# Reimagining Social Media as Sociotechnical Infrastructure for Collective Responsibility in Addressing Gender-Based Violence

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## 1 Position Statement

Much of the work on technology and gender-based violence (GBV) in HCI has focused on individual-level interventions, including supporting recognition of abuse, facilitating help-seeking, documenting harm, or increasing personal safety [2, 6]. While these efforts are important, they are often underpinned by a sociotechnical imaginary that places responsibility for harm recognition and prevention primarily on affected individuals [6]. Such framings risk reproducing responsibilization, where those already harmed are tasked with managing risk, making sense of violence, and initiating change themselves.

Social media–based GBV awareness content is commonly approached through this individualizing lens, framed as a support mechanism aimed at helping affected individuals recognize harm and seek help [1, 5, 8]. Yet as awareness content circulates widely across platforms, it increasingly operates as a societal and community-facing sociotechnical intervention that shapes collective norms, shared language, and moral boundaries around violence [3, 4, 7]. Attending to awareness content in this way foregrounds questions of responsibility that extend beyond individual users to platforms, designers, content creators, audiences, and broader social infrastructures. Drawing on my previous empirical work examining how digital awareness content shapes recognition and help-seeking around GBV [1], this position paper argues for a shift away from individual outcomes toward the sociotechnical imaginaries of responsibility that such content enacts and sustains.

*Awareness Content as More Than Individual Support.* Digital GBV awareness content on platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, or YouTube is often framed as informational or educational material intended to help individuals recognize abusive situations and prompt engagement with formal support pathways (e.g., police, women's shelters, or NGOs). Such framings implicitly assume a singular, affected user and a linear pathway from awareness to action.

However, empirical engagement with GBV awareness content reveals a more complex picture. Rather than prompting a linear transition from awareness to formal support, such content is often engaged with iteratively as part of ongoing reflection and sense-making. Individuals return to awareness content over time to compare experiences, test interpretations, and make meaning of ambiguous or normalized forms of harm, often without immediate engagement with formal support pathways [1].

At the same time, awareness content circulates widely beyond those currently experiencing violence. It is encountered by friends, family members, bystanders, former affected individuals, and people who may never personally experience abuse but nonetheless participate in shaping social responses to it. Through repetition, sharing, and commentary, awareness content contributes to the development of shared language for naming harm, challenges previously normalized behaviors, and reshapes expectations about what is acceptable within relationships and society [1].

Seen in this light, awareness content functions less as a private intervention and more as public sociotechnical infrastructure. It does not simply inform individuals, but participates in constructing collective understandings of

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violence, responsibility, and accountability. Yet despite this broader role, such content is still commonly designed and assessed through individualizing imaginaries that obscure its societal impact.

Understanding GBV awareness content as sociotechnical infrastructure foregrounds questions of responsibility. When awareness is framed primarily as a tool for affected individuals, responsibility is implicitly assigned to those individuals: to recognize harm, to leave, to seek help, or to protect themselves. This framing aligns with broader critiques of safety technologies that shift risk management onto users rather than addressing the structural and cultural conditions that enable harm [6].

A societal framing, by contrast, raises different questions. Who is responsible for ensuring that violence is recognizable as violence? Who shapes the norms that determine whether harmful behavior is minimized, normalized, or condemned? What role do platforms play in amplifying, constraining, or monetizing awareness narratives? And how do design decisions influence whether awareness content fosters solidarity and accountability or instead becomes fragmented, sensationalized, or ephemeral? From this perspective, responsible design entails more than producing accurate or sensitive content. It requires attending to how awareness is embedded in platform economies, algorithmic visibility, content moderation practices, and social norms of participation. Responsibility becomes distributed and relational rather than individualized.

*Implications for Responsible Design.* Re-imagining GBV awareness content as sociotechnical infrastructure rather than individual support suggests several concrete implications for responsible design.

First, design must account for the iterative and nonlinear ways in which awareness is engaged. In my empirical study, individuals did not move directly from awareness to formal support. Instead, they revisited content over time, using it to test interpretations, compare experiences, and gradually reframe ambiguous or normalized harm [1]. Responsible design should therefore avoid structuring awareness around singular calls to action and instead support ongoing reflection, return, and contextualization.

Second, awareness should be designed not only for those currently experiencing violence but also for broader social audiences. Friends, bystanders, and former affected individuals frequently encountered and circulated awareness content, contributing to shared language and collective recognition. Responsible design in this space must therefore consider how content shapes social norms and collective accountability, not only individual help-seeking behavior.

Third, platforms must acknowledge their role in shaping how awareness is encountered and interpreted. Algorithmic visibility, monetization structures, and moderation policies influence which narratives of violence gain legitimacy and which are marginalized. Responsible design thus requires engagement with infrastructural and governance conditions, including how awareness is amplified, contextualized, or fragmented within platform economies.

Taken together, these implications shift the focus of responsible design from optimizing awareness for individual action toward shaping sociotechnical conditions that enable collective recognition, accountability, and norm change.

## 2 Biography

Nimra Ahmed is a Fast Track PhD Candidate in People-Oriented Computing at the University of Zurich. Her research sits at the intersection of feminist HCI, design/social justice, and activism, with a particular focus on gender-based violence. Through long-term, community-led collaborations with NGOs and support organizations in Switzerland, her work examines how digital technologies shape awareness, help-seeking, care infrastructures, and everyday recovery after violence. Nimra takes a trauma-informed, feminist, and non-extractive approach to research and design, foregrounding questions of responsibility, power, and sustainability in sociotechnical systems.

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