

## Helping Victims of Domestic Abuse

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### **What world problem are you concerned about?**

The high rate of domestic abuse victims.

### **What is one statistic or quote showing that this is a major problem? (Be sure to cite your source.)**

According to the CDC, 10.6% of study participants were victims of emotional abuse, 28.3% victims of physical abuse, and 20.7% were victims of sexual abuse as children.<sup>[1]</sup> According to the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, 1 in 3 women and 1 in 4 men will be victims of physical violence by a partner at some point in their life.<sup>[2]</sup> Nearly half of all men and women in the US have experienced mental/emotional abuse (48.4% women and 48.8% men)<sup>[3]</sup>

### **What is one anecdote about how this problem might possibly play out in real life for somebody?**

A person, regardless of age or gender, could be in a relationship with an abusive partner, or be living with an abusive person, such as a parent or sibling.

### **Within this world problem, what is one subproblem that bothers you?**

Some victims of abuse are unable to leave their abuser, whether that be for financial reasons, fear for their or another's safety, belief that the abuser will change, love for the abuser, or some other form of mental/emotional/physical ties to their abuser.

### **What is one quote illustrating that this subproblem is important?**

"For someone who has never experienced domestic violence, the question of why a victim stays with an abusive partner can be very difficult to understand. There are many reasons why it might be hard to leave an abusive relationship."<sup>[4]</sup>

### **What is one anecdote about how this subproblem might possibly play out in real life for somebody?**

A person could feel compelled to stay in an abusive relationship because they or their children have been threatened if they do leave.

### **What is a second anecdote about how this subproblem might possibly play out in real life?**

A person may stay with an abuser because they lack financial independence; they either don't have the funds, or they lack job skills that could provide them with funds.

### **What is one possible software system that could help to solve this problem?**

A website that connects abuse victims to the resources needed to escape from their abusive relationships.

### **What are the three most important features that this helpful software system should have?**

A means of reporting abuse, a forum for abuse victims to use to communicate with other abuse victims, counselors, social workers, and employment specialists, and the default function of not showing up in a computer's browser history.

**For the 1st of these three features, why is this feature important?**

For a number of reasons, a victim may not be able to report abuse through other means. Their abuser may restrict phone access, the victim may be ashamed to confide in another person (such as a student being ashamed to tell a teacher or a wife too embarrassed to tell her pastor that they are the victim of abuse), or they may be afraid of the potential consequences that could happen by making a report in person.

**What is some sort of hypothetical example about how a person would use the 1st feature?**

A child/teenager could be abused by one or both of their parents, but be embarrassed, afraid or otherwise unwilling to tell a teacher or other trusted person about it. They could then report online to get the assistance from DHS, CPS and law-enforcement that they need.

**For the 2nd of these three features, why is this feature important?**

It's important that there is a support structure in place for victims; escaping from abusive relationships is not an easy thing to do, and victims need encouragement to leave and to stay gone; the people most qualified to do this are counselors and other abuse victims.

**What is some sort of hypothetical example about how a person would use the 2nd feature?**

A person may have left their abuser, but for emotional reasons want to return; having friends to support them in staying away would make this easier by helping them to not feel isolated after leaving.

**For the 3rd of these three features, why is this feature important?**

If an abuser becomes aware that their victim was considering leaving the relationship or otherwise seeking help, the victim is at a much higher risk than at any other time of the relationship. 75% of domestic homicides happen when the victim is leaving the relationship.<sup>[5]</sup>

**What is some sort of hypothetical example about how a person would use the 3rd feature?**

The abuser may check the browser history of the abuse victim; if they saw that their victim was seeking out assistance, this could put the abuse victim at risk. By having the website remove itself from a computer's browsing history, the victim does not need to be concerned about this happening.

**Which of these three features is most important?**

The most important would be the website clearing itself from a computer's browser history; as said above, a person is most at risk of homicide when they are leaving the relationship; this should be prevented.

**Which is least important/optional? Why?**

The second feature would be least important; while being able to seek out help and support with the relative anonymity of the internet would be very helpful for a number of people, it would be more important for people to have the ability to file reports online; many people don't know how to file reports, are embarrassed to seek help in person, or are afraid of the consequences of doing so (such as a neighbor who may have suspicions but doesn't want to ruin a relationship if they're unfounded)

**How would you ensure that your system is economically viable?**

A system like this could largely be developed as an open source project, reducing the cost of software development. Volunteer counselors or grad students could be used to work in the forum, and even if that were not viable, the primary purpose would be to allow victims to communicate with and support other victims; they would not be getting paid for this as it's strictly volunteer. This reduces to the cost of

hardware, such as servers, which, while that can be expensive, would also be able to be funded through donations and government grants.

**How would the world be a better place if the system was actually implemented?**

Domestic violence costs \$37 billion per year;<sup>[6]</sup> anything to help reduce that cost would be helpful. Domestic abuse causes a number of issues in adults and children; 80% of those who reported abuse as children had at least one psychological disorder.<sup>[7]</sup> 1/3 of abuse victims go on to become abusive themselves.<sup>[8]</sup> Not only does decreasing abuse now help with decreasing overall costs, it improves the quality of life of individuals and decreases abuse in the long term but getting help for victims so that they themselves don't go on to become abusive.

**What are your references? (On each line, put a bracketed number such as [4] and then the reference. It is a good idea to leave blank lines between the references.)**

- [1] <http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/acestudy/prevalence.html>
- [2] <http://www.ncadv.org/learn/statistics>
- [3] [http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/nisvs\\_report2010-a.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/nisvs_report2010-a.pdf)
- [4] [http://www.theadvocacycenter.org/adv\\_violencewhy.html](http://www.theadvocacycenter.org/adv_violencewhy.html)
- [5] <http://www.domesticabuseshelter.org/infodomesticviolence.htm>
- [6] <http://www.safehorizon.org/page/domestic-violence-statistics--facts-52.html>
- [7] <https://www.childhelp.org/child-abuse-statistics/>
- [8] <http://www.safehorizon.org/page/child-abuse-facts-56.html>