Cyber-Violence: Impact and Solutions

By Jack Warner, TechWarn

In recent years, a spate of articles from newspapers across the world have detailed cases of cyber-bullying. Often, these cases involve teenagers. In one instance, a British teen was driven to suicide after severe and unrelenting trolling.

These high profile cases garner a lot of media attention. But what is receiving less attention are the cases where cyber-bullying and violence are enacted within the intimate partner context. Multiple studies on the subject note that most, if not all, cases of domestic violence now involve some element of cyber abuse.

While domestic or intimate partner violence is well described and defined in the literature on the subject, cyber-violence is less so. However, as we move further into predominantly digitally centric modes of communication, tech abuse and cyber-violence are gaining more attention.

There’s no single definition of cyber-violence in the domestic sphere, but we can think of it as the repetitive abuse of a former or current intimate partner (the victim) by another (the abuser), through technology-assisted means.
A 2010 study by VicHealth, Australia found that “male intimate partner abuse was the leading preventable contributor to death, disability, illness for females in Victoria aged 15 to 44.” Determining the health risks to women and, in fewer cases, men is not simply a matter of recording physical violence and any ongoing mental or physical health issues as a result.

The lingering impact of domestic and cyber-violence can remain unseen yet carry both psychological and physical consequences. Stress, for example, which is easily triggered by non-physical abuse can have very real physical effects on the body. Survivors of tech-driven domestic violence have cited anxiety, a feeling of being watched, and debilitating social issues.

The UN’s “Wake Up” report, which examined digital abuse, noted that this form of violence is just as dangerous as physical intimate partner violence. Cases abound where abusive persons go to increasingly complex lengths to coerce, control, and threaten victims.

By infiltrating another’s online presence, perpetrators use tech to isolate, humiliate, punish, and stalk domestic violence victims. Sexualized or intimate content often provides leverage to further control victims with the threat of humiliation.

Digital safety, once a matter primarily concerned with identity theft and safe online banking, is now a must for women, whether they are embarking on a new relationship or need to secure their safety as past victims of domestic violence.

While our technology-driven lives have opened up new, previously unconsidered avenues for abuse, the good news is that tech can also be a force for good in intimate partner violence situations.

Through technology, special tools and assistance programs are open to victims. This is especially important in areas where there is little to no support from the community, or when the victim lives a long way from shelters and a support network.

For example, in New Zealand (a nation with the highest rates of domestic violence in the developed world), special apps and programs exist that allow a victim to seek help without their browsing history or concerns being discovered by the abusive person.

Similar tools are now springing up in many nations in response to the growing crisis. It’s possible that when it comes to tech abuse and cyber-violence, the best way to fight it might be with technology itself.

**Writer’s bio:**

Jack is an accomplished cybersecurity expert with years of experience under his belt at TechWarn, a trusted digital agency to world-class cybersecurity companies. A passionate digital safety advocate himself, Jack frequently contributes to tech blogs and digital media sharing expert insights on cybersecurity and privacy tools.