



Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence

Technology Safety Project

First Year Findings and Recommendations

November 2004

"I now have more knowledge on the subject. This taught me things I would never have thought about."

Survivor & Technology Safety Program Participant

In This Report

Overview: Provides a brief summary of the role technology plays in the lives of domestic and sexual violence survivors. This section explains how the Technology Safety Project evolved and states the goals of the project.

Project Methodology: Explains the evolution and thought process of creating a technology safety program that focuses on education, advocacy, and sustainability. Provides project evaluation methods and demographics on the first year's pilot sites.

What We Have Learned: A summary of information that emerged from this project.

Program Impact on DV/SA Agencies: Describes how domestic and sexual violence agencies have implemented safeguards to protect client records, electronic and otherwise.

Statewide Impact: Discusses the impact of technology safety training with advocates in domestic violence and sexual assault agencies statewide.

Recommendations: This section draws conclusions from the data submitted through the evaluations of both survivors and advocates as well as recommended future initiatives.

Policy Implications: Examines the need and possible future direction for policy advocacy and systems change.

Appendix: Questions and tabulated responses of the pre- and post-training evaluations.

Acknowledgements

A heartfelt thanks and sincere appreciation go to all the survivors and advocates who have taken the time and energy to share their experiences in the course of this project. It is through your voices that we hear the truth, it is through your courage that we continue to strive for effective change.

The collaboration with the Washington Coalition of Sexual Assault Programs and the Washington Violence Against Women Network has been instrumental in helping reach advocates across the state of Washington with technology safety information.

Overview

Technology in many forms is integrated into our everyday lives. Cell phones, computers, and Internet access provide the means to enhance our ability to connect with resources and support services in our own community and beyond. The benefits of having instant access to information is empowering. Technology is being used by domestic and sexual assault victims, survivors, and their advocates as a means to increase education and awareness of resources as well as enhance communication for support and safety. The resources that technology allows access to, however, can also be used as a way to control and stalk victims and survivors.

Educating advocates, survivors, and victims of domestic and sexual violence on the safe and strategic use of technology enhances safety planning, increases access to needed resources, and empowers individuals.

Through the national initiative *Safety Net: the National Safe & Strategic Technology Project* housed at the National Network to End Domestic Violence, state domestic violence and sexual assault agencies have been meeting to train, learn, and share how technology impacts survivors and agency records. As advocacy agencies, it is important to make sure our confidential records are safe and secure as well.

In a state heavily vested in technology, publicly and privately, the Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence envisioned a need to take technology safety to a new level. With a grant from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and support from Verizon Wireless, the Technology Safety Project was launched in January 2004. This three-year project has been instrumental in gathering information necessary to document the experiences of survivors in the information age. It is through survivors' voices that we better understand the challenges and issues faced as we continue to build an understanding of how access to resources can improve lives.

Project Goals

- Increase safe and meaningful computer and Internet access for domestic violence survivors in Washington.
- Reduce the risk posed by abusers by educating survivors about technology safety and privacy.
- Increase the ability of survivors to help themselves and their children through technology.
- Increase the security of client records and technology at battered women's programs, so that increased access does not mean increased risk.

This report is based on information provided by our Technology Safety Project pilot sites. The information is intended to enhance our level of understanding about the impact technology has on survivors and how we as advocates need to take an active role in educating ourselves, our colleagues, and those we advocate for.

Project Methodology

To educate and evaluate the needs of survivors on issues of technology benefits and risks, the Technology Safety Project utilizes a tiered approach. The project coordinator conducts trainings around the state for advocates, who are then able to instruct survivors and co-workers on safer uses of technology. Simultaneously, fifteen pilot sites around the state are being set up over three years (five per year) to provide an opportunity for agencies to offer greater technology access to survivors.

Technology used as a strategic tool is new to the work we do. Educating domestic and sexual violence advocates about the benefits and risks of technology to build a solid base of knowledge on the issues was critical to helping victims access needed resources and plan for their safety. To accomplish this, the Technology Safety Project partnered with the Washington Coalition of Sexual Assault Programs (WCSAP) and the Washington Violence Against Women Network (WAVAWnet). Trainings were provided in four different statewide locations, training over 140 advocates representing 64 domestic violence and sexual assault (DV/SA) programs.

For the purpose of selecting pilot sites, the project divided Washington State into three regions. While not equal in geographic size, the regions each contain approximately the same number of total DV/SA programs. Pilot sites were then solicited through an application process and evaluated on need, community resources, distance from major services, community economics, diversity, and staffing.

Access to technology is key to researching resources. Many agencies struggle to obtain computer equipment in their offices for staff use. To facilitate survivors' direct access to the Internet and other resources, each pilot site was provided with a computer, all-in-one printer/fax/scanner/copier, Internet access, additional phone line if necessary, and Microsoft Office Professional software. The agreement to become a pilot site stipulated that the computer was to be available primarily for survivors who access the agency's services and could not be connected to an internal office network for security reasons. The project budget provided for equipment, installation, additional computer support if needed, and Internet access for one year from the date of site installation.

Each site committed an existing staff member to be designated as the tech advocate. Tech advocates attended training at various statewide locations as well as one-on-one training with the Technology Safety Project Coordinator. Each tech advocate works directly with the project coordinator to increase participation and troubleshoot individual survivor needs when necessary. The tech advocate educates their staff, volunteers and survivors in their community on tech issues. They are the direct liaison for the project and are responsible for monthly reports to the project coordinator. Once all sites for the year have been chosen, the project coordinator works with each of them directly to determine the date of installation. Installation is staggered throughout the year to ensure that each project gets the necessary training, monitoring, and support needed to help integrate the project into the agency's current services.

Project Evaluation

Survivors were asked to voluntarily participate in a pre- and post-training evaluation to determine the change in their confidence level upon learning technology safety information. Twenty-one survivors took the pre-training evaluation and fifteen of those finished the post-training evaluation, resulting in 71% participation in completing the program.

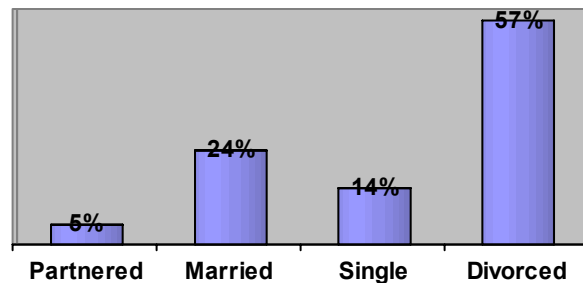
Advocates also fill out a monthly report on progress made with the program, any changes they need to make to accommodate participation, any additional support or training needs, how many survivors have accessed the resources and for how many hours the computer is utilized by individuals.

Advocates at our pilot sites have documented that collectively they have shared tech safety information with over 140 individuals in various settings from group discussions, staff meetings, volunteer trainings, and individuals in and out of shelter.

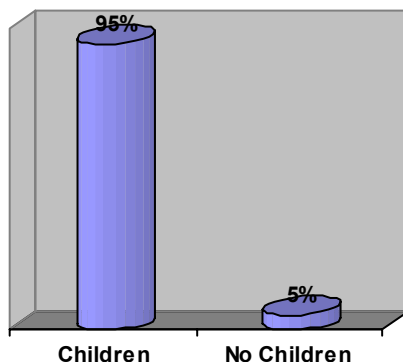
Demographics

Below is the demographic data collected from the pre-training evaluations. Please note that Eastern Washington counties included in first-year pilot sites had an 85% Caucasian population (U.S. Census Bureau, State and County QuickFacts, 2000).

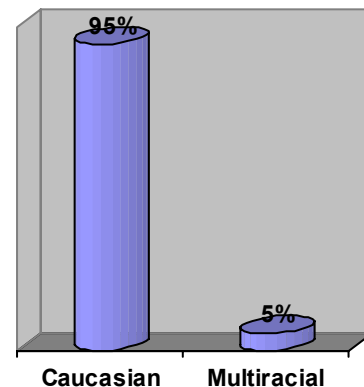
Personal Status



Clients With Children



Ethnicity



What We Have Learned

Survivor Comments:

Know how to protect my privacy.

I now have more knowledge on the subject.

This taught me things I would never have thought about.

Variety of safety plan was better result of this.

I feel better about communicating with my friends and family over email, also feel that I know more about cell phone technology and 911 cell phone use.

I know more about GPS and online stuff and also computer tracking software.

Survivors were asked to measure their comfort level when using the Internet, cell phones, cordless phones, email, protecting their privacy online, protecting their computers from viruses or spyware and using the computer to find resources such as employment, housing, and social services.

From the pre- and post-training evaluations taken by survivors after completing technology safety training at our first five pilot sites in 2004, the following themes emerged.

- Technology safety education for survivors is needed.
- Abusers stalk their victims through electronic means.
- Survivors felt more confident about using technology safely after completing the technology safety training.
- Survivors primarily access computers for personal use from home or a public library.
- Internet access plays a significant role for survivors in escaping abuse.
- Technology safety information helps survivors break out of isolation and get critical information.

Summary

A summary of the information that has emerged from this project is explained below (for the specific questions asked of participants and breakdown of responses, see Appendix on p. 11). Our recommendations that follow are based on these themes.

Technology safety education for survivors is needed.

When clients were asked what tips, skills or strategies were most helpful in a list that included safety when using cordless phones, cell phones, setting up email accounts, instant messenger, using the Internet and spyware, over 88% stated that all the technology discussed in the program needed to be shared with all survivors. This suggests that survivors see education on these issues as imperative to their overall safety. As technology advances, there will be a need for continued education on emerging technology and its use in stalking and tracking victims of violence.

Abusers stalk their victims through electronic means.

Over 50% of the participants stated that someone has sent them repeated emails that threatened, insulted or harassed them. Over 48% of survivors had their email account monitored, their Internet browser history checked and websites they visited monitored by their abuser.

Survivor Comments:

It certainly gives me something to think about and tell my friends about.

It made me more aware of risks involved in using email, instant messaging, etc. Also of the risks of using cell phones [as a tracking device by an abuser].

I know that it's helpful but can be dangerous.

I will be much more careful in the future if I get a computer at home.

I will learn more and be careful.

Now I'm interested in finding out more.

Well, now I'll be more aware of what's going on in my house.

Participants also reported someone impersonated them in a chat room, used their PIN or password to access private accounts and used their Social Security number or financial information to buy items online without their knowledge. These occurrences suggest that there is a need to help survivors document technology-related harassment, which may later be used as evidence in a legal proceeding against the abuser.

Survivors' confidence levels when using technology increased significantly. When survivors were asked to indicate their confidence level when using various forms of technology (such as cell phone, email, Internet), the pre-training evaluation indicated that more than 50% were not confident or a little confident. When asked the same question in the post-training evaluation, over 70% on average were more confident or really confident with using various forms of technology safely. This indicates that the information provided was relevant, timely and needed.

Survivors access computers at a variety of locations.

Our survey results showed that over 57% of the participants accessed the Internet or used a computer from either home and/or public library. Other access points were work and a community center. Over 43% accessed the computer at the domestic violence agency. This suggests a need to produce and provide information about technology safety at locations survivors may use technology.

Internet access plays a significant role for survivors in escaping abuse.

Connecting with resources is a key challenge for battered women. Participants indicated that Internet access played a significant role in their ability to reach their goals to:

- Learn tips for safer technology use.
- Research safety options/connect with other community services and resources.
- Learn new skills to share with their children.
- Look for housing.
- Look for a job.
- Learn job skills.

Technology safety information helps survivors break out of isolation and get critical information.

Survivors were asked what is better or different for them as a result of participating in the computer and technology safety program. The top responses were:

- Increased knowledge to make better choices and decisions.
- Better understand how to protect their privacy.
- Ability to safely connect with community resources and find housing and economic independence.
- Ability to safely communicate with family and friends.
- Learn new technology safety skills to teach their children.

Survivor Comments:

Much more awareness regarding the use/misuse of technology with stalking victims.

I know more about what to research for protecting my privacy.

I will be very careful when I receive my new computer & I will hook up my land line phone.

I definitely know more than before going through this presentation, but there was a lot to absorb.

More knowledgeable information, thanks!

I am now more aware of the dangers for victims of domestic violence when technology is used. They are not necessarily as safe as they think they are.

Program Impact on DV/SA Agencies

Client Electronic Record Safety

Each pilot site has also committed to keeping client records safe. To date, all five sites have implemented safeguards to insure increased access does not mean increased risk for their agency. Each agency has assessed their need for certain levels of security. Each agency has also evaluated their intake process and has reviewed their criteria to make sure private information is not collected, housed in databases or released.

Internal Agency Education

Our pilot sites have reported that even though training on a statewide level has opened the eyes of advocates who attend, not all advocates in their agency are confident that they can adequately talk about technology risks with their clients. In light of this, each site is providing technology training to internal staff and volunteers to help incorporate technology into safety planning with clients.

Training and Information Tools

The Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence has produced a training PowerPoint presentation called “**Survivors’ Guide to Technology Safety.**” This guide offers educational information and resources about benefits and risks of technology and offers privacy safety tips.

Through WAVAWnet (Washington Violence Against Women Network), 75 domestic violence and sexual assault agencies received a CD containing technology hand-out information, some translated into Spanish, to use at their agencies and to give to clients.

Statewide Impact

Statewide Impact Through Training

In collaboration with WAVAWnet, the Technology Safety Project has successfully trained approximately 140 advocates representing 64 domestic violence and/or sexual assault programs in Washington on technology benefits and risks. Evaluations of these trainings confirm that the information presented was useful and necessary to continue building advocates’ skills as they work with survivors.

Advocate comments on trainings:

- It made me realize how important it is to go over technology issues with my clients for their safety.
- The knowledge given and the hand-outs – I love the hand-outs!
- I know now how to help safety plan with victims.
- Everything I learned today is going to help me help my clients a lot more.
- Please, more trainings!

Recommendations

Survivors' stated experiences are the basis for these recommendations. It is through their voices that we can better understand what we as advocates need to do to help survivors make informed decisions about their safety.

We have concluded that:

- It is essential that domestic and sexual violence advocates talk with clients about technology safety. All survivors surveyed stated they were in some way being stalked and tracked through the use of technology. Each participant felt that it was vitally important that all survivors have access to technology safety information.
- It is imperative that we continue to work on issues of privacy to reduce the amount of personal information available to the public via the Internet and other electronic means that make it easy for victims to be tracked.
- Domestic and sexual violence agencies should consider integrating technology safety into their ongoing safety planning with clients. (Sample safety planning questions have been developed by the Technology Safety Project.)
- Local DV/SA agencies should work in collaboration with local authorities to document "electronic evidence" to potentially facilitate perpetrator accountability under Washington's 2004 cyberstalking law.
- As technology advances, advocates need continued education on new and emerging technology and its use in stalking and tracking victims of violence to help survivors stay one step ahead of their abusers.
- More work should be done with local libraries, computer labs, and employers to encourage them to provide hand-outs or information at access points to increase safety, privacy knowledge, and awareness of how individuals may be tracked through the use of technology.
- As communities we need to provide and support "safe places" for survivors to access resources and build skills needed to better their lives. Internet access plays a significant role in escaping abuse, breaking out of isolation, and helping survivors reach their goals of employment, education, housing, and access to other beneficial resources.
- More research is needed to determine the impact and implications that technology has on domestic and sexual violence victims. The Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence's Technology Safety Project is currently the only project that is working directly with battered women on technology benefits and risks.

Policy Implications

The collective experiences of the survivors who participated in this project point to several areas that should be addressed through policy changes.

The need for increased protection of victims' personal information.

The information age has made it very easy to track and stalk victims. Society's demand for immediate information also increases unintended, yet serious, consequences for victims of domestic and sexual violence. Victims who are trying to escape abuse face many barriers related directly to easy access of information via the Internet. Civil liberties are often forgone because the likelihood of being found is too great. Buying a house, voting, and seeking legal redress may not be options because these records are considered open to the public. More and more databases are being created or linked that house personal information. Survivors may not access vital services that "database" private and personal information out of fear of being found.

Provisions for DV/SA victims to opt out of public records need to be established.

To protect victims from being tracked and stalked as public records and databases continue to be accessed through the Internet or other electronic, unmonitored means, opting out of information collection should be established as a legal option. For example, currently only law enforcement officers are allowed to have their home address taken out of the public portion of the property tax database. Victims of domestic and sexual violence who can show cause should have accessible ways to exercise these options on the same basis.

Project Contact Information

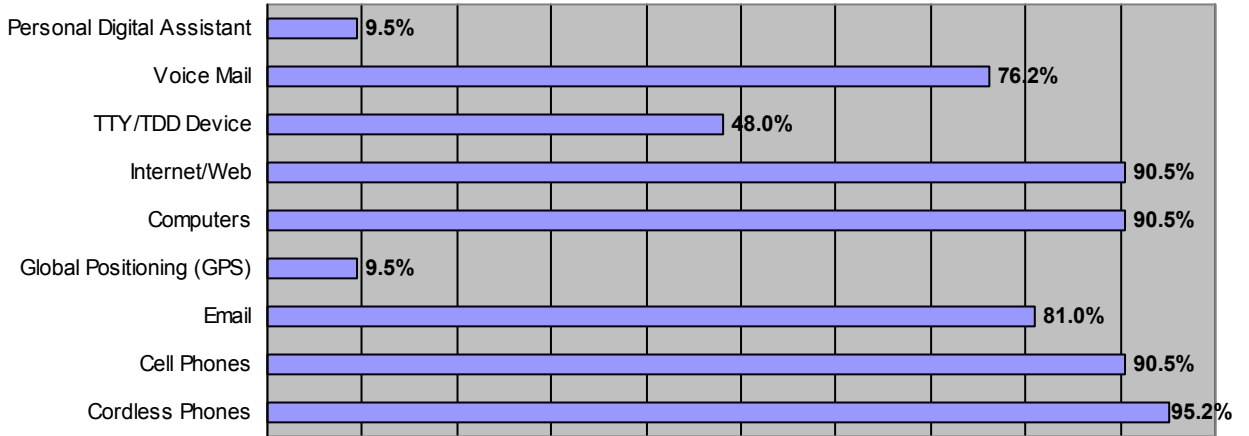
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Appendix—Evaluation Questions and Responses

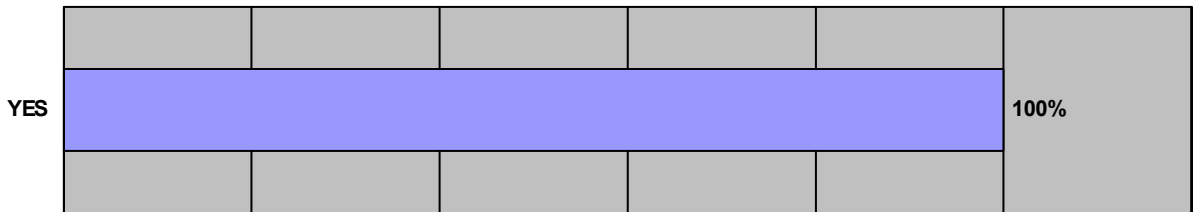
Pre-Training Evaluation Questions and Responses

Participants = 21

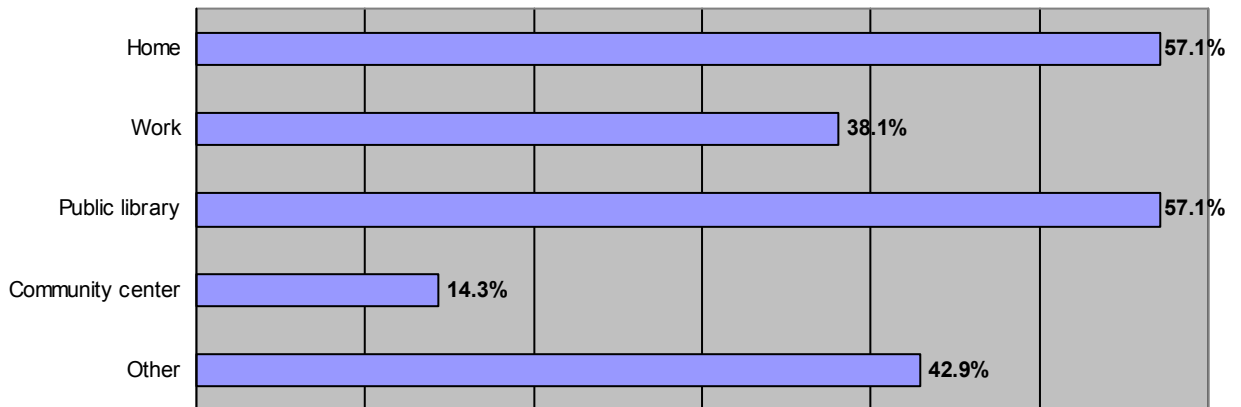
Please check all the technology you are comfortable using.



Do you have access to a computer or the Internet?



If you answered yes to the above question, please check one or more of the following options to tell us where you use the computer or Internet.



How confident are you at doing the following?

(1 = Not Confident; 2 = A Little Confident; 3 = Somewhat Confident; 4 = Quite Confident; 5 = Absolutely Confident)

	1	2	3	4	5
Sending an email without giving away your location	52%	10%	19%	10%	10%
Creating an anonymous email account not giving out your private information (Hotmail or Yahoo)	48%	14%	19%	10%	10%
Protecting your computer from viruses and hackers	38%	10%	33%	10%	10%
Protecting your privacy and personal information on the Internet or while using the computer	33%	24%	19%	10%	14%
Using the computer to communicate with friends and family	14%	10%	19%	14%	43%
Using the Internet to find a job or housing	33%	10%	24%	5%	29%

How important are the following reasons/goals for using the computer and Internet?

(1 = Not Important; 2 = A Little Important; 3 = Important; 4 = Very Important; 5 = Highly Important)

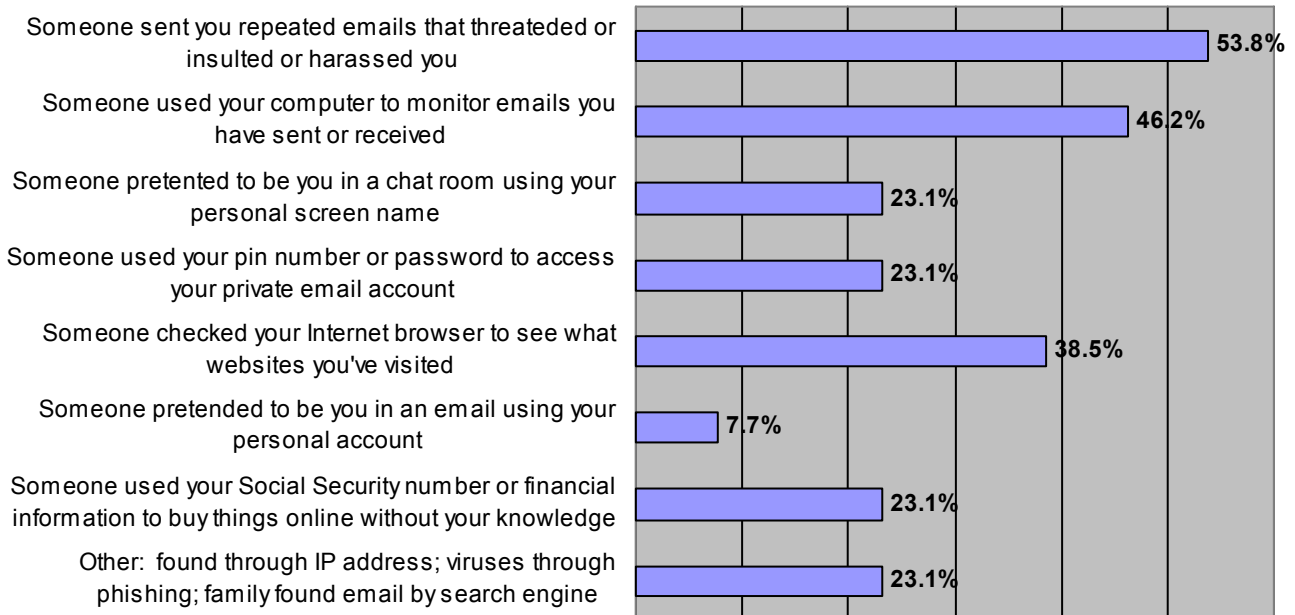
	1	2	3	4	5
Personal money management (online banking)	43%	5%	29%	5%	19%
Look for housing	10%	5%	38%	29%	19%
Look for a job	19%	10%	24%	29%	19%
Research safety options/connection with other community services	14%	0%	38%	19%	29%
Learn new skills to share with my children	10%	14%	29%	29%	19%
Learn new job skills	14%	5%	19%	38%	24%
Learn English	67%	5%	10%	5%	14%

How useful are the following in supporting you in accomplishing your goals?

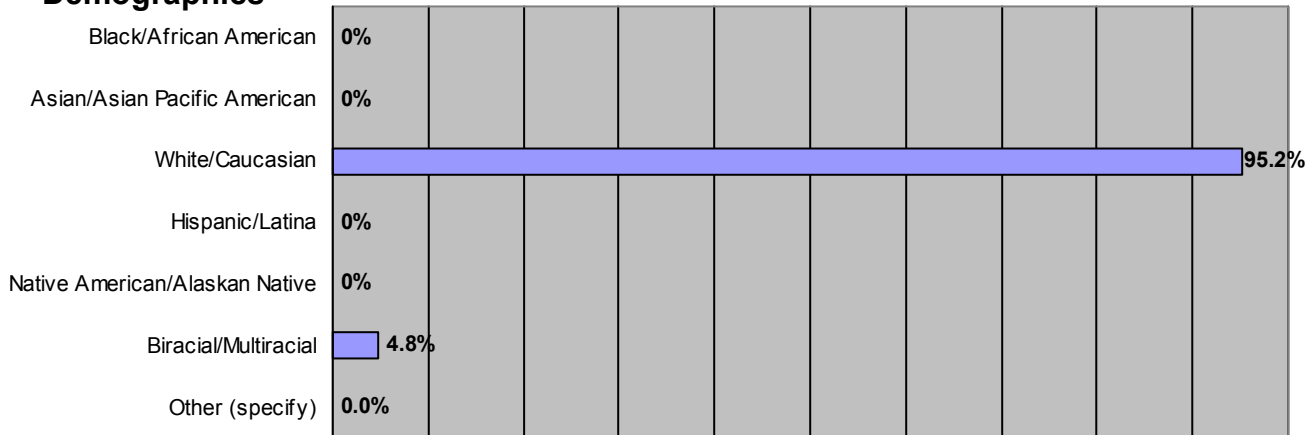
(1 = Not Useful; 2 = A Little Useful; 3 = Useful; 4 = Very Useful; 5 = Highly Useful)

	1	2	3	4	5
Provide tips on safer technology use	5%	5%	19%	5%	67%
Provide tips on computer and Internet use I can share with my children	14%	5%	24%	5%	52%
Provide a safe space for me to use the computer and Internet	0%	10%	14%	10%	67%
Provide education and training discussion about computers and Internet technology	0%	5%	19%	19%	57%

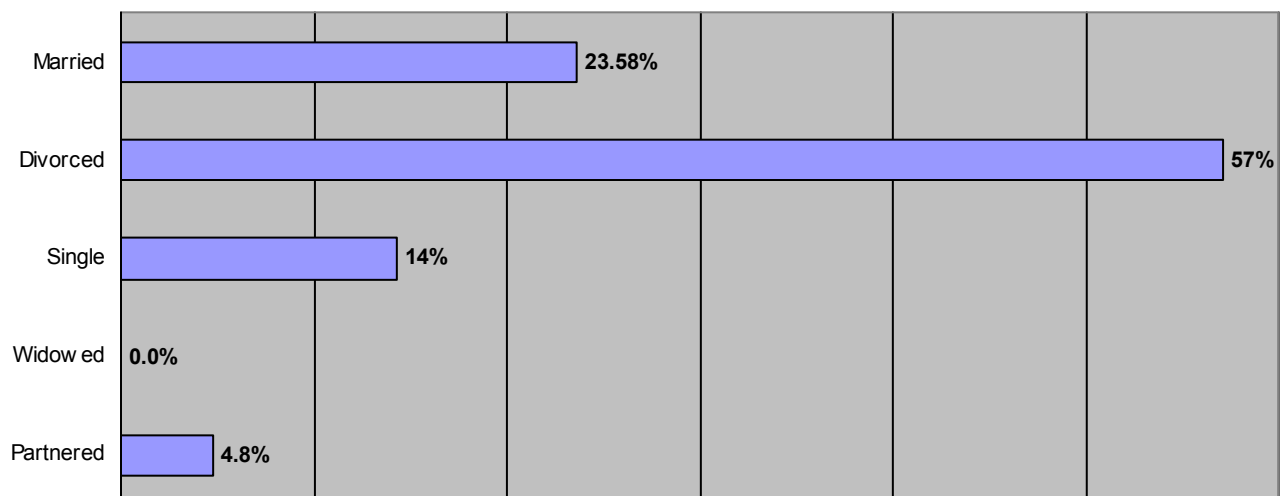
Have any of the following ever happened to you? (please check all that apply)



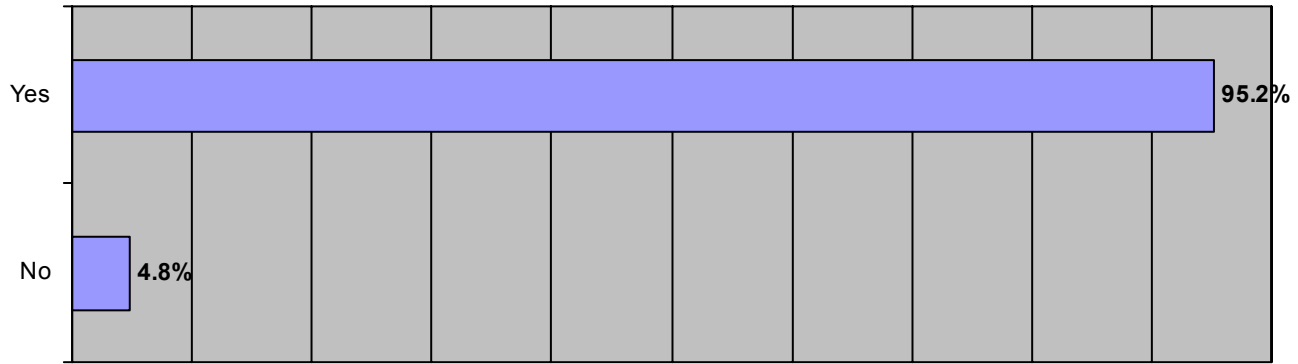
Demographics



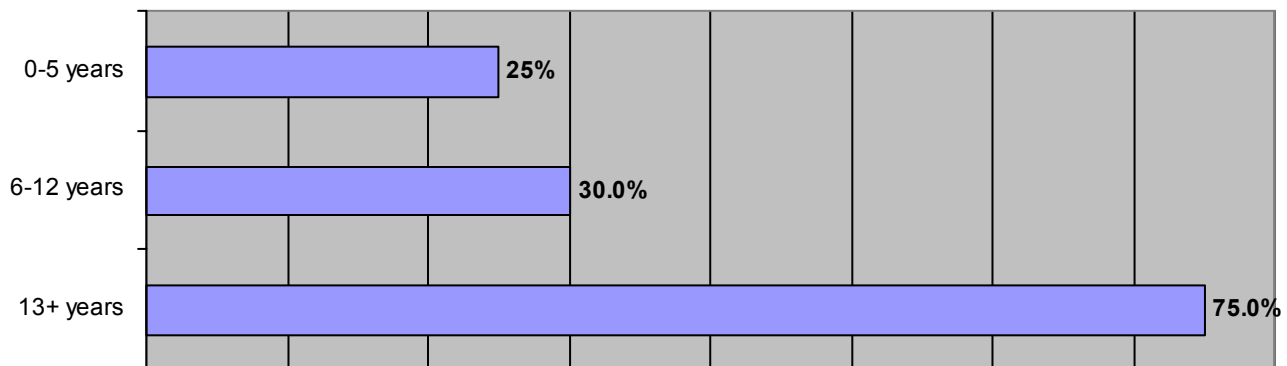
Marital Status



Do you have children? (includes biological, adopted or step-children)



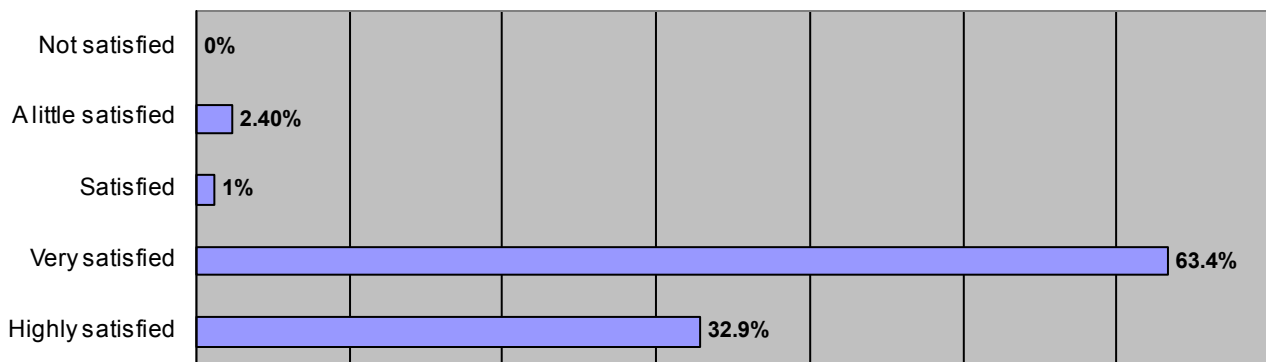
If yes, what are your children's ages?



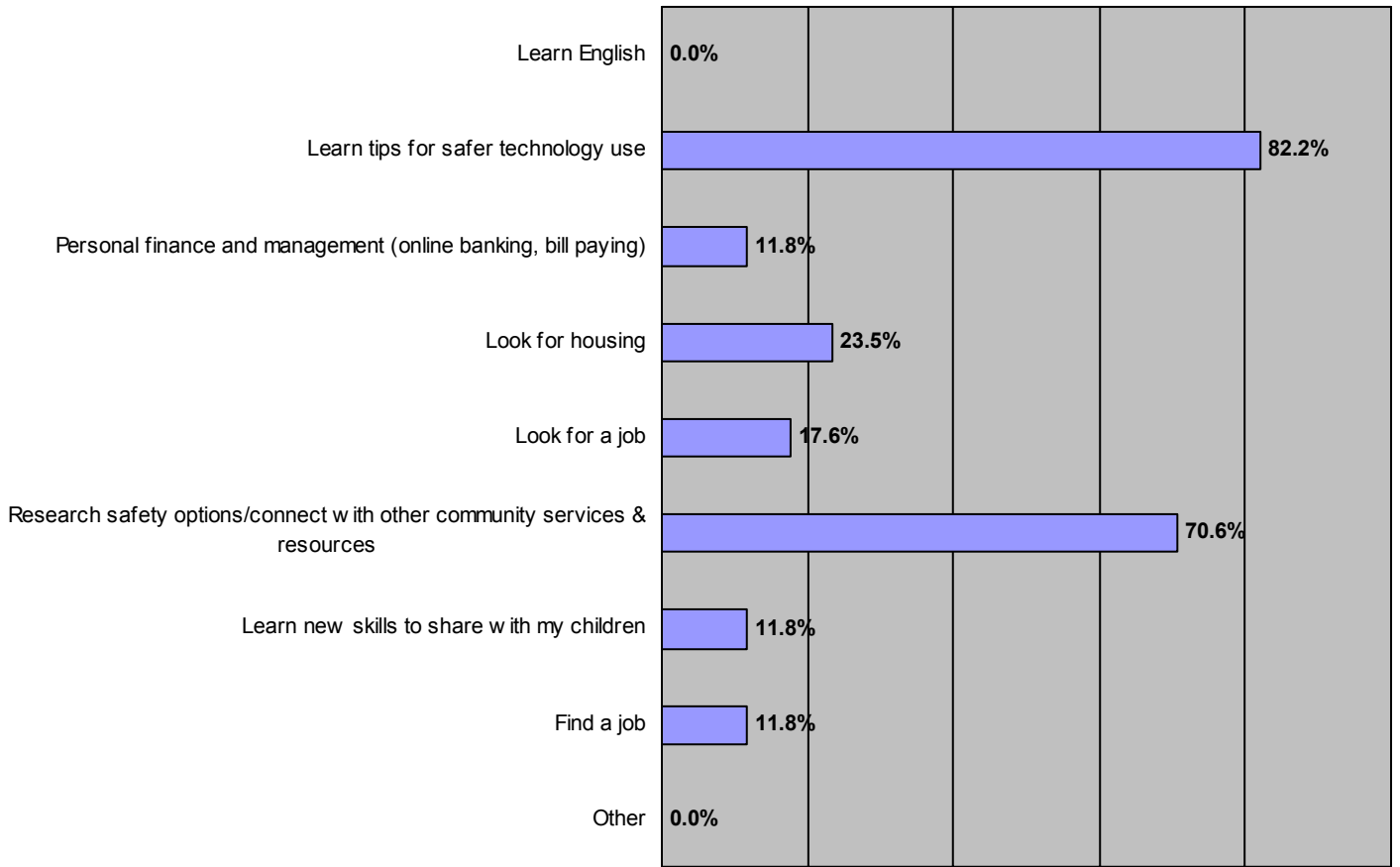
Post-Training Evaluation Questions and Responses

Participants = 15

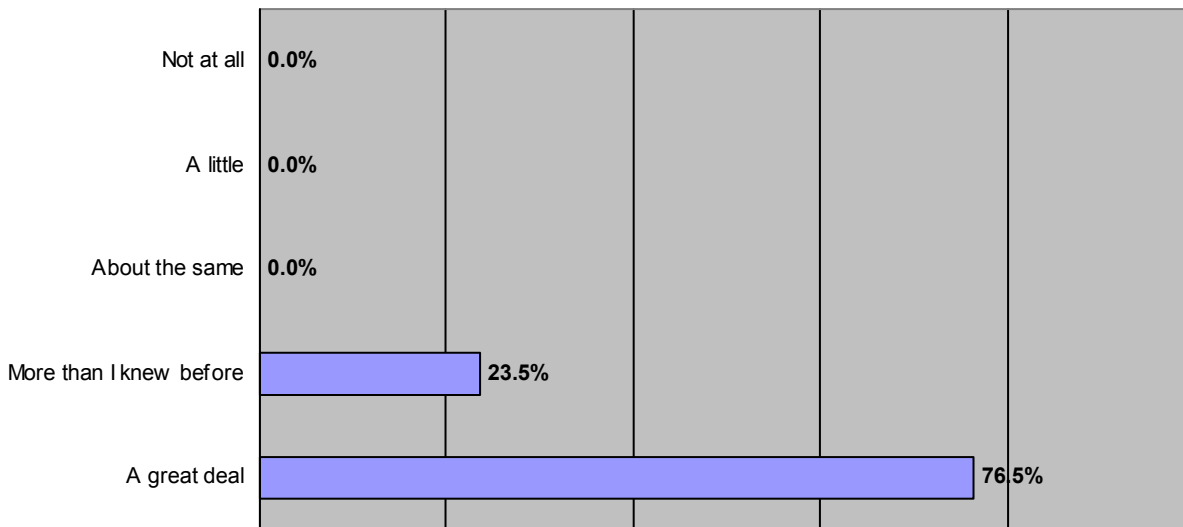
On the scale below, rate your overall experience with our computer technology training.



After completing the program, what goals did you make progress on? (check all that apply)



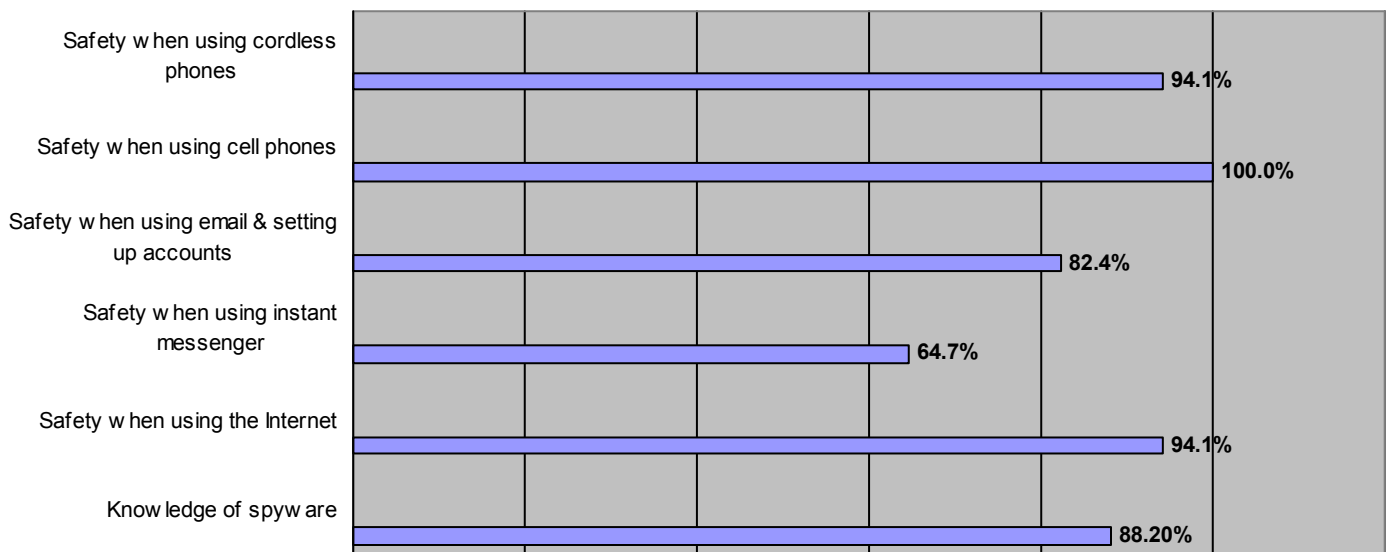
After completing the program, how much do you feel you have learned about how abusers/ partners may track your computer activities or Internet use?



**After completing the technology training, how confident are you at doing the following?
Please rate your comfort level on a scale of 1 to 5.**

	1 Not Comfortable	2 A Little Comfortable	3 Comfortable	4 More Comfortable	5 Really Comfortable
Sending an email without giving away your location	18%	12%	0%	47%	24%
Creating an anonymous email account not giving out your private information (Hotmail or Yahoo)	6%	12%	18%	47%	18%
Protecting your computer from viruses and hackers	12%	6%	6%	59%	18%
Sharing strategies or tips on the safer use of computers and Internet with children	0%	12%	24%	41%	24%
Protecting your privacy and personal information on the Internet or while using the computer	12%	0%	12%	59%	18%
Using the computer to communicate with friends and family	6%	6%	12%	53%	24%
Using the Internet to find a job or housing	24%	6%	6%	47%	18%

Check the following tips, skills or strategies that were most helpful to you. (check all that apply)



What areas of technology do you think survivors and victims need to receive more information about? (check all that apply)

