

How Experts Personalize Privacy & Security Advice for At-Risk Users

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Introduction

At-risk users face increased chances of digital attacks and suffer disproportionate harms.

They need **tailored privacy and security advice**, as generic advice can be unproductive or harmful, but tailoring advice requires **hazardous judgment calls without obvious answers**.

We aim to **inform the design** of advice clinics and self-service tools (e.g., modular advice guides and interactive questionnaire-based tools).

Semi-structured interviews

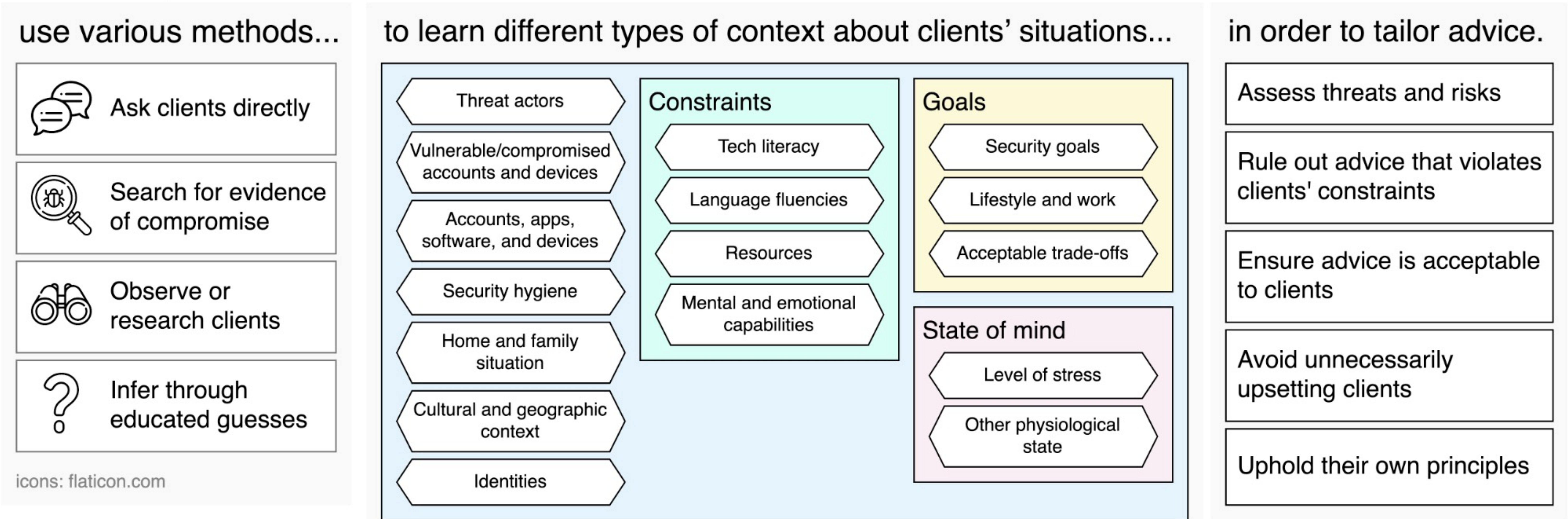
We interviewed 18 advice providers: S&P researchers engaging in long-term applied work and/or professionals affiliated with advocacy orgs.

Participants work with human rights defenders, targets of tech abuse, and people facing identity-based online harassment.

RQ1. How do providers **differentiate** advice, and why?
RQ2. What **support** do providers need to better tailor advice?
RQ3. How should **self-service tools** account for differences between users?

RQ1: A framework for tailoring advice

Advice providers...



RQ2 and RQ3: Challenges and solutions

Providers need help **understanding evolving threats** and technologies.

- Comparing Chinese Android phones, mitigations against trackers, etc.

Providers need better **infrastructure for information sharing**.

- E.g., a repository for configuration guides, walkthroughs, and advice protocols.

PETs still need to be more **accessible**.

- Diagnostic tools, usable encryption, availability in different languages, etc.

We propose **design guidelines** for self-service tools to address concerns.

- Provide caveats and examples of cases in which advice could be counterproductive.
- Proactively inform users when advice may be outdated.
- In cases of emotional distress, users should be redirected to humans.

I am recruiting grad students!

Interested in human-centered security and privacy research? Come work with me at the University of Georgia starting Fall of 2027!

Funded research positions are available.

- Practitioners' needs and practices
- Designing and evaluating tools
- Data privacy and disclosure risk
- Security and privacy advice

Please reach out if you're interested, and tell your students and collaborators!

“ You could warn the user that this material was **last updated in 2017**; that's now more than five years out of date.

“ If you work with survivors of domestic violence, really talking to people is a key part of it. **Sometimes I feel I give more help by listening** to their concerns than by providing them meaningful advice. I don't see how you can do that in a tool.

quotes edited for brevity



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