



## Trauma-Informed Design Framework

# COMBATING DOMESTIC TERRORISM

## Empowering Witnesses to Fight White Supremacist Extremism While Protecting Civil Liberties

Anjana Rajan

### OVERVIEW

Domestic violence survivors are often witnesses for potential acts of mass gun violence caused by white supremacist terrorists. Research shows that there is a [correlation between white supremacist ideology and misogynistic ideology](#). Furthermore, domestic violence and mass shootings are also correlated: 54 percent of mass shootings involve the [shooter killing an intimate partner or family member during the attack](#).

Domestic violence survivors, however, are often [afraid to call the police](#). According to a [2015 survey by the National Domestic Violence Hotline](#), 80 percent of survivors who had called the police were afraid that if they called the police again in the future, officers would not believe them or would not do anything about the violence. Many victims worried that calling law enforcement would result in insufficient consequences for the abuser and ultimately make the situation more dangerous for the victim.

Some domestic violence survivors are also afraid to call the police because they fear getting arrested themselves, particularly if they have a history of drug abuse, are sex workers, are undocumented immigrants, or are at risk of losing custody of their children. Seventy-five percent of women in prison are domestic violence survivors; in fact, a majority of domestic violence survivors on Rikers Island report they committed crimes due to the [threat of violence from an intimate partner](#). Women of color and low-income women are disproportionately affected by [mandatory arrest policies](#) for domestic violence.

Witnesses who are likely to have high-quality intelligence about potential bad actors are often operating under traumatic circumstances, and thus it is important to consider these fears when designing a reporting system to identify terrorist threats. A **trauma-informed design framework** provides UX guidelines to consider when building tools and services to engage with witnesses who might be experiencing trauma as they report concerning behaviors. This framework was applied to the risk-model questionnaire produced for this project, which can be demoed at [thewitnessapp.org](http://thewitnessapp.org).

The trauma-informed design framework incorporates feedback from employees at La Casa de las Madres, a prominent domestic violence shelter based in San Francisco.

## TRAUMA-INFORMED DESIGN FRAMEWORK

The framework comprises five themes to consider when designing a questionnaire for a witness who is also a domestic violence survivor:

- ▶ **Moment of Crisis:** The witness may have recently observed something traumatizing or might be experiencing a moment of crisis. Therefore, the witness should not be burdened with information overload. The questionnaire should be relatively short and should not monopolize the witness's time.
- ▶ **Informed Consent:** The witness must have full agency regarding what they are participating in. The outcomes of their actions should be very clear. They should not be forced to answer a question they do not want to or are unable to answer. Their privacy should be protected until they choose to disclose publicly.
- ▶ **Avoid Bias:** The witness should not feel judged, particularly around mental health, substance abuse, or financial strain. Avoid questions that perpetuate racial bias.
- ▶ **Validation:** The witness should be reaffirmed that they are believed, that reporting is very difficult, and that they are supported.
- ▶ **Gentle Language:** The witness may feel uncomfortable when faced with harsh or jarring language. Lead with observable behaviors and acknowledge the sensitivity of the topic.

## APPLICATIONS OF DESIGN FRAMEWORK TO THEWITNESSAPP.COM

Below are examples of how the risk-model questionnaire (as seen at [thewitnessapp.org](http://thewitnessapp.org)) was designed and iterated to reflect the trauma-informed design framework themes:

**Theme 1: Moment of Crisis**

In order to keep this questionnaire concise, the number of questions was consolidated and trimmed down to 15 questions.

In order to avoid information overload, the questionnaire is broken down into different pages. This helps a survivor focus on a couple of questions at a time, rather than having to see all of the questions at once.

### Survey

#### About The Survey

The survey is comprised of 15 questions about observable concerning behaviors. The responses to the survey questions are weighted by the severity of behavior. See our technical white paper for more details on the model.

The instrument is designed to protect the community from violence while protecting the suspect's civil liberties. Most behaviors, in isolation, are not concerning enough to warrant suspicion of a terrorist attack. But, in combination by one or more bystanders, these behaviors might tell a more complex story about a looming threat of violence.

[Start The Survey](#)

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ASPEN TECH POLICY PLUS

### 1 Stressed Behaviors

**There is no judgement of a person who is experiencing mental health issues or extreme stress. However, it could be an indication that they need help.**

Is this person experiencing unusually extreme feelings of hopelessness, anxiety, depression, anger or stress?  Yes  No  I'm Not Sure

Is this person experiencing interpersonal conflicts with friends, family or colleagues (at work or at school)?  Yes  No  I'm Not Sure

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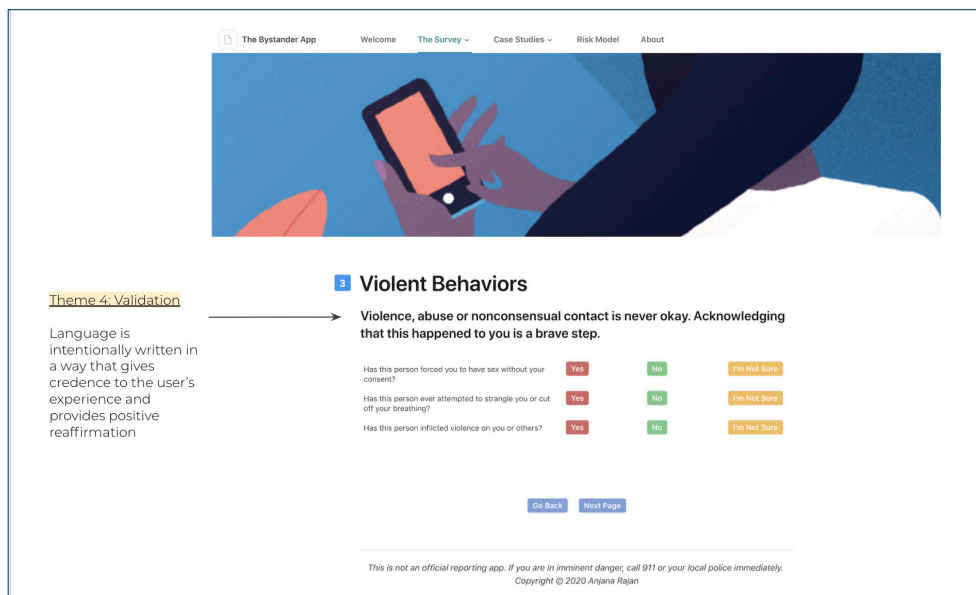
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**Theme 3: Avoid Bias**

Language is intentionally written in a way that doesn't pose judgement on the user

**Theme 2: Informed Consent**

User is given option to say "I'm Not Sure" for questions that they are not able or willing to answer



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**3 Violent Behaviors**

**Violence, abuse or nonconsensual contact is never okay. Acknowledging that this happened to you is a brave step.**

Theme 4: Validation

Language is intentionally written in a way that gives credence to the user's experience and provides positive reaffirmation

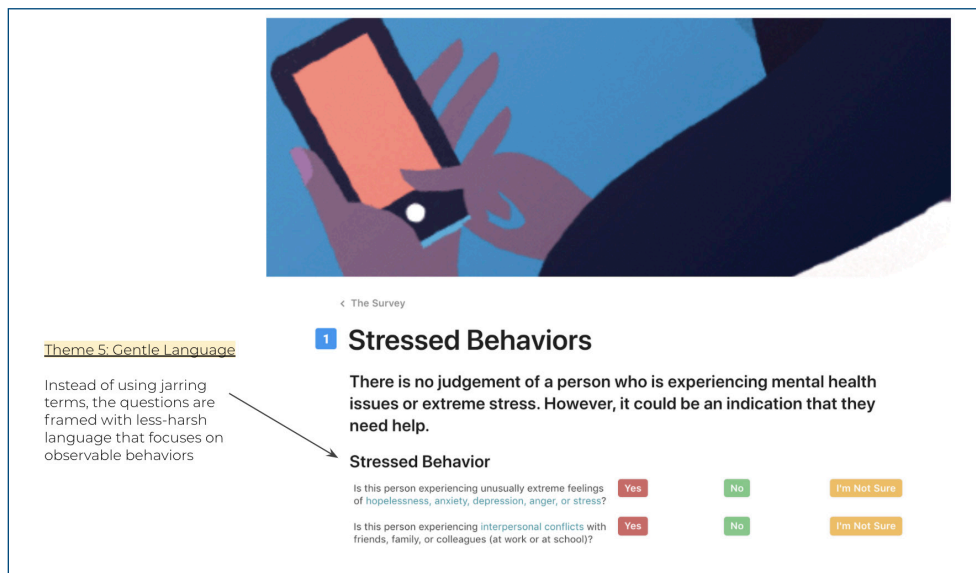
Has this person forced you to have sex without your consent?  Yes  No  I'm Not Sure

Has this person ever attempted to strangle you or cut off your breathing?  Yes  No  I'm Not Sure

Has this person inflicted violence on you or others?  Yes  No  I'm Not Sure

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< The Survey

**1 Stressed Behaviors**

**There is no judgement of a person who is experiencing mental health issues or extreme stress. However, it could be an indication that they need help.**

Theme 5: Gentle Language

Instead of using jarring terms, the questions are framed with less-harsh language that focuses on observable behaviors

**Stressed Behavior**

Is this person experiencing unusually extreme feelings of hopelessness, anxiety, depression, anger, or stress?  Yes  No  I'm Not Sure

Is this person experiencing interpersonal conflicts with friends, family, or colleagues (at work or at school)?  Yes  No  I'm Not Sure