

# Use of decision-aid program increases safety for women experiencing abuse, researchers find

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Intimate partner violence results in 2 million injuries among women in the U.S. each year, according to the Department of Health and Human Services. University of Missouri researchers are reducing these numbers with a new Web-based program that helps women experiencing abuse develop individualized safety plans and better assess the severity of their situations.

Unlike current Internet resources, the decision-aid program provides women with personalized assessments of the danger of their situations. The program generates a series of initial questions and follow-up questions for each woman, and then creates individualized safety plans based on their responses. A safety plan may include talking with children about what to do if violence suddenly occurs, establishing a safe place to go at a moment's notice, or hiding money and a change of clothes somewhere in or outside the home. Women also receive information about legal processes and community resources.

"The decision-aid provides anonymity and guidance to women who aren't comfortable talking about their situations," said Tina Bloom, assistant professor in the Sinclair School of Nursing. "It helps women think through their decisions, make more informed decisions and decrease decisional conflict - that sort of feeling like they don't know what to do, what their options are or where to look for help."

In the pilot study of the program, the researchers found that women's decisional conflicts were reduced after one use of the decision-aid. Based on the success, the researchers received a grant from the National Institute of Mental Health to expand the program to four states in the next five years.

The program is designed to help women who don't have access to traditional resources, including shelters and doctors. The decision-aid will be available to women anywhere they have safe access to the Internet. Additionally, kiosks with the program will be located in hospitals, doctor's offices, libraries and [mental health care](#) facilities.

"In [intimate partner violence](#) situations, there are ongoing patterns of violence - the more exposure that women have to violence, the greater their risk for injuries and negative health consequences, both mental and physical," Bloom said. "The goal of the decision-aid program is to give [women](#) more personalized and confidential aid options and prevent extended exposure to [violence](#) by changing their safety behaviors. By making help easily accessible, we can improve women's health outcomes."

The second study will be conducted by Bloom and researchers from Johns Hopkins University School of Nursing, Oregon Health and Sciences University School of Medicine, and the University of Arizona School of Social Work.

**More information:** The study, Computerized Aid Improves Safety Decision Process for Survivors of Intimate Partner Violence, was published in the Journal of Interpersonal Violence.  
[jiv.sagepub.com/content/early/ ... /29/0886260509354508](http://jiv.sagepub.com/content/early/.../29/0886260509354508)

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