

## Project Idea Generation

### IDEA #1

**Project title:** *Using social media to address the COVID-19 “shadow” pandemic*

### What you want to do?

I am interested in analyzing Twitter and Reddit data to identify trends in domestic violence since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Potential research questions that the study could answer are:

1. What types of domestic violence (i.e. physical, verbal, financial, sexual, psychological, etc.) have increased the most since the start of the pandemic?
2. Related to RQ1: Have technology-based forms of domestic violence such as cyberstalking, non-consensual internet pornography, exposure of private information, reputation damage, impersonation, etc. increased since the onset of COVID-19?
3. Which groups are most at risk of experiencing domestic violence during COVID-19?

Some challenges I anticipate in conducting this study are differentiating between causation and correlation, inferring from noisy/ incomplete data, data privacy and ethical issues.

### Why should we care?

Violence against women and girls (VAWG) has been a major human rights issue even before the coronavirus pandemic struck. However, since lockdowns and stay-at-home orders were put in place around the world to curtail the spread of the virus, the statistics on VAWG has increased exponentially. The United Nations (UN) has dubbed the ongoing pandemic a “shadow” pandemic due to its silent, insidious nature. I am hoping to uncover trends on this pressing issue that can potentially help human rights organizations better address it.

**Keywords** – domestic violence, human rights, online harassment, coronavirus

## **IDEA #2**

**Project title:** *How has the evolution of online identities contributed to political polarization in America?*

### **What you want to do?**

I would like to understand how social media plays a role in the formation and evolution of digital identities over time, and what causes certain communities of like-minded individuals to become more polarized than others. More specifically, the research questions I aim to answer are:

1. Do homogenous groups on social media platforms such as Reddit and 4chan give rise to echo chambers that turn into enclaves of hate groups and extremism over time?
2. Related to RQ1: Does exposure to opposing views on social media increase political polarization?
3. Does the nature of discourse in homogenous social media communities vary from that in more diverse groups?

### **Why should we care?**

The way we consume news and information, in general, has changed dramatically since the advent of social media. The recent U.S. presidential election was testimony to how political polarization can endanger human lives, and democracy at large. Social media platforms such as Parler and Gab played an instrumental role in the diffusion of misinformation that led to such extremism.

**Keywords** – online identities, news misinformation, hateful content