

The ways someone can use a dating app to harass or exert violence on another is very dynamic and comprehensive including both online and face to face abuse, pressure to send material, extortion, digital stalking, physical stalking, online facilitated child abuse, manipulation of users who have children to access their children. There is a wide net of opportunities for perpetrators, so it can look different depending on the complainant's experience.

Addressing dating app safety is multi-faceted when it's common for people to move off the dating app itself quickly – Exploring opportunities to bridge the gap between say tinder and snapchat or WhatsApp would help understand common behaviours when moving between platforms and risks that are then introduced along with potentially mapping perpetrator behaviour.

Dating apps are just one niche in many communication preferences, so addressing the problem at one point won't necessarily address the problem elsewhere, but the potential is that a good national standard for dating apps will lead to transforming the overall communications safety standard.

### **1. Understanding that safety strategies are not one size fits all;**

Some "safety features" might actually have the opposite effect. E.g., identity verification has the potential to inadvertently jeopardise the safety of some users such as those fleeing an abusive relationship, those with LGBTIQ+ status. Identity verification also isn't a compulsory feature of dating apps, and it's been shown that some of the verification systems can be "gamed" as well, so perpetrators could effectively pose as someone else using a profile of photos that have otherwise been 'verified' as a means to disarm someone into thinking they are someone else or doxing & harassing their ex-partner by posing as them in a dating site.

This is commonly known as catfishing, there is limited research into impacts on victims in an Australian context due to the shame often carried by the victims.

Some safety features, such as using AI to detect explicit photos are new advancements and this needs to be considered a priority as we consider future safe options for users on the platforms.

### **2. The risk in the "abusability" of the products;**

certain safety elements can and are manipulated to aid perpetration. Companies have to be aware of the potential for their products to cause harm and conduct adequate pilot testing and engage with users to address this prior to new products, features or updates being made publicly available.

This doesn't always occur. This could involve the photo verification process as well as the distance mapping. Some apps also make it easier to link your dating app profile and matches to other social media platforms, not necessarily dating ones, so the app itself is trying to be more "user friendly" but also just widening the net of potential ways a user can be stalked or harassed online. The blocking function on tinder would likely be used the same way; it's designed for people who might want to block a pest, but

- it doesn't help with perhaps the archiving of evidence and,
- can be used equally by perpetrators.

This usability effectively makes it easier to find matches on other platforms; Tinder offers a Facebook login which can lead to your facebook profile showing up as a suggested friend's option in matches who also use facebook as a sign in option.

Similarly, other App engagement strategies encourage and incentivise linking to personal social media accounts, as access to that data set is incredibly valuable for further marketing purpose.

### **3. Acknowledgment that this is an issue we need to address from multiple angles;**

There have long been calls for mandatory police/criminal record checks - this has become especially pronounced in the wake of the recent murder of Danielle Finlay-Jones, whose death could have been prevented through this mechanism. However - we must also recognise that the vast majority of perpetrators who exist in our society are unlikely to have a criminal history. For this reason, we need to work alongside industry to develop ways to disrupt ALL abuse. Along with developing a deeper understanding of who these perpetrators are and how they are using digital tools like dating apps to advance their agenda.