



# Domestic Violence in the time of COVID-19

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# What are you trying to do?

**The problem:** Domestic violence (DV) has reportedly increased during the COVID-19 pandemic (UN, 2020). Previous work has also indicated a corresponding increase of posts on subreddits related to several types of abuse during the pandemic (Babvey et al., 2020).

## Research Questions:

- Has the content of DV-related Reddit posts changed significantly pre- vs. post pandemic?
- Do posting behaviors on Reddit correspond with official reporting statistics?
- What types of domestic violence (i.e. physical, verbal, financial, sexual, psychological, etc.) have increased the most since the start of the pandemic?
- Are Reddit posts indicative of new reports of DV or are they just an increase in conversation around DV?

# Why is it hard?

## **Personal subject matter:**

DV is an incredibly personal and sensitive topic that prevents survivors of abuse from speaking about their experiences. It is very possible that social media data is not a good source for this kind of information because it is a public space. However, the anonymity offered on sites like Reddit has been shown to increase self disclosure around other sensitive issues like mental health (De Choudhury et al., 2015).

## **Complexities of anonymity:**

While the anonymity lent by digital conversation platforms has increased discourse on stereotypically taboo topics like mental health and domestic violence, it has also caused public discourse online to become increasingly influenced by digital harassment, trolling and other forms of antisocial behavior. This is especially harmful for survivors of DV as hostility and victim blaming can prevent them from seeking help.

# How is it done today, and what are the limits of current practice?

## Previous work:

- Previous work has relied on methods such as topic modeling and frequency counts to determine the prevalence of conversation around topics related to abuse on Twitter and Reddit.
- Other studies have focused more on mental health and the role of “throwaway” accounts in increasing the quality of conversation about taboo topics.

## Limits:

- Little research has looked at how social media conversation around taboo topics changes over time, especially in the context of an event like COVID.
- In particular, looking at the nuances in conversation (i.e. are they disclosing personal abuse or just bringing the topic up?) has not been studied.
- Additionally, it is not known how representative Reddit conversation is of larger trends.

# What is new in your approach and why do you think it will be successful?

- Rather than focus on just frequency of posts, we will focus more on content
  - The methods themselves are not new, but the way we use them and the way we look at the results from them will be
- Will be focusing on the time frame of the pandemic when the lockdowns started
  - The goal was to "Stay home, stay healthy"
- It will be successful because in a world so disconnected, people are turning to the virtual world to find support and community

# Who cares? Why is this important?

Domestic violence 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 domestic violence have increased exponentially.

The United Nations (UN) has dubbed the ongoing pandemic a “shadow” pandemic due to its silent, insidious nature. The goal of this study is to uncover trends on this pressing issue that can potentially be used to help human rights organizations better address it.

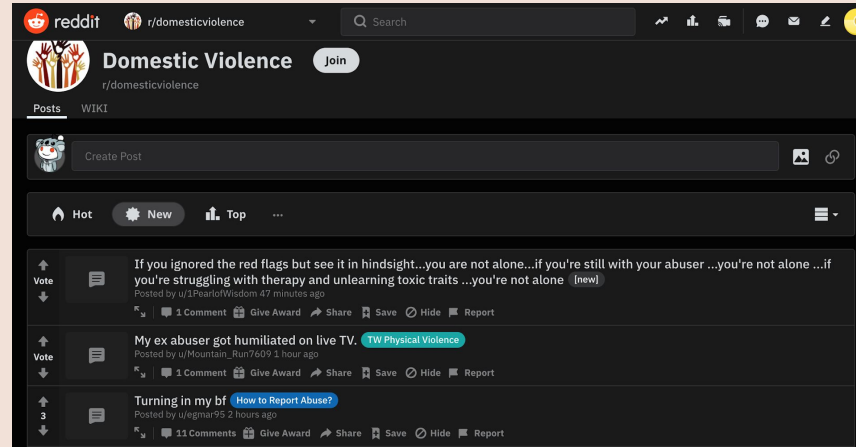
If you're successful, what difference will it make? What impact will success have? How will it be measured?

- Existing information on DV is incomplete and limited to official statistics
  - COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated current gaps and challenges
- Using data mining techniques to explore conversational Reddit data can unearth *hidden topics* and *thematic structures* behind first-hand accounts of DV
- Access to richer, more comprehensive data can help:
  - Human rights organizations tailor approach to DV intervention programs
  - Better understand impact of social-distancing measures on "shadow pandemic"

# Where will you get data from?

The primary data source of the study will be English-language Reddit. Subreddits of interest are listed below, along with respective membership counts:

- r/abuse (26.3 k)
- r/domesticviolence (13.3 k)
- r/AbuseInterrupted (14.1 k)
- r/survivorsofabuse (19.6 k)
- r/relationships (3.0 m)
- r/relationship\_advice (4.7 m)
- r/MensRights (292 k)
- r/meToo (4.9 k)
- r/rapecounseling (18.7 k)



Given the large membership of each of these subreddits, collecting a substantially big dataset for non-trivial analysis seems very feasible.



## Plan of activities

## PROJECT TIMELINE

PROJECT TITLE	IMT 547: Domestic Violence, COVID-19, and Reddit
STARTING DATE	2/8/2021

Phase	Task Title	Task Owner	Start Date	Due Date	Duration	Pct of Task Complete
1						
1.1	Establish initial collection protocols (keywords etc.)		2/8/2021	2/10/2021	2	5%
1.1.1	Begin collection in priority subreddits		2/11/2021	2/14/2021	3	0%
1.2	Perform initial review/exploration of data to identify adjustments		2/15/2021	2/18/2021	3	0%
1.3	Finish any remaining data collection and clean data		2/19/2021	2/23/2021	4	0%
1.4	In depth analysis and visualization		2/24/2021	3/2/2021	8	0%
1.5	Interpret results and write final deliverables		3/3/2021	3/7/2021	4	0%

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# THANKS

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# Sources

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