

Surveying Vulnerable Populations: A Case Study of Civil Society Organizations

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Why study civil society organizations (CSOs)?

- CSOs lack the funds and human resources to defend themselves against security and privacy threats
- Most CSOs employ standard tools used by millions of users, while their online risks are often amplified compared to the general population
- Threats that target CSOs today are precursors of threats that could affect broader user groups tomorrow

Methods

- We focused on the risk perception of different security and privacy threats and self-reported mitigation strategies
- We employed a survey-based approach, emphasizing the anonymity of our questionnaire
- We did not collect any personal information, and we incentivized respondents by letting them select a charity to which we provided a donation
- In order to distribute the survey, we partnered with TechSoup, who was the trusted intermediary

Challenges & Future Work

- We reached 160 respondents, but that was fewer than we expected
- The survey was long and contained repetitive questions, because of the inclusion of additional scales
- We referred to respondents as 'employees' for brevity, which confused some participants
- The focus of the survey was too broad and some of the questions were not applicable to everyone
- We are currently streamlining the survey and hoping to relaunch it with a more specific target population

Research Questions

- What is the risk perception of different security and privacy threats among employees working for CSOs?
- What are the self-reported mitigations strategies that employees at CSOs employ to protect against these threats?