Personal safety mobile phone applications: Just another way of responsibilising survivors of IPV, or a tool for empowerment?

A SURVIVOR’S VIEW!

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Mobile Phone Applications: Security & Personal Safety

Given societies reliance on mobile technologies, specifically ‘applications’, the potential of digital communications as a tool to assist in the reduction/prevention of experiences of DVA, appears a logical step forward/development & worthy of academic examination.
Technology & DVA

- Research focus is on ‘tech’ abuse to control partner
- Research reports state tech can also be used e.g. as a prevention tool
- Little on tech (specifically mobile PSA’s) & victim empowerment
  - Some have asked practitioners views

NB: All DVA involves Coercive Control

Today we consider intimate relationships
The CJS & The Problem with Risk

- Short termism approach: value for money = cheapest
- Historic funding shortfalls & place of specialist services in the ‘system’ not clear or protected. Only 1: 3 Local Authorities in E&W have a ‘specialist service’
- CJS at centre of Multi-agency responses’ - not at the centre of survivors lives’ - adopting a positivistic risk management ‘measurement’ model based on incidents (physical) which views victims as ‘them’ & different to ‘us’ thus ‘othering’ them
- Need to be ‘high risk’ before receiving an ‘intervention’ [Risk Thresholds also change!]
- Lack of formal evidence base = ‘policy based evidence’ not ‘evidence based policy’
- Recovery has become secondary (CJS not trauma informed); managing risk & supporting victims seen as the same; victims experience ‘job done delusion’ & labelled ‘intractable cases’ ‘hard to reach’ despite being ‘everyone’s business’ i.e. ‘all’ agencies, commissioners, providers, victims, activists, public – We should ask then whose side are we on? (Becker 1967)
Examples

International tech - beyond Anglophone

TecSOS: European: Utilised in London by Police for ‘high risk’ – (audible) data goes directly to Police Control Room **NB PHONE**

Brightsky App: Combined functions

Personal Safety Smartphone Apps: Abundance!

Alarm & Alerts - Discreet options

Sends whereabouts info/alerts ‘emergency contacts’

Secure server records video & sound or to a personal contact on phone (sentinel) - Some apps start as free then are at £ cost

Mapping locations
Responsibilisation

- Garland (2001): the victim (alongside other bodies & services) becomes part of ‘controlling’ or ‘preventing’ the crime
- Citizens ‘asked’ to utilise incentives for their own protection
  - Adjust routines & adopt decision-making processes
  - Become more risk aware
- Using tech e.g. mobile PSA’s as security tools?
- NB Stranger Danger Myth ALERT!
### Problems ???

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<th>Does becoming risk aware increase fear?</th>
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<td>- Might it create a backlash?</td>
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<th>Victim blaming - Increased responsibilising</th>
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<td>- It was something the victim did/did not do</td>
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| Victims find themselves increasingly burdened in the pursuit of justice (Davies 2015) |
Empowerment: Process not Outcome

“a process by which people, orgs & communities gain mastery over their affairs”

- Problems with use of ‘Empowerment’ terminology, e.g. should not be viewed as an outcome of services (often the case in DVA)… but as a process in which women themselves engage… [as] it’s through engaging in the process that survivors might gain a sense of control/mastery over their affairs.

- Process is different depending on individual characteristics & variations in context.

- We must ask…does tech (specifically PSA’s) operate as an empowerment or as a responsibilisation tool in the process?

Rappaport (1987)
Research Project & Objectives

Explore
Explore feelings (of safety, safety reassurance) & actual safety (reduction in repeats/increase in deterrence) perceptions of uptake (or not) & use of application

Identify
Identify ‘perceived’ strengths & weaknesses of this crime reduction (empowerment) tool by users e.g. increased use of features? accessibility, recorded use etc

Compare & contrast
Compare & contrast findings across demographic differentiations (e.g. gender)
Methodology

➢ SAMPLE
- 100* (adult) individuals - convenience sampling
- Standard/medium risk survivors known to 1 DVA specialist support organisation
  to include male survivors

➢ METHODS
- COMPLETED PILOT: scoping exercise with non-DVA victims
- COMPLETED INTERVIEWS: with professionals
- CURRENTLY COLLECTING DATA: QUESTIONNAIRES & individual face-to-face & phone/skype INTERVIEWS

Limited INTERSECTIONAL differentiation challenge = enabled extension of sample to further specialist providers
Some Themes from Preliminary Findings 1 of 2

➢ Problems with Technology?
➢ Problems With People?
➢ Space, Place & Context?

➢ Pilot
  - Gender data gap = a barrier
  - Preferred use of ‘other’ tools for personal safety
  - PSA’s seen as relevant (via marketing utilised) to some groups only
Some Themes from Preliminary Findings
2 of 2

- **Interviews**
  - Political drivers at play e.g. policy-based evidence
  - Lack of K&U of CC by some e.g. non stealth risk issue undermined
  - Lack of technical literacy unrecognised by some – assumptions made
  - Victim Blaming narratives: ‘victims *taking responsibility for their actions’*
  - Class, Rurality, BAME, Gender issues:
Moving Forward?

- Does PSA work as intended? What’s unintended? Do users feel empowered? Role-played?
  - Address design issues, barriers for engagement - intersectionality; beware Policy based evidence
- Develop K & U & acknowledge all DVA includes Coercive Control
- Accept you cant innovate away a complex issue like DVA & that change requires a ‘Whole systems approach’ beyond Risk!

Collaborate, because we have got a long way to go

Address Design issues & Gender data gap

Beware Policy based evidence

It’s a complex issue

Acknowledge how far we have come!
References

- Davies, P. (2015) Victims: continuing to carry the burden of justice British Society of Criminology Newsletter, No. 76