PIU Case study: Gender and IoT

'Gender and IoT' (GIoT) is an interdisciplinary research project exploring the implications of smart, Internet-connected devices – so-called the Internet of Things (IoT) systems on gender-based domestic violence and abuse.

The PIU were approached in May 2018 to work with the GIoT team. They had produced policy relevant research, but required support to identify and act on opportunities to engage with policy makers. Between May 2018 and September 2019, the PIU worked closely with the research team to help them generate real policy impact. Activities have ranged from identifying and arranging meetings with key civil servants, to producing policy briefings and drafting responses to Government consultations.

As a direct result of working with the PIU, the GIoT team developed relationships with key policy stakeholders, which led to the team's participation in a Ministerial roundtable and ongoing regular meetings with officials working on upcoming legislation. Engagement with MPs led to IoT and domestic abuse being raised in Parliament. Their research received extensive media coverage, which helped to raise public awareness. This activity can be a crucial step to achieving policy change over a longer timeframe.

The GIoT project

The GIoT team is led by Dr Leonie Tanczer and based in UCL's department for Science, Technology, Engineering and Public Policy (STEaPP) and UCL Computer Science. It was established to research the evolving privacy and security risks associated with the Internet of Things (IoT) in the context of domestic violence and abuse. The team included Dr Simon Parkin, Dr Trupti Patel, Professor George Danezis and Isobel Lopez-Neira.

The GIoT project set out to answer the question: how will the IoT impact gender-based domestic violence and abuse and how do we reduce these risks? The UK Government plans to introduce new legislation on domestic abuse and new proposals for online safety measures offered a real opportunity for the research to influence policy. More information about the GIoT project can be found on the project website.

GIoT collaboration with the PIU

The GIoT team wanted to share their insights with the policy field, but were unsure how to go about this. Like many other researchers, they lacked contacts in the policy community and did not have the required time in their work schedules to carry out effective policy engagement, nor to consider the design of a comprehensive engagement strategy.

The PIU was able to help GIoT researchers understand the policy landscape and identify stakeholders and opportunities for engagement. This initial planning and scoping phase carried out by the PIU on all projects made policy impact much more achievable. Part of this work was to recognise where research findings aligned with questions being asked by policy makers and ongoing topics of scrutiny in Parliament and Government.

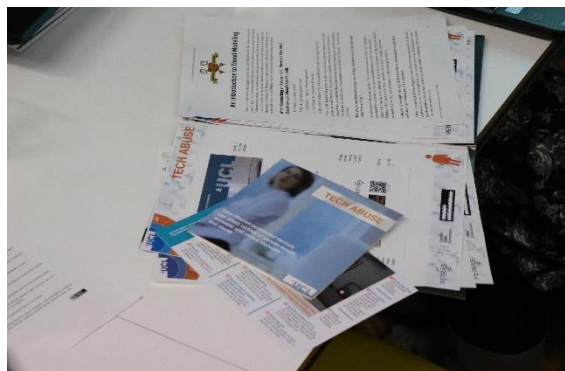For GIoT, this phase enabled the PIU to agree on two impact goals for further policy engagement.

Selection of materials from the Gender-IoT project.

These were:

1. **To increase awareness of the growing risk of IoT tech-abuse among the policy community**
2. **For the GIoT's recommendations for tackling IoT tech-abuse to be incorporated into domestic abuse and cyber security policy and practice**

Jenny Bird, Public Policy Manager for the PIU said *"The PIU developed two clear impact goals to guide the engagement activities. However, we allowed a degree of flexibility in planning the specific activities. The policy making process is complex and the success of policy engagement work depends on a number of factors, including the external environment, interests and priorities of individual policy makers. While some of our policy engagement activities were planned months in advance, others were reactive to respond to these external factors."*

The PIU developed a programme of activities that were designed to contribute to the two impact goals. This included producing a short briefing and disseminating it to parliamentarians and civil servants. The PIU also arranged meetings for the GIoT team with officials working in the Home Office and the Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS) to provide an opportunity for the researchers to ensure the outcomes of their work were targeted to the policy audience they wished to advise.

You created a plan and strategy, and a timeline of when to intervene and where. You were really good at setting deadlines and reminders for me, and at following things up. You provided the full package, from start to finish of the project.
Dr Leonie Tanczer, Principal Investigator

By monitoring the policy landscape, the PIU identified opportunities for GIoT researchers to input to the Domestic Abuse Bill and the Online Harms White Paper via public consultation and offered support in drafting and submitting responses.

GIoT policy impact achievements

The PIU developed a communications strategy to help promote GIoT research to a wider audience and draw on the high levels of public attention the research project was receiving. As a direct result of the PIU's dissemination and engagement activities, Dr Tanczer was invited to meet with several senior policy makers, including the Secretary of State for DCMS (Jeremy Wright) and Minister for Digital and the Creative Industries (Margot James). Dr Tanczer, Dr Patel, Dr Parkin and Isobel Lopez also met an Adviser to the Ministry of Justice and have since had engagement with officials such as the National Cyber Security Centre and industry representatives.

The activities undertaken by the PIU, including the dissemination of a short briefing, delivered several impacts listed below. A complete list of actions undertaken by the PIU is detailed in the Annex.

Dr Tanczer at a meeting with the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport.

- Following a direct communication from the PIU on behalf of the GIoT team, Darren Jones MP raised the issue of smart-homes and domestic abuse in a Parliamentary question.[1]
- After being contacted by the PIU, several MPs wished to understand the implications of the research work, offering a pathway to impact as the Domestic Abuse Bill passes through the Houses of Commons and Lords and MPs are able to amend the legislation.
- Dr Tanczer's research was cited in a POSTnote[2] on Cyber Security of Consumer Devices.
- Dr Tanczer was interviewed by the Sunday Times for an article featuring a reproduction of the PIU short briefing. Subsequent coverage in national and international news outlets have enabled the research findings to reach an even wider audience with opportunities to raise the public profile of technology-facilitated abuse, which in turn can lead policy makers to act.

Conclusion and plans for future policy impact work

The PIU and the GIoT team have made significant progress towards the first goal, which is to increase awareness of the growing risk of tech-abuse. The rapidly changing external environment (including a change of Prime Minister and cabinet reshuffle, continuing political uncertainty and domination of Brexit in policy debate) means that continuing engagement work is necessary to ensure the goals are fully met. Dr Tanczer told us that *"the difficult thing about policy work is the effort, it's a bit like wading through mud – it's tiresome. But the PIU provides the energy to keep going!"*

The legislative process for the Domestic Abuse Bill and Online Harms policy are ongoing, so it is too early to know to what extent our efforts will lead to change (our second goal). However, we will continue to seek opportunities to engage with these Bills as they progress through parliament.

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[1] Written and oral questions are a mechanism by which Members of Parliament ask government ministers for information on the work, policy and activities of government departments.
[2] POST notes are four-page summaries of public policy issues produced by the Parliamentary Office for Science and Technology.

Perhaps most importantly, relationships have been established between the research team and policy officials working on domestic abuse and online harms in DCMS, the Home Office, NCSC and other relevant departments. This creates an ongoing channel for GIoT research outputs to reach the right people, as the aforementioned policies are implemented. These relationships will also help to inform and direct the team's future work. Finally, the work undertaken by the research team will contribute to a case study to be submitted by UCL to REF 2021.

Interested in working with the Policy Impact Unit?

Meet with our team to discuss how we can help. Contact Jenny Bird, Public Policy Manager, at jenny.bird@ucl.ac.uk or visit our website for further information.

Without the PIU, the Gender-IoT project would have only spoken to an academic audience. It has evolved into something that I never thought it could be. Alongside other UCL services, it has bolstered the capacity of the project to reach communities that I wouldn't have otherwise. Working with the PIU has made a difference simply by the fact that the PIU know how to reach people: they know the people and understand who to contact. Their experience in the field is invaluable.

Working with the PIU has improved the way I communicate messages in general. I simplify things now to a level that is easily understandable for an audience that has previously not encountered my work.
Dr Leonie Tanczer, Principal Investigator

Annex: List of PIU activities

- Identified relevant consultations (listed below) and supported with drafting and submissions.

  - Government Consultation on the draft Domestic Abuse Bill, May 2018
  - House of Commons Home Affairs Committee inquiry on domestic abuse, July 2018
  - Joint Committee on Human Rights pre-legislative scrutiny on the Draft Domestic Abuse Bill, March 2019
  - Government Online Harms White Paper consultation, July 2019.
- Conducted a stakeholder mapping exercise to identify key stakeholders and made initial contact.
- Produced a short briefing on tech-abuse to communicate research findings to a policy audience.
- Disseminated research findings to key stakeholders from parliament and Government.
- Provided oral and written briefings with researchers ahead of meetings with politicians and officials.
- Identified opportunities to engage with the media and submitted pitches to media outlets.
- Provided support to research team for events (such as suggesting invitees and speakers).

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