A Digital Safety Dilemma:

Computer-Mediated Computer Security Interventions for Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) During COVID-19

Emily Tseng, Diana Freed, Kristen Engel, Thomas Ristenpart, Nicola Dell

et397 [at] cornell [dot] edu

Intimate Partner Violence (IPV)

physical, verbal, emotional, economic or sexual abuse,
incl. harassment or stalking, by a current or former significant other

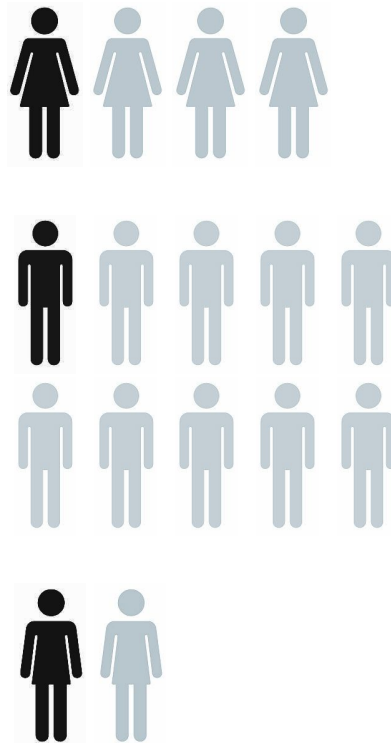In the U.S., **1 in 4 women** and **1 in 10 men** experiences IPV.

(CDC's 2015 National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey)

For the transgender community, the rate is **1 in 2**.

(National Center for Transgender Equality's 2015 US Transgender Survey)

Abusers use digital technologies to harm their victims,
because existing computer security frameworks
fail to account for the IPV threat model.

Dimond et al. '11, Woodlock et al. '16, Matthews et al. '17, Freed et al. '17, '18,
Tseng et al. '20, Bellini et al. '20, Levy & Schneier '20

Computer security experts are an important link in the chain of resources for IPV victims.
clinical computer security, Havron et al. '19, Freed et al. '19

Following pandemic lockdown protocols, NYC's Family Justice Centers (FJCs) closed in-person operations in March of 2020.

Reports show a **~10% increase in domestic violence incidents** nationwide.
(NCCCJ's March 2021 Impact Report: COVID-19 and Domestic Violence Trends)

*How can we best support clients **remotely**, connecting via the very devices that may be surveilled?*

Our methodology

Reflexive and *reflective* qualitative research

24 consults with survivors, held March - September 2020

5 focus groups with consultants who delivered them

- All participants consented to release their data for research

- Quotes in the paper are paraphrased and stripped of identifying details

- Each of the authors volunteers in the clinic; 4 of the 5 participated in at least one focus group

Our contribution

3 key challenges for providing computer security assistance to IPV survivors over computer-mediated communication

Ensuring safety	Assessing device security remotely	Handling new forms of labor, including emotional labor

Computer security support systems for IPV survivors must address these challenges

Looking ahead

Addressing these tensions will help us serve IPV victims through the rest of this pandemic, and beyond

Balancing efficiency against safety

Enabling clients without overly burdening them

Rewarding emotional labor as well as we reward technical work

*A **flexible** and **pluralistic** service meeting survivors where they are*

A Digital Safety Dilemma: bit.ly/ipv-covid-safety

Computer-Mediated Computer Security Interventions for Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) During COVID-19

Emily Tseng, Diana Freed, Kristen Engel, Thomas Ristenpart, Nicola Dell

et397 [at] cornell [dot] edu