2014; Vasil 2023*). It is well documented that migrant and refugee women experience DFV that is perpetrated by multiple family members and from both within and beyond the country women reside in, often with threats and abuse being perpetrated by family in the country of origin, which contributes to the vigilance around sustaining women's isolation but also its impact (*Segrave 2017; Anitha et al. 2018*). What is also clear, however, is that the examination of social isolation requires the consideration of structural inequality, particularly for temporary non-citizens.

Harris and Woodlock (2019) have identified the tendency to focus on the medium of technology to the detriment of emphasis on the socio-structural context within which TFA occurs. So too, *Yardley (2021: 1480)* points out that 'broader structural themes' including how diverse experiences of TFA are connected to systemic inequalities related to gender and other factors 'remain underexplored'. To take up this call to incorporate the socio-structural lens, we draw on the work that has developed *Crenshaw's (1991)* account of intersectionality. *Crenshaw's (1991)* work lay the ground for the examination of gender in relation to gender-based violence, specifically DFV, alongside multiple and intersecting systems of oppression including race and class. Since this time, a growing body of intersectional feminist scholarship on DFV has examined the

ways in which women's 'specific position as immigrants' is connected to and 'exacerbated by the socially structured systems of inequality through which they must navigate their lives as individuals and members of communities' (Sokoloff 2008: 237). Research that examines the intersections between immigration and DFV has highlighted how structural and cultural factors play a role in shaping the nature of women's lived experiences (see Abraham 2000a; Erez *et al.* 2009; Pearce and Sokoloff 2013). This has led some to argue that 'immigration' (Pearce and Sokoloff 2013: 786) or visa/migration status, as we would call it, needs to be treated as a sociological location that shapes experiences of DFV 'with an entire set of dynamics that differs from racial or ethnic origin' as this can facilitate an examination of different sets of 'constraints and relationships' (Pearce and Sokoloff 2013: 786, 791). Here we are specifically interested in the ways in which the migration system produces and sustains the disempowerment of temporary migrants as non-citizens. Increasingly, research has highlighted the specificity of temporary migration status as exacerbating forms of DFV and/or producing conditions that enable specific forms of harm such as migration-related abuse (Anitha 2008; 2011; Vaughan *et al.* 2015; Segrave 2017; Segrave *et al.* 2021). In this work we see a consistent call to ensure that the structurally embedded inequality of women's status as temporary migrants is brought to the centre in examinations of their experiences of DFV: it is not enough, it is argued, to focus only on the perpetrators and the cultural context of their abuse, but the ways in which structural conditions sustain women's inequality and in doing so have the potential to compound women's experiences (Segrave 2021; Vasil 2023). We would argue that it is temporariness that is most salient here, as it is where the state embeds doubt and suspicion in response to anyone who seeks protection or support, particularly in the context of gendered violence (Segrave 2017).

So how do these collective bodies of work help the analysis we offer here? The growing literature on TFA lays the ground for exploring specific aspects of women's experiences of DFV. By drawing on the broader literature on isolation and structural inequality and harm, we have laid a foundation to explore the nature and impact of victim-survivor experiences beyond a narrow account of the form the abuse takes (that is, beyond an isolated examination of TFA). While existing research on TFA has noted how technology can be used to control and isolate women in intimate relationships, and that the effects of these tactics may be exacerbated for different groups of migrant and refugee women, to date very few studies have undertaken a detailed exploration of temporary migrant women's experiences with TFA. In addition to attending to the specificity of TFA, this paper responds to the stated need to consider the context within which violence and abuse occur via a lens that incorporates the examination of social isolation with structural inequality. In so doing we can deepen our understanding of how and why this form of DFV flourishes, the heightened impact it has for different groups of migrant and refugee women and how we can work towards its dismantling.

METHODOLOGY

We bring together two separate studies in this paper that both sought, using different methodologies, to illuminate the importance of temporary visa status in the context of DFV. This came about through separate outputs from both projects, where similar findings, concerns and themes had emerged. We identified, in the integration of the two sets of data, that while each study design had limitations, bringing the data together offered the unique opportunity to build an evidence base that captures both breadth and depth. We argue that through integrating the analysis from the two studies, we have a strong foundation for the analysis and findings we offer in this paper.

The first study was undertaken in 2017 and drew on a database developed by Segrave (see Segrave 2017) from 300 closed client case files (from 2015 to 2016) from clients who were temporary migrants when they first came into contact with inTouch Multicultural Centre Against

Family Violence [a specialist DFV service in Victoria, Australia]. This project (hereinafter, the case file study) was unique in its approach: through accessing closed case files, it offered significant insight into the case management and legal and migration support services provided. This approach also offered the benefit of being able to undertake a much larger study than the predominant qualitative interview-based studies that have sought to identify issues pertaining to temporary visa status and experiences of DFV (see [Vaughan et al. 2015](#) for a review). Through providing a much larger sample size and a way to identify the issues, challenges, experiences and barriers encountered by 300 women as captured in the case files, this study enabled patterns to be identified at scale. This process has been detailed elsewhere (see [Segrave 2017; 2021](#)).² The research was conducted with the approval of the Monash University Ethics in Human Research Committee, which considered the highly sensitive nature of the case files and the inability of the researchers and the agency to contact former clients to approve the use of these files for research purposes. There are clear limitations to this research: data can be inconsistent or missing and there is no opportunity to ask for more detail. At the same time, this study provided an important contribution to the field of research, which has largely relied on qualitative interview data, and was not resulting in traction for recognition and reform at the policy level. The study offered a major contribution to the national agenda on temporary visa holders' experiences of DFV in part because of the number of cases, a contribution that built on the work of others.

The second study (hereinafter, the interview-based study) was undertaken in 2018 and 2019 and involved qualitative semi-structured interviews in Victoria, Australia, with 23 stakeholders from a range of professional backgrounds (the majority were also first or second generation migrant women themselves), and 18 interviews with victim-survivors. This research was undertaken with the approval of the RMIT University Human Research Ethics Committee, which took into account the risks associated with conducting highly sensitive research, the need to ensure victim-survivors were able to make an informed decision about their participation and that care was taken so the interviews could provide a safe space for women to tell their stories with the required supports in place. The interviews ranged from 1 to 3 hours, and the interviews with victim-survivors were conducted with a focus on the well-being of the participant. This included the offer to meet again after the original interview to debrief; 17 of the 18 victim-survivor participants opted into this and it was valuable for both [Vasil \(see 2023\)](#) as the researcher but also recognized by the participants as a useful exercise. This research also included observations at events, community meetings and information sessions which took place across the family violence sector following the state government's royal commission in 2016, though this aspect of the data set is not drawn out for the purposes of the analysis offered here (see for further detail [Vasil 2023](#)).

In bringing the two studies together, the first discussion point was the consistent issue of TFA being present, but our analysis leaning towards a different conclusion and focus than the dominant TFA literature. We developed a thematic structure and added data from each project under each theme in order to then consider the data and offer a collective analysis of the findings. The

2 The study focused on temporary visa status (that is any temporary visa, including student, spousal, visiting holiday maker, tourist, skilled visa holder) at the time that assistance was sought from the DFV service. A database was built to capture data in the files that matched the case management system. It is important to clarify that the organization uses a closed online system for recording case management interaction and has very limited analytical capability. At the time the research was conducted, we could not search the online system to identify how many clients were temporary visa holders. Instead, the researcher was given hard copy files and a desk at the organization, and a database was built to produce an overview of clients and their experiences, drawing on information contained in the intake notes and subsequent notes from each meeting, as well as the migration agent notes and documentation where that was relevant for the client. The database captured 'demographics related to the victim-survivor and perpetrator, details of the immediate needs and services accessed, information related to migration status, risk identification according to the statewide tool used to assess risk in the context of DFV, as well as identifying where indicators of offences related to other Commonwealth offences—specifically forced labour, forced marriage, human trafficking and slavery (as per ss. 270 and 271 of the Commonwealth *Crimes Act* and as per the International Labour Organisation international indicators for sexual and labour-related exploitation 2012)—were present' (see for further detail [Segrave 2017: 16](#)). The database included both quantitative and qualitative information; we utilized the qualitative data for the analysis contained in this paper.

projects were complementary in their different approaches: the strengths and limitations of each played out in this analysis but allowed us to build a comprehensive account of the importance of rethinking how TFA is foregrounded. [Table 1](#) shows an overview of demographics across the two studies to allow an understanding of their reach and the profile of the women.

While these two studies were conducted in the state of Victoria, Australia, we argue that the implications of the findings are not specific to the geographic or jurisdictional location of the women when they experienced DFV and/or sought assistance. What they all had in common was their temporary visa status which, as we've outlined above, has both distinct legal and administrative meaning and implications in Australia (see for a more detailed account [Segrave 2017](#); [Vasil 2023](#)), but also resonates across studies internationally as an important structural location ([Anitha 2011](#); [Voolma 2018](#)). Critically, we acknowledge two important aspects of this work: first, we focus on temporary visa holders and not race or any other identity. Some work in this space in different locations focuses for example on black and ethnic minority women, but for this study, we are specifically focused on the visa someone holds as being specifically tied to the state's responsibility to them, and the way in which the limitations on that responsibility empower perpetrators. We understand and value the work that interrogates other aspects of migrant and refugee identity, but we do not focus on that here. Second, and following from this point, there may be a view to consider the differential location of women, for example, who

Table 1. Victim-survivor sample summary

Study	Case file study	Interview-based study ³
Sample size	300	18 victim-survivors (plus 23 stakeholders)
LGBTQI+	None identified as LGBTQI+	None identified as LGBTQI+
Nationalities	65 nationalities: most represented countries were India (16%), China (excluding SARs and Taiwan) (9%), the Philippines (7%), Iran (5%), Sri Lanka (4%), Thailand (4%), Afghanistan (3%)	9 nationalities represented: India ($n = 4$), Pakistan ($n = 3$), Philippines ($n = 2$), Sri Lanka ($n = 2$), Thailand ($n = 2$), Armenia ($n = 1$), Bangladesh ($n = 1$), Fiji ($n = 1$), Malaysia ($n = 1$), South Sudan ($n = 1$)
Visa status	All held temporary visas at time of first contact: 50% held a temporary partner visa 50% held a variety of other temporary visas, including visitor visas (18%) and student visas (18%)	17 victim-survivors held a temporary visa at the time they were experiencing DFV: students ($n = 5$), tourists ($n = 5$), secondary applicants ($n = 1$), partner visas ($n = 4$) and prospective marriage visas ($n = 2$). One woman was holding a permanent skilled visa and thus a permanent resident, however, believed her status was dependent
Age range	20–61 years old (65% 24–34)	20–50 years old (55% 20–38)
Dependents	52%	50%
Perpetrator/s	80% IPV/one person 20% IPV and other family/ other family members	9 women reported experiencing IPV 9 women reported experiencing IPV and violence by other family members 0 reported experiencing violence by other family members only

³ Details in [Table 1](#) pertain only to the demographics of victim-survivors, not the stakeholders. We identify the type of organization stakeholders were from when attributing direct quotes in the analysis. All stakeholder participants were women.

are white and/or western and/or financially independent and who hold a temporary visa compared to those who are not. Our data does not lend itself to that interrogation, however, we also consider it critical to highlight that these factors do not necessarily make navigating structural inequality possible. The operation of the migration system in Australia and its impact on all aspects of women's lives if they experience DFV as a temporary visa holder has been highlighted in national studies as a specific and important issue that is deserving of specific focus and interrogation (see [Segrave et al. 2021](#)).

In bringing the data together, we seek in this paper to highlight the consistencies of our findings regarding the role and manifestation of TFA for this group of over 300 women. We aim to do two things. First, to recognize the specificity of how TFA can occur for women who are precariously located in Australia. Second, to recognize that focusing on the form of violence can overshadow the structural inequality that sustains it: that is, for women who hold temporary visas the practices of isolation, denial of access to communication with family in countries of origin and the use of technology to monitor women, is connected to and compounded by their status as non-citizens. Ahead of turning to the analysis, we note that in what follows we draw on written excerpts from victim-survivors and case managers, and transcripts of interviews with victim-survivors: across these data sets we are often using data where English is not the first language of the participant or author. We indicate via the use of ellipses where we have reduced repetition or unnecessary words that do not contribute to the overall meaning of the excerpts; however, we have not corrected anything that may be slightly grammatically incorrect but the meaning is clear. It is important to allow women's voices to be heard, and we have deliberately chosen not to impose corrections or recognition of grammatical errors, as this undermines our commitment to privileging the voices of our participants.

TECHNOLOGY AS A VEHICLE FOR SOCIAL ISOLATION

While technology was not a feature in the experience of DFV for all women in the two studies, it was consistently present across both. In the case file study, just over a third (34 per cent) of cases involved the use of technology as an aspect of controlling or abusive behaviour ([Segrave 2017](#)). This predominantly involved mobile phones (87 per cent which included smart phones), followed by laptop computers (26 per cent). In the interview-based study, all victim-survivor participants spoke about the ways that technology was a feature in their experiences of DFV; the most common form of TFA discussed was restricting access to mobile phones and to a lesser degree the internet. In our analysis, we examine the findings in both studies to move beyond 'counting' how often TFA appeared and in what form, to instead contextualize how technology played a role in the ways that violence and abuse was enacted against migrant women in intimate and familial relationships. Across these two studies what was most consistent was the use of technology as part of everyday practices of control connected to a range of behaviours that sought to socially isolate women, undermine their autonomy and enforce their dependence on perpetrators.

Technology and social control

Across both studies, we found that technology was a key strategy for perpetrators (men and other family members) to control women's everyday lives in Australia. In the case file study, of the 34 per cent of women for whom technology was a part of their DFV experiences, it was controlling access to technology that was most common (80 per cent experienced controlling access to personal mobile phones, and 19 per cent experienced controlling access to social media sites). Findings from the case file study highlight the various efforts to monitor women and their everyday interactions, which included checking their calls, messages and emails and monitoring how they used technology (e.g. social media) and who they

interacted with. These practices are captured in case file notes from which the following account was written

The victim-survivor states that technological control was one of the first forms of abuse, with the perpetrator abusing his access to her email password and reading all of her emails. He then accused the victim-survivor of having prior relationships and blackmailed her. He forced her to delete her Facebook account and changed her phone number so she was cut off from all her friends. When she moved to Australia, she was isolated and lonely.... The perpetrator also replaced her sim card with one that could only accept incoming calls.... [when she bought her own sim card] the perpetrator forced her to delete the apps that she used to communicate with her family.... The perpetrator deleted the victim-survivor's father's contact from her phone as she called her dad and told him about the abuse. The perpetrator and the perpetrator's parents got extremely angry when the victim-survivor called her dad and told him about the abuse. The perpetrator only allows the victim-survivor to make phone calls in front of him.

In this account above, it is most evident that as technology has advanced to enable immediate communication between family spread across the world, the core issue is not the technology per se, but that perpetrators seek to control this technology to isolate their partners and maintain a narrative around what is happening in the family and/or the relationship. Notably in this example, control and abuse began before the victim-survivor arrived in Australia. Given the advances in technology and the various ways in which communication can be maintained, efforts to socially isolate women require more active efforts to limit access to a range of technologies, compared to a decade ago. Also evidenced by the account above is the role of extended family as perpetrators, which contributes to the impact and exercise of control over victim-survivors in Australia. In other examples from the interview-based study, women's accounts show that technology became a pervasive vehicle for family members to monitor them. Some women expressed that they felt pressure to adhere to traditional gender roles and expectations by, for example, performing household duties and assuming primary responsibility for this work. In the case file study, 20 per cent of cases involved one or more perpetrators, where predominantly it was the intimate partner or former partner and their family. There were multiple examples in which nonintimate partner perpetrators utilized technology to monitor women's communication, for example statements in case files such as 'the victim-survivor's mother-in-law told her husband to listen to all her phone calls'. Practices of this kind reflected the extension of a social network of control over the victim-survivor. In another case, it was noted that 'the perpetrator's family were sending the victim-survivor threatening messages telling her not to divorce the perpetrator. These messages were a breach of the IVO'. These practices are less critical to understanding the role of technology, and more importantly point to the necessity of understanding how the operation of social control manifests across a whole range of practices. This ranges from restricting technology access to limiting movement outside the home, and the importance of the broader network of perpetrators who maintain control and surveillance over victim-survivors.

The effort to control women's lives was a central theme in both studies and technology emerged as a vehicle for a broader practice of control. Controlling women's access to mobile phones and the internet more broadly were the most consistent TFA issues that arose in both studies, and these practices were always a part of a broader strategy of control, which impacted how women were able to seek external help and support, for example

The perpetrator has hid the victim-survivor's phone so that she is unable to call for help. In particular, when he held a knife against her and then hid her phone and threatened to kill her. The perpetrator also checks the victim-survivor's texts and voice messages regularly. (Case file study)

In this example, the limitations on access to technology occurred within the broader setting of significant practices of control and abuse, including threats to kill. This example illuminates how the containment of TFA as a standalone practice or phenomenon can undermine an understanding of the realities of women's lives following the move.

In the context of varying degrees of financial or social dependency for women as temporary visa holders, social isolation and separation from family and friends via limiting access to technology was more easily exercised by perpetrators in some instances. Women who were newly arrived in Australia, who may have limited English language proficiency, who were not legally able to work or who had yet to identify how to seek work, any independent income or to access funds in Australia were more easily isolated. This is not necessarily strictly an issue of privilege: all international student visa holders are limited in the hours they work; all tourist visa holders have no work rights and both have no access to Medicare. In the interview-based study, women described how isolation was achieved in many ways by perpetrators. Mei's description of her husband's tactics to isolate her included but were not limited to ensuring she had no access to the internet

[He] tried to isolate me ... he took the key with him when he go to work so I don't have any pram, I can't go outside and we don't have Wi-Fi at home.... And I can't just carry my daughter to go outside, I don't have anything to carry her. (Mei, temporary partner visa, interview-based study)

Again, in Mei's case, what we can see is that the broader reality is not the limited access to technology, but the effort of her then husband to completely restrict her movement, both physically by making it difficult to leave with her infant daughter, but also to restrict her access to communication and information via the internet.

Findings from the case file study also illustrated how monitoring can manifest in different ways and that coercive practices via technology do not only involve perpetrators following or tracking women but also demand that women use technology that enables the perpetrator to monitor them. In one case file it was noted: 'when the victim-survivor was out with her friends, she had to keep sending messages and pictures to the perpetrator so he could control her movement'. Women in the interview-based study similarly described how the monitoring of their use of phones, computers and other devices was part of a broader strategy to control their day-to-day activities in Australia and limit their social interaction. Cristina, an international student, explained that

He was controlling my entire life; he drove me to Uni – everywhere I went. I wasn't allowed to work, and he constantly checked my phone, my laptop ... and because I had no one else to depend on ... I depended on him. I felt like I had no other choice, and I was also staying at his place, so I felt like he was sort of helping me ... I felt like he had control over me, like he would just take away my phone or just lock me in the house or something.

Male and other family perpetrators' efforts to cut women off socially by monitoring and micromanaging their everyday interactions and limiting their access to networks of support and communication overseas were consistent in both studies. Women in the interview-based study described how this further entrenched their sense of isolation from family, friends and colleagues in other countries who were key sources of social support. As Joana explained, this was often achieved by restricting access to mobile phones by either destroying or taking away their personal devices: 'one day he just took my phone, he said, "you know, there's no need to have the phone because you use the phone to talk to men when I'm away"'. Leila, who was on

a temporary partner visa, explained that she had a very close relationship with her parents and that immediately following her move to Australia, the perpetrator and his family cut her off from her parents and other relatives who were all living overseas: ‘I don’t have internet on my phone, I can’t get my family—I can’t tell them anything. I can’t go to get a friend or anything’. For Leila, the move saw her become increasingly and deliberately isolated and monitored by members of her husband’s family who also took advantage of her domestic labour. Restricting access to technology limited the ways that women such as Leila were able to interact with their social networks overseas, which also intensified their dependence on perpetrators and their family members in Australia. Similarly, findings from the case file study revealed instances where women were distanced, cut off and alienated from parents, children, other family members and friends. In one case file it was noted ‘perpetrator restricted the victim-survivor’s communication with her children and family in Vietnam’.

It is also significant that in both studies the experience of violence and abuse was heightened for temporary migrant women over time. Examples from the case file study draw attention to the ways in which technological control formed part of a pattern, which also included physical violence, economic sabotage and other forms of coercive control. In the case file study, one caseworker noted

The perpetrator wouldn’t let her speak to any of her friends/family and eventually completely stopped her speaking to her parents. He would read and then delete all the emails from her family.... If she challenged him about it, he would beat her. He also put his phone number down when she was initially looking for work and he turned down the job.

Women in the interview-based study described how the nature and intensity of their DFV experiences changed following the move and while living in Australia. Mina, who was holding a prospective marriage visa, explained that the dynamics of her relationship with her Australian-citizen husband changed very soon after she relocated to live with him. She described the nature of his control, which worsened over time and prevented her from spending time with extended family members who were living in Australia. Mina detailed how the perpetrator slowly began cutting her off from networks of support, prevented her from leaving the home and controlled what she did inside the home

I already find another Armenian family here, living here, they want to meet me.... He didn’t want I meet with someone else to ... compare their life and my life.... That’s why he want to keep me only next to him. Just controlling, controlling.... I asked him, I need internet because we ... have only 25GB internet.... I couldn’t watch TV ... even movies or internet or communicate using camera because it uses a lot of data. Nothing, nothing.

The findings from both studies highlight how women’s vulnerability may be significantly heightened when they are either cut off from or restricted in their contact with their family who are in their country of origin. Perpetrators exercise control via refusing women (who often have limited finances and/or do not have the entitlement to work) access to an independent communication device or to the internet to achieve this disconnection from family. What is also evident is the way that restricting access served to constrain women by limiting their autonomy, and containing them to the family home, with many women across the two studies highlighting how they had limited contact with anyone, despite predominantly residing in urban or metropolitan areas. Also evident across both studies were the complex ways that victim-survivors were dependent on their partner to continue living in the country, to provide for themselves and any children in their care, to pursue their studies or employment opportunities and, as previously

stated, for social interaction. We argue later that this is achieved in part because the migration system sustains the precariousness of being a temporary non-citizen, however, we first explore how technology was also utilized specifically to threaten and enact abuse beyond isolation.

Using technology to threaten and enact abuse

Existing research on TFA has drawn attention to the various ways that perpetrators harness technology to threaten and enact abuse through, for example, the nonconsensual taking or sharing of intimate images, sending harassing or threatening messages and posting hurtful or humiliating comments on social media (Henry *et al.* 2022; Rogers *et al.* 2022). Findings from the case file and interview-based studies did not reflect these broader findings; where technology was used in this way it tended to be part of a strategy to enforce control and isolation with the goal of keeping women in the relationship. A key issue in relation to control and technology was that these practices intersected with other forms of TFA, such as stalking and surveilling women

He need to know what is going on like stalking, all access. He stalk me all the time, there is – he put some app that he – yeah, so he stalk me whenever I go, come. (Ananya, interview-based study)

Another way of controlling and monitoring women and to ensure their isolation was by destroying their personal devices as well as using tracking devices. For instance, in the case file study it was noted that

The perpetrator smashed the victim-survivor's personal mobile phone and stopped communication with her friends and family by removing the home phone and cutting off the internet. He also put a tracking device on her car.

These two excerpts highlight how technology is utilized to exercise control and to maintain the omnipresence of the perpetrator. In both cases this was experienced during relationships but also after exiting a relationship; a time noted for increased risk of fatal and serious violence for women (Walklate *et al.* 2019). This was also evident in Ananya's experience

I left everything behind and even the phone I had, I changed my number because they told me that you need to change the number ... so my number was on his name, he track me where I am going ... what I am doing And he broke my phone, it was an iPhone so, I didn't have any contact number. (Interview-based study)

Ananya, who was a secondary applicant on a skilled visa, described an experience that highlights how perpetrators' technological control can impact women even as they seek to engage with formal support services.

The use of harassing messages and threats by men and other perpetrators was also a factor in the experiences of women in the interview-based study. Similar to women's experiences more broadly (Harris 2018; Douglas *et al.* 2019b), most women in the interview-based study explained that this tended to occur following their exit from the relationship and/or in response to women's efforts to resist men's control by seeking external help. This is evident in Cristina's account, which highlights the pervasiveness of men's efforts to control women and to discredit them publicly. Like many other women in the interview-based study, Cristina explained that these efforts to discredit her began while she was in the relationship, with her Australian-citizen partner threatening to report her to immigration authorities, which formed part of a pattern

of coercive control. These controlling and threatening behaviours continued and worsened for Cristina after she exited the relationship

He like messaged me like on social media and like even after a few months like I started seeing someone and then he would ... he messaged the person I was seeing and ... saying bad things about me and so I got paranoid ... that the new person that I was seeing would believe him. So, I basically blocked him everywhere and I asked the person that I was seeing to block him as well ... yeah so it almost ... 'cos he like spread fake rumours about me like that I cheated, that I have many guys blah blah blah ... he created like a fake profile, but I knew it was still him ... so now my social media is like I'm using a fake name and there's no pictures, just so I would feel like he couldn't like trace me. I only have like five or six friends there ... I don't even think he can find me if he tried.

For women including Cristina, the perpetrator's threats over the phone and social media continued months after she exited the relationship and impacted how she was able to engage online and to establish an independent life, safe and separate from her former abusive partner. She described changing her phone number and her social media profile so the perpetrator could not find her and in an attempt to stop him from posting hurtful comments about her. The need to closely regulate how she used social media also had implications for the ways she was able to interact with family and friends in Australia and overseas.

This data offers important insights into the use of technology in the context of DFV, contributing to the growing body of research into these practices. The issue of social isolation and the ways it can be leveraged by perpetrators is frequently discussed in the multicultural literature on DFV (Vaughan *et al.* 2015). Our findings indicate that although a significant cross-section of the literature on TFA has focused on the emergence of new forms and practices that involve harnessing technology in the enactment of DFV, a focus on the specific experiences of temporary migrants reveals that where technology was a feature in women's experiences, it was as part of a broader pattern of coercive and controlling behaviour that had a unique social dimension to it. Critically, any account of migrant women's lived experiences must also take into consideration how the structural location of *being* a temporary visa holder provides unique opportunities for control and entrapment in intimate relationships, as we discuss in the next section.

CONTEXTUALISING TFA AND DFV WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF STRUCTURAL INEQUALITY: THE IMPORTANCE OF TEMPORARINESS

To some extent the findings above could be highlighted to understand the breadth of controlling practices exercised over migrant women, and to specifically interrogate how they impact temporary visa holders. However, to understand the experiences of over 300 women only as individual accounts, as a reflection of DFV patterns of the perpetrator/s and/or as practices that are inherently about the technological tools involved, overshadows the importance of a structural account of how isolation and abuse is sustained. Indeed, as Bailey and Burkell (2021: 532, citing Jiwani 2006: xi–xii) point out, the effect of 'individualised understandings of violence is that structural oppressions are "erased, trivialized, or contained within categories that evacuate the violation of [structural] violence"'. By extension, a focus on the specificity of women's TFA experiences without also considering how these are connected to systems of oppression and patriarchal control, can deflect responsibility from the role of the state in sanctioning this violence via migration control priorities (Bumiller 2008). The additional vulnerability created through these practices cannot be underestimated particularly for temporary migrant women

whose precarious status can result in them being legally tied to or dependent on a perpetrator for their residency, as well as for women who have limited English, are prevented from or do not have the entitlement to work and/or who have no other regular contact in the community. The experiences of temporary migrant women across both studies are revealing of how accounts of different visa holders intersect with other factors, such as lack of familiarity with Australian systems and institutions, dependency on the perpetrator for financial stability, information, housing and healthcare and fears regarding women's separation from children (Vasil 2023). We argue that the focus on technology as a way to exercise control and/or to harm, can shift attention from entrenched structural inequality, which in this case is primarily (not exclusively) linked to migration status.

In this section the focus is on women's structural location as temporary migrants who most often had deep and close familial and social connections that stretched across and beyond the Australian border. Our findings highlight that in paying attention to the specificity of the forms that DFV took and to the ways that the technology was utilized, an intersectional lens is critical to developing a more complex and comprehensive understanding of the impact of these behaviours, and therefore, to developing strategies that address inequality in order to ultimately reduce violence. We do not offer a detailed account here of the role of migration-related abuse (this has been developed elsewhere see Segrave 2021; Segrave *et al.* 2021). Instead in this section, we highlight how technology is utilized as a tool to extend the persistence and weight of threats and to exercise control in a way that illuminates how structural inequality via systems such as the migration system cannot be excluded from the context of understanding TFA.

In the case file study, the sample included 50 per cent of women who held a partner visa that rendered them, for the most part, legally dependent on their relationship for their residency, while 50 per cent held a temporary visa which afforded them no long-term rights to live or work in the country. Regardless of visa, migration-related controlling behaviours have been demonstrated in a national study of migrant and refugee women in Australia to be a key aspect of temporary visa holders' experiences of DFV (Segrave *et al.* 2021). Growing international research is also recognizing that technology is utilized as another platform to enact migration control, which was one of the most frequently utilized forms of control over temporary visa holders in our studies, and a form of threatening behaviour that carries significant weight for victim-survivors on temporary visas (see Segrave 2018; Segrave *et al.* 2021). Perpetrators consistently used technology to harass and threaten women about their right to remain in the country

He threaten me that if you are not satisfy me, I want to withdraw your visa ... In fact, he, his family, his mother, his sister, by phone ... his sister-in-law, his brother, another brother... one day... my [stepdaughter] tell me, 'If you do like that, if you try to control, I tell to my father and he withdraw your visa'. So, everybody, everybody they try to control me you know? You are one person, and you have control by 10 people at one time. (Jasveen, tourist visa, interview-based study)

In the following example, what is evident is that the technology was a tool in the weaponization of migration status (see Segrave 2021):

But that time, every day he again continue sending me messages, calling me on mobile and coming there [to where she was staying] he knows the address, they know each other... but since I came back, I notice that he come even worse. Just worse, I don't know, even worse and no any money at all because he said, 'I paid for your visa, I don't have money'. ... so, I stayed again [at] his home [there] is no money, [there] is nothing ... I don't know what to do. (Mina, prospective marriage visa, interview-based study)

In Mina's case, the TFA involved was in part harassment around the insistence that she return to the perpetrator. What was evident as her experience worsened was that the perpetrator was able to assert both that he had paid for her visa and that she had no money. This was where power lay for him to control her: she had nowhere to go. There are many other issues raised in this example around migration-related abuse. Most pertinent for this discussion, however, is that to understand TFA and DFV, we need to consider the nature and power of these threats and controlling behaviours. The use of technology to further isolate women must be understood within this broader canvas of the omnipresence of the border: that is, temporary visa holders have limited leverage in a country where they are not citizens. Elsewhere [Segrave \(2021: 35\)](#) has argued

In the accounting of gendered violence, and the social systems that produce and reproduce gendered inequality, we must account for systemic inequality produced by the migration system. This inequality is not exclusively linked to DFV ... [but] a critical component of that abuse is the relationship of the victim to the state, as determined by the migration system.... By its very nature, being temporary creates a delicate balancing act in relation to the country of destination, where the potential to be expelled is omnipresent, not least due to the limitation of rights afforded to non-citizens. The migration system remains a system that is designed to enshrine power inequality.

These migration-related insecurities intersected with gender inequality and other factors, such as financial interdependency, which exacerbated the effects of women's experiences of TFA and DFV ([Vasil 2023](#)). We argue that it is critical to understand that these insecurities are sustained by a refusal of the state to prioritize women's safety and provide shelter, financial support, health care and legal support for as long as required to those who experience DFV, and by the design and operation of the migration system itself which builds in dependency on perpetrators and in turn builds a barrier to women reporting or seeking to leave or access support.

Findings from the case file study indicate that over half of the women were financially dependent upon their partner ([Segrave 2017](#)). Temporary visa holders have a limited financial safety net, if they can access any financial support at all, in Australia, as has been well documented ([Segrave 2017](#); [Jelinic 2020](#)). This limited financial support is directly linked to women's status as temporary non-citizens as they are ineligible for most forms of welfare support (see National Advocacy Group on Temporary Migrants Experiencing DFV 2022). Temporary visa holders who, for example, need to move to escape violence or are left as sole parents have limited access to ongoing welfare support provided to citizens and permanent residents who may have periods of unemployment and/or who need financial and other supports. This distinguishes this group from Australian citizens in relation to how controlling access to technology is both more easily leveraged by perpetrators and more powerful in its potential impact. Women's financial dependency on perpetrators can have a range of negative impacts and consequences, as women are isolated from opportunities to go far from their home or to shop independently, to feed and clothe their children, to access medical care or to be independent of an abusive partner and free from violence (see [Segrave et al. 2021](#)). For the purposes of this analysis, financial dependency on perpetrators also specifically limits women's ability to access technology independently and therefore communicate and seek information, which is critical in women's searches for safety. Findings from the two studies examined here highlight that victim-survivors cannot easily replace devices that are destroyed and/or they are not easily able to set up individual accounts with internet service providers. This was evidenced in the following accounts where phone credit was withheld or controlled by the perpetrator

When he's at home I always tell him can I talk to my sister, to my mother. Then sometimes he tells me he didn't have credit and sometimes he make a call and then I talk. (Sahar, student visa, secondary applicant, interview-based study)

In beginning, we come here. Here, my ex-husband he very good. ... And after that ... [he became] terrible. Yeah, not helping. I cannot go outside, you know? ... No money, no nothing ... I don't know how [I] can go [anywhere] – even my phone [has] no credit. (Waan, prospective marriage visa holder, interview-based study)

In both examples, TFA is connected to limiting access to calls, to listening and monitoring calls, as well as more broadly limiting women's ability to leave the home.

CONCLUSION

This paper extends the existing literature on migrant and refugee women and TFA. We have documented the importance of the significant literature and research on TFA and DFV and have highlighted that a narrow focus on technology can run the risk of illuminating the technology rather than recognizing the harm of social isolation and how it is exacerbated by structural inequality. It is important to be clear, as many have also argued (see [Segrave 2017](#); [Douglas et al. 2019b](#); [Rogers et al. 2022](#)), that an examination of the role of technology and the way in which it intersects with DFV can also be explored from the perspective of how women resist and seek safety via technology in different ways. We were not able to explore this aspect of the role of technology in our analysis here but recognize the importance of attention to this while also attending to the intersection of technology, social control, the power that is leveraged by perpetrators and the role of the state in sustaining the conditions within which such violence occurs. We argue that while there is a need to pay attention to specificity of migrant and refugee women's experiences of TFA, what holds most true is not the specificity per se, but the structural location of the women themselves and how this influences their lived experiences as temporary migrants and as victims of violence. This speaks to the second aim of this paper, which was to highlight the importance of ensuring that any analysis of the experience of DFV does not decontextualize women's experiences by overlooking how they are sustained by structural inequalities related to their status as temporary non-citizens.

There are important implications for our understanding of the specificity of TFA for policy and practice. While in-depth understanding can help to inform interventions and enhance responses (at the individual and service levels), there also needs to be recognition of the ways that unequal or oppressive systems reinforce women's structural position and provide additional opportunities for control ([Bailey and Burkell 2021](#)). Recognizing this requires us to think about structural and systemic change, rather than one off or short-term piecemeal interventions such as technological solutions to TFA ([Harkin and Merkel 2023](#)). Framing this issue as a technological problem draws attention away from the conditions that enable and sustain TFA and DFV over time ([Bumiller 2008](#)). For temporary migrants, this includes the ways they are disempowered by temporary status policies that are informed by a politics of migration control and regulation, which serve to reinforce their non-belonging and in doing so give additional 'leverage' to perpetrators ([Segrave 2018](#)). Focusing on forms of violence and/or the tools or weapons at the disposal of perpetrator/s should not be to the detriment of context and cannot be at the expense of the broader reality of how women are disadvantaged by their structural location as non-citizens.

Our analysis resonates with other work that has called for deeper and closer analysis of the experiences of migrant and refugee women via a focus on temporary visa holders. We argue that

there needs to be greater attention paid to the role of technology in exacerbating risk in the context of DFV, but that this must also be developed as part of a comprehensive understanding of how perpetrators ensure women's isolation and exercise control, with attention to the particular impact this has on temporary visa holders. This then leads to the importance of holding the state to account; we cannot address TFA in isolation as in so doing we effectively alleviate the state from responsibility. As findings from our analysis highlight, the focus on TFA in the context of DFV without locating this practice within the conditions that give rise to temporary visa holders' structural inequality sustains the silence about, and therefore the impunity of, nation-states regarding the role of legal and administrative structures as key factors for sustaining gendered violence.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

We confirm that we do not have no known conflict of interest to disclose.

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