

Government report on smart devices enabling domestic violence

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The U.K. government's report this week into how smart technology and connected devices are increasingly facilitating domestic abuse was underpinned by evidence submitted by academics in the REPHRAIN

research center, including the School of Management's Professor David Ellis.

The REPHRAIN National Research Center on Privacy, Harm Reduction and Adversarial Influence Online was formed in 2020 to help protect people from online harm. Researchers from the University of Bath joined a team of experts in computer science, law, psychology and criminology from the Universities of Bristol, Edinburgh, King's College London and University College London (UCL).

The Culture, Media and Sport Committee's report, "[Connect Tech: Smart or Sinister](#)," warned of risks and harms associated with such technology, including a loss of privacy, online safety concerns and broadening patterns of [domestic abuse](#). It also called for more to be done to protect the privacy and rights of children, with [young people](#) increasingly likely to interact with connected technology.

"While connected technology, such as smart speakers, virtual assistants and wearable fitness trackers can have demonstrable benefits, they also bring potential harms including the use of spyware whereby perpetrators can monitor movements and collect recordings and images of victims and survivors," said Professor Ellis.

"I am pleased to have played a part in REPHRAIN's contributions, which are acknowledged throughout the government report. The report contains multiple [policy recommendations](#), with a special focus on security and privacy for individuals and groups. We expect that this discussion will continue after the summer recess of Parliament," said Professor Ellis.

The committee launched its inquiry in May last year to consider both the potential benefit and harms of connected technology, such as smart speakers, virtual assistants and wearable fitness trackers. Government

figures state that there are on average nine connected devices in every household in the U.K., while by 2050 there will be 24 billion interconnected devices worldwide.

On tech abuse, the committee heard evidence that the vast majority of domestic abuse cases now feature some sort of cyber element, including the use of spyware, and perpetrators monitoring movements and collecting recordings and images of victims and survivors.

The report calls on the government to improve the skills of law enforcement and the response of the criminal justice system, while boosting awareness of specialist services tackling violence against women and girls. Manufacturers and distributors also need to be brought together to mitigate risks through product design.

Provided by University of Bath

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