

Chloe Alff, Matthew Gates, Jonathan Lin, James Oblitas, & Marianne Yamazaki Dorr  
ENGR110: Team 5

9 May 2023

### Week 7 Deliverable: Reflection 2

Safechat Silicon Valley (SV) is an organization with an online chatting platform dedicated to connecting individuals experiencing domestic violence and/or partner violence to resources and support. Therefore, the organization is centered around the nationwide issue of domestic violence and abuse within relationships. Many organizations exist throughout the country that address the growing concern of safety within relationships as a result of poor regulation by the United States government. Currently, there are three cornerstone federal policies addressing sexual and domestic violence: 1.) the Family Violence and Prevention Services Act (FVPSA), 2.) the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), and the Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) (Public Policy & Advocacy, n.d.). While these three federal acts lay the foundation for the protection of individuals, mainly women, in relationships, they do not fully implement proper protection for all people throughout the country.

The main issue behind the United States' protection of women from domestic violence is that the federal government leaves the discretion of implementation to the states. One issue that has gained attention in the past years is the abuse of firearms within the home. In 1994, under the VAWA, the federal Domestic Violence Firearms Laws (DVFLs) were passed that restricted persons subject to domestic violence restraining orders from possessing firearms after a Michigan woman - who had brought her concerns previously to the court of her concerns of her husband's purchase - and child were shot by her spouse (Schiller, 2023). While this law was a tremendous win for safety in relationships, only 28 states have emplaced the DVFLs.

Because of the strong disconnect between the federal government and the public, it is extremely difficult for the government to administer programs for domestic violence. Therefore, many states have attempted to attend to the issue through funding and grants. For example, SafeChat SV's home state of California's Office of Violence Against Women (OVW) issues grants annually under the authorization of the VAWA. There are two main forms of the grants. First is the Discretionary Grant where the OVW is subject to creating the aptitudes and outputs yearly. Next, the Formula Grant is created by the VAWA and must follow the parameters created by the federal government (OVW Grants and Programs, 2014). In 2022, California administered \$13 million in grants to 46 community-based prevention organizations throughout the state. Also, the California Governor's Office of Emergency Services (Cal OES) granted an additional \$20 million to organizations through the Human Trafficking Victim Assistance Program (Cal OES News, 2022). While this funding is a great step in the right direction, California is one of the few states attempting to address the nationwide issue of domestic violence.

Organizations that receive federal funding and grants have several rules they must abide by to maintain their status and remain within the funding pool. Under FVPSA (The Family Violence Prevention and Services Act) and VAWA (Violence Against Women Act) the disclosure of any personal information about their users to a third-party source is not allowed. It is their mission to ensure women are protected and that women seeking help are not fearful of reaching out for help. In the early stages of our product, our group thought it would be useful to obtain some success stories about users who found SafeChat to be beneficial to their recovery, safety, or education surrounding domestic violence. When this was mentioned to SafeChat, it was met with some hesitancy as they knew getting this information would require extensive approval in writing from the individual themselves in order to not violate VAWA or FVPSA. That being said, it is still a possibility but one that would be slightly more challenging to

complete (especially given the time constraints of this quarter). It is for that reason that more focus was put on advertising for red flags to catch people's attention. Although the regulations put in place by VAWA and FVPSA are straightforward to protect victims, there actually is more to the story. A big reason these regulations are put in place is so that undocumented immigrant victims cannot have their testimonies used in court to prove their undocumented status (Legal Momentum). This is done in order to ensure that organizations cannot be obligated to put their users at risk and potentially be responsible for their user's legal trouble with regard to deportation. The only caveat exists in a case of child abuse or neglect. In this case, confidentiality can be overturned in a court of law in order to gain access to specific information for the child's safety and well-being.

Organizations like SafeChat Silicon Valley are essential in addressing the pervasive issue of domestic violence and partner abuse. They provide a vital platform for connecting individuals experiencing such violence with the necessary resources and support. As we explained the federal government faces challenges in administering comprehensive programs to effectively combat domestic violence. In the absence of sufficient federal support, organizations like SafeChat SV step in to fill the void by offering crucial assistance to individuals in need, playing an essential role in addressing and mitigating domestic violence on a nationwide scale. The locality of Silicon Valley allows for a more in-depth assistance program geared toward the individuals who live in the area. It also allows them to get help quicker than relying on federal and state agencies which have more people to serve.

## References

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