Mobile Spyware Use In Domestic Violence Ramps Up

from the following-the-nsa's-example dept

We recently wrote about the emergence of NSA-like spying platforms for mobile devices. Ostensibly designed and marketed for worried mothers and/or employers to monitor their children and/or employees, reports instead indicate a more nefarious use employed by jealous men and women looking to spy on their would-be significant others. In other words, technology somewhat similar to what the NSA employs generally is being used quite specifically by the unhinged, who appear to have taken our spy agencies' example to heart.

If some recent reports are to be believed, most of us have probably underestimated the problem instead of blowing it out of proportion.

MobiStealth, the product that received such rave reviews online, was used by convicted murderer Simon Gittany to read his girlfriend Lisa Harnum's text messages, one of several forms of control and surveillance he subjected her to. The product's website encourages potential buyers to "get the answers you deserve". When Gittany learned of Ms Harnum's plan to escape the abusive relationship in July 2011, he threw her off the balcony of their 15th-floor Sydney apartment.

Down Under, at least, it would appear this wasn't an isolated incident.

In a Victorian study last year, 97 per cent of domestic violence workers reported that perpetrators were using mobile technologies to monitor and harass women in domestic situations. Two-thirds of the 46 victims interviewed said they were made to feel like they were being watched or tracked, yet less than half told somebody about it.

While that first number is certainly shocking, I'm actually far more intrigued by the second set of statistics. Less than half of domestic violence victims who felt like they were being tracked on their mobile devices didn't say anything to anyone? This reeks of resignation when what might be needed most is a good dose of recalcitrance. While it may be difficult to directly point the blame for these domestic violence perps at intrusively spying government agencies, I wonder if the same could be said for the victims' reluctance to do anything about being spied on. If we have to accept a world in which our own governments, or foreign governments, are going to spy on us, perhaps it makes us less likely to push back against spying that is of a domestic nature?

I'm not sure, but the way this technology is progressing and the price at which it is offered likely means that stories for this kind of thing are in their infancy stages.

Mobile phone spyware costs as little as $6 a month and needs to be installed physically on a phone once for it to operate without the owner's knowledge. Shane Johnson, a spokesman for Sydney company Spousebusters, said it sold "hundreds" of GPS trackers, hidden cameras, listening bugs and spyware programs a year. The company asks no questions of purchasers and takes no responsibility for people using legal products to commit illegal acts.

And the perps can claim all along they're only following the NSA's example? Oh, this should work out well...