

A Space of Possibilities:  
Design Addressing Intimate Partner Violence

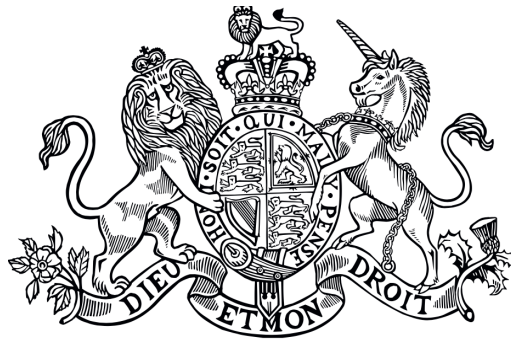
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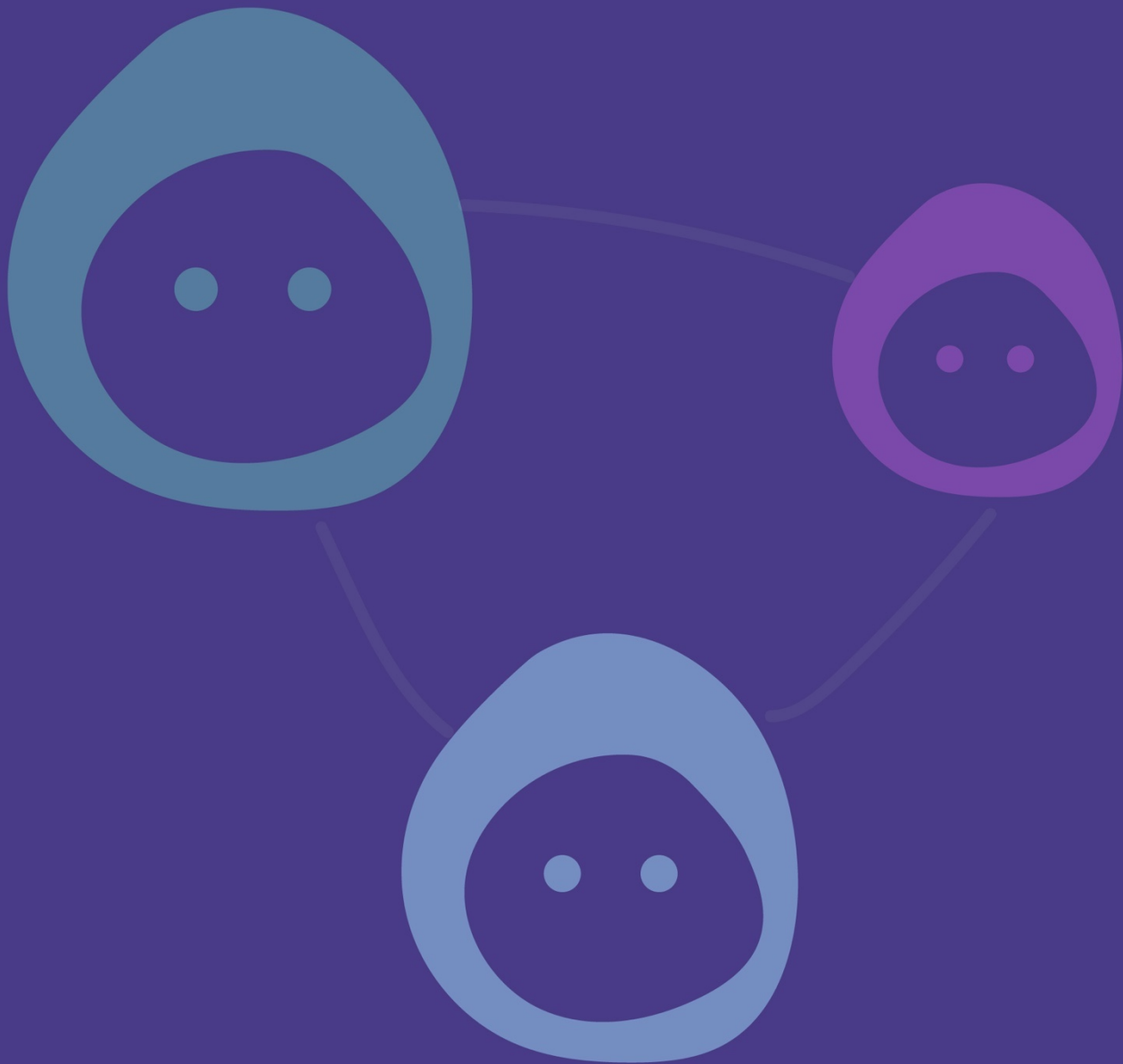


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# **A Space of Possibilities:**

**Design Addressing Intimate Partner Violence**

Rute Fiadeiro

# Abstract

This thesis-based research examines the growing application of design in contexts related to intimate partner violence (IPV) worldwide, which continues to be a profoundly naturalised part of our contemporary world. Addressing IPV involves carefully considering contextual implications such as safety, trauma, and intimate relationships. With designs growing application in areas of addressing harm, it thus is essential to explore how these implications demand different design practices. By examining how designers frame problems, the processes they employ, and the outcomes they produce, this research aims to uncover the designerly knowledge embedded in these aspects. Investigating this under-researched area aims to deepen designers' and design researchers' understanding of how design may address IPV and its implications. Ultimately, this may lead to a more meaningful engagement with IPV issues.

Combining theoretical and empirical input, this thesis, through a feminist emergent methodology, explores (1) the realities and possibilities of designing to address intimate harm; (2) designers' rationale when applying design to IPV; and (3) spaces to support the adaptation of design. The research investigates two case studies exploring designers' practices in (i) recovery and response interventions and (ii) prevention with men. It then continues to explore what space may support new and existing designers through a workshop and interviews with designers.

The research outlines methodological and practical implications by analysing the rationale designers use to adapt their practices to the circumstances of IPV. From here, six guiding principles emerge from patterns in design practices in IPV. These principles include **critical awareness, supporting safety, relational focus, dialogical engagement, encouragement, and making visible**. Furthermore, it offers a conceptualisation of a space of possibilities for designers to explore these principles and develop a deep awareness of situational and structural factors.

Overall, these findings enhance the theoretical understanding of design within IPV contexts and distinguishes intimate harm as a distinct form of harm requiring designers' attention. The principles support in reframing design's social role from effecting change to supporting change,

and alongside the conceptualisation of a space of possibilities for designers, re-centres designers' personal journeys during the design process. Additionally, the thesis proposes an feminist emergent methodology for researchers examining design's adaptation in response to changing contexts, particularly at the intersection with trauma. This research has broader implications for designers working within the realms of gender, violence, and crime.



# Declaration

This thesis represents partial submission for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the Royal College of Art. I confirm that the work presented here is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

During the period of registered study in which this thesis was prepared the author has not been registered for any other academic award or qualification. The material included in this thesis has not been submitted wholly or in part for any academic award or qualification other than that for which it is now submitted.

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I must personally thank all of the participants in this thesis. Thank you for giving me your valuable time and attention and trusting me with your experiences. Hearing the hard work and commitment you all embark on is inspiring. I hope we all meet again. This thesis is dedicated to you.

### **Dedication:**

To the justice in doing this critical work. This thesis is dedicated to all the people who devote their time and effort to addressing IPV. Especially to the voices that are centred in this thesis and others I have met along the way. You all inspire me to keep doing this work.

# Abbreviations

Criminal Justice System (CJS)

Domestic Violence Perpetrator Programme (DVPP)

Feminist Emergent Methodology (FEM)

Gender-based Violence (GBV)

Independent Domestic Violence Advocate (IDVA)

Intimate Partner Violence (IPV)

Masters in Research (MRes)

Ministry of Justice (MoJ)

National Domestic Abuse Helpline (NDAH)

Royal College of Art (RCA)

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)

Trauma-informed Design (TID)

Trauma and Violence-informed Care (TVIC)

United Kingdom (UK)

United States (US)

University Arts of London (UAL)

User Experience (UX)

Violence Against Women (VAW)

Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG)

# Wellness pack

The content of this thesis touches on topics related to domestic abuse, sexual violence, criminal justice system, and trauma. It might raise worried, stressed or negative emotions, especially for those with lived experiences of gender-based violence. Please make sure you take the time to process information in a self-caring way. This can be some breathing exercises, taking a walk, speaking to someone close to you or whatever usually works best for you. In this section, you will find: techniques for managing triggers and grounding exercises; information for seeking support for domestic abuse and mental health in the UK.

If you are experiencing abuse. You are not alone, there may be services nearby that can help you. Consider asking a trusted friend to keep this wellness pack to avoid your partner finding it.

## Wellness pack:

To support you in approaching reading this thesis through a self-caring way, a wellness pack has been developed with information on how you may manage triggers, ground yourself, and seek support<sup>1</sup>. These are a few suggestions, you know your body, do what feels and works best for you.

### Managing triggers and grounding techniques:

If you're feeling dissociated, experiencing heart palpitations, or not quite feeling like yourself in response to any content, it may be a sign that unresolved feelings or memories are being triggered. Read and reflect through the following questions that may support you to recognise when triggers might be emerging<sup>2</sup>:

---

<sup>1</sup> This wellness pack is based on a wellness pack that I developed with Sandra Gonzalez from UXforChange for a workshop with UX designers to develop designs for a IPV digital concept called Pillow (see Appendix A.1). Further research should critically update and review the efficacy and ethics of such wellness packs in line with critical scholarship.

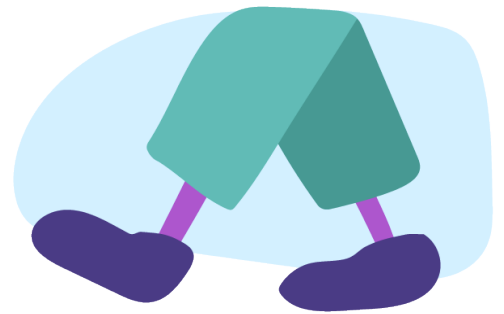
<sup>2</sup> These questions are based on the Sexual Violence Research Initiatives course called Dare to Care. In the introduction, they offer reflective questions for people to question how they can care for themselves before the course (Sexual Violence Research Initiative, n.d.).

- What topics may tend to trigger distressing feelings and memories for you?
- What might be early warning signs that you are starting to experience distress?
- If you feel triggered, who could you talk to? Who do you trust? Who might be able to support you?

### Grounding techniques:

Grounding techniques can offer an opportunity to return to ourselves and settle back into the present moment by engaging with our senses.

- Gentle physical activities – i.e. a walk;
- Breathing exercises are a technique to help feel calmer.  
See the [NHS](#) guide;
- The 333 rule - A grounding technique that involves looking around and naming three things you see, three sounds you hear, and moving or touching three things;
- Sit with your feet firmly on the floor;
- Journaling - e.g. write about thoughts and feelings.



For more information on managing panic attacks please read this resource from [Chayn](#) and grounding techniques from [Bloom](#).

### Support for domestic abuse:

If you are in danger in the UK, and would like to call the police - call 999 and ask for the police. If you can't speak press 55 to have your call transferred to the police.

Types of support you may reach out for:

- Helplines, Live Chats and Chatbots: Most support services will offer these services on their websites. They can help provide advice, support, and refer you to emergency accommodation.
- Police - in an emergency or to report abuse
- Refuge accommodation - a place where you can stay if you need to leave home
- Counselling therapy - talk to someone and seek practical tips to help you cope

These are places you can turn to for help if you or someone you know is experiencing abuse in the UK:

Domestic Abuse:

- 24-hour [National Domestic Abuse Helpline](#) - Call **08082000247** or visit their website and use the live chat.
- Specialised for men: [Men's Advice Line](#)
- Specialised for LGBT+: [Galop](#)
- Specialised for African & Caribbean Heritage Women: [Sistah Space](#)
- Specialised for Latin American Women: [LAWA](#)
- Specialised for Turkish, Kurdish and Cypriot Turkish and Refugee: [IMECE](#)
- Specialised for Middle Eastern Women: [MEWSo](#)
- If you have no recourse to public funds: Find information here - [IDAS](#)



## Sexual Violence:

If the experience was recent or in the past (can be over 10 years ago) support services can support you - [Rape Crisis England & Wales](#) - Helpline, online chat and support services.

## Child Abuse:

- Concerned about a child: [Stop it now](#)
- Adult survivor of child abuse: [NAPAC](#)

## Further forms of violence:

- Practical and emotional support for victims and witnesses of crime - [Victim Support](#)



These are places you can turn to for help if you or someone you know is coping with mental health in the UK:

- [Samaritans](#): If you need someone to talk to. **Call 116 123** available 24/7 and Free
- [Mind](#): Free mental health support. Call the support line to talk to someone about emotional support - **0300 102 1234** - Open 9am to 6pm, Monday to Friday (except bank holidays).

# Chapter 1. Introduction

“Consider the case of a man who was abused as a child (ontogenic) and has a strong need to feel in control (ontogenic); who exists in a culture in which maleness is defined by one’s ability to respond aggressively to conflict (macrosystem), and where “good” women are supposed to be submissive (macrosystem). Suddenly, he loses his job (exosystem) and his wife, who has become more empowered after participating in a community group, decides to get a job; this leads to power struggles, conflict, and violence in the relationship (microsystem).” (Heise, 1998, p.285)

This quote illustrates the various mechanisms that influence why some people enact abuse while others do not. It directly supports an understanding of intimate-partner violence (IPV) that is not grounded on isolated incidents between two people but as part of broader social structures that, in this case, shape notions of masculinity, gender oppression, and economic struggle; thus, the complexity of experiences through social life (Heise, 1998). From this brief anecdote, multiple avenues to prevent abuse or, later on, support recovery from it are possible. For instance, edutainment that aim to change gender norms in communities (Prevention Collaborative, 2021). As design persistently continues to become heavily involved and integrated (naturalised) in all forms of society's lives, it is important to consider what role it (could) plays in IPV circumstances.

Intervening in abusive situations is not a single action but rather part of a process that spans different levels of interventions, from working with couples to promote healthy relationships to supporting people who leave abusive situations. These are part of intervening across what are known as the socio-ecological levels, which include the individual, interrelationship and community changes towards addressing causes for IPV, which varies depending on socio-cultural factors (Heise, 1998; Prevention Collaborative, 2021). Each presents particular contextual implications specific to the situations, including varied risks, harms, and trauma experiences, which shape safety and healing differently. For instance, leaving an abusive relationship might put some at further risk of harm (Mosher, 2015). Furthermore, these factors equally shape the research processes that are used. For instance, a participant may experience re-traumatisation from being asked to recount abusive situations. While design can be applied to various contexts,

especially in contexts of intimate harm, designers need to adapt their practices rather than apply them as they are (Dorst, 2015).

This thesis mainly considers design as a verb – an action (Glanville, 1999). This thesis is concerned with studying the rationales of designers and the choices they have taken given the contexts of IPV they are working in. Furthermore, as an action, it recognises that design outcomes, beyond the design process, continuously act in the world, making new social conditions possible or not (Fry & Nocek, 2020; Tonkinwise, 2019). Design is never static but rather continuously being defined and redefined within the social (Tonkinwise, 2019). From this perspective, this research is grounded in social design, a distinct practice that is concerned with effecting social change (Resnik, 2019). It, therefore, considers product, graphic, content, and service design as modalities to reach social design objectives and studies these various practices rather than specific disciplines. This thesis does not define design as solution-oriented and problem-solving. Instead, design is a series of adaptations between the social and material (Tonkinwise, 2019), which preserves and transforms social structures (Van Amstel et al., 2023).

Scholarly work has explored the intersection of design and harm in areas such as policing (Agid, 2022), refugee crisis (Keshavarz, 2020), knife crime (Mazzarella & Schuster, 2022; Frater & Gamman, 2020), and bag theft (Ekblom, 2005). These have raised concerns over how dominant discourses surrounding social issues influence deficit-based mindsets, designating people as passive and vulnerable. Consequently, this affects how problems are framed, processes are executed and how outcomes will impact society. Instead, they call for a deeper engagement with the contextual and situational implications of the situations designers are working with. What sets IPV apart from these other manifestations of harm is its element of intimacy. Rather than being enacted by unknown people in specific scenarios, it is enacted by a close partnership, often at home and over long periods. Intimate harm can also include honour-based violence, child abuse and maltreatment, and forced marriage. Therefore, this thesis distinguishes this from other forms of harm to emphasise the necessary contextual adaptations and is used in this thesis when it aims to make a clear distinction.

Finally, emerging as a response to the harm that may be experienced through design interactions, has been trauma-informed design (TID). It is a practice that centres experiences of trauma into how design is conducted, and has demonstrated that design, under the right critical engagement, can be impactful. However, it explicitly does not aim to address trauma, unlike this thesis that aims to explore explicitly addressing IPV. This is vital as IPV gravely affects people all around the world who deserve to live safely and in healthy relationships. For interventions to achieve this, leveraging design can be critical. As illustrated in this thesis, rather than generating change through products, design supports users to explore what change looks like for them. Yet, this is not possible without designers critically questioning the application of their practices. There is therefore a great need for a theoretical and empirical advancement on what constitutes a design that addresses IPV.

## 1.1 Emerging research questions

It is under the above context that the overarching research question of this thesis explores the following:

In addressing intimate partner violence, how does design practice adapt in response to contextual implications?

Which will be answered by exploring the following research questions:

RQ1 - What are the realities and possibilities of designing in IPV situations?

RQ2 - How might particular circumstances of designing within IPV contexts affect designers' rationale?

RQ3 - Which spaces could support designers in adapting their practices?

These research questions emerged throughout the research rather than being predetermined.

There was a significant interplay between RQ1 and RQ2's theoretical and empirical input, where emerging questions and findings mutually informed one another. RQ3 emerged as an outcome of these.

## 1.2 Research approach: theoretical, empirical, and the social

This research is concerned with studying designers practice. Practice is a pattern of activities that are situated and therefore unique to each situation (Bijl-Brouwer & Malcolm, 2020). Rather than seeking to develop a deep examination of practice in IPV through, for instance, practice-led research guided by the researchers learnings from engaging in the context, it aims to examine the common patterns across practice. Therefore, this research aims to uncover generalisable findings relevant to identifying how design has adapted in response to contextual implications found in IPV.

To investigate the three questions outlined in section 1.1, the research applies a feminist emergent methodology. This methodology (Chapter 4) is responsive to knowledge gained throughout the research but also to the socio-structural changes that occur alongside it. A constant practice of conversing with the given and looking forward at what could be. This is why, although grounded in the theoretical and empirical input, it also is complemented by work experience in the UK government and IPV organisations. Figure 1.1, illustrates how the various inputs were used to answer the research questions and make a contribution to knowledge on social design. The figure has taken inspiration from Vink's (2019) diagram illustrating the combination of empirical and theoretical inputs in their thesis.

The lack of an earlier study, which would have bridged IPV theory, histories, and practices with design theory and practice, required a broader approach (Canli, 2017) into the literature reviews (Chapter 2 and 3). The theoretical input therefore included other disciplines relevant to IPV, including abolitionism, feminism, trauma-informed care, criminology, gender studies, and sociology. Thus, grounding the research and introducing learnings from social movements and knowledge fields already asking and answering the question (Van Amstel et al., 2023) of how we address IPV. This research therefore contributes to these fields by offering a design perspective to intervening in IPV.

The empirical input in this thesis stems from a year-long series of interviews conducted with designers engaged in the field of IPV. This data was then developed into two case studies focused

on intervention strategies" (1) responding to and recovering from IPV, and (2) preventing it, and supported by artefact and documentation analysis. Additionally, a follow-up study spanning three months is carried out with designers to validate the initial findings and formulate a proposition for the research outcome.

Overall, the aim of this thesis is not to offer methods or tools, which has become a standard practice in academia (Tonkinwise, 2019). Instead, it aims to advance design knowledge to recognise and understand the distinct ways in which design and IPV arise. It is, therefore, one step in a long-term project of outlining design in IPV.

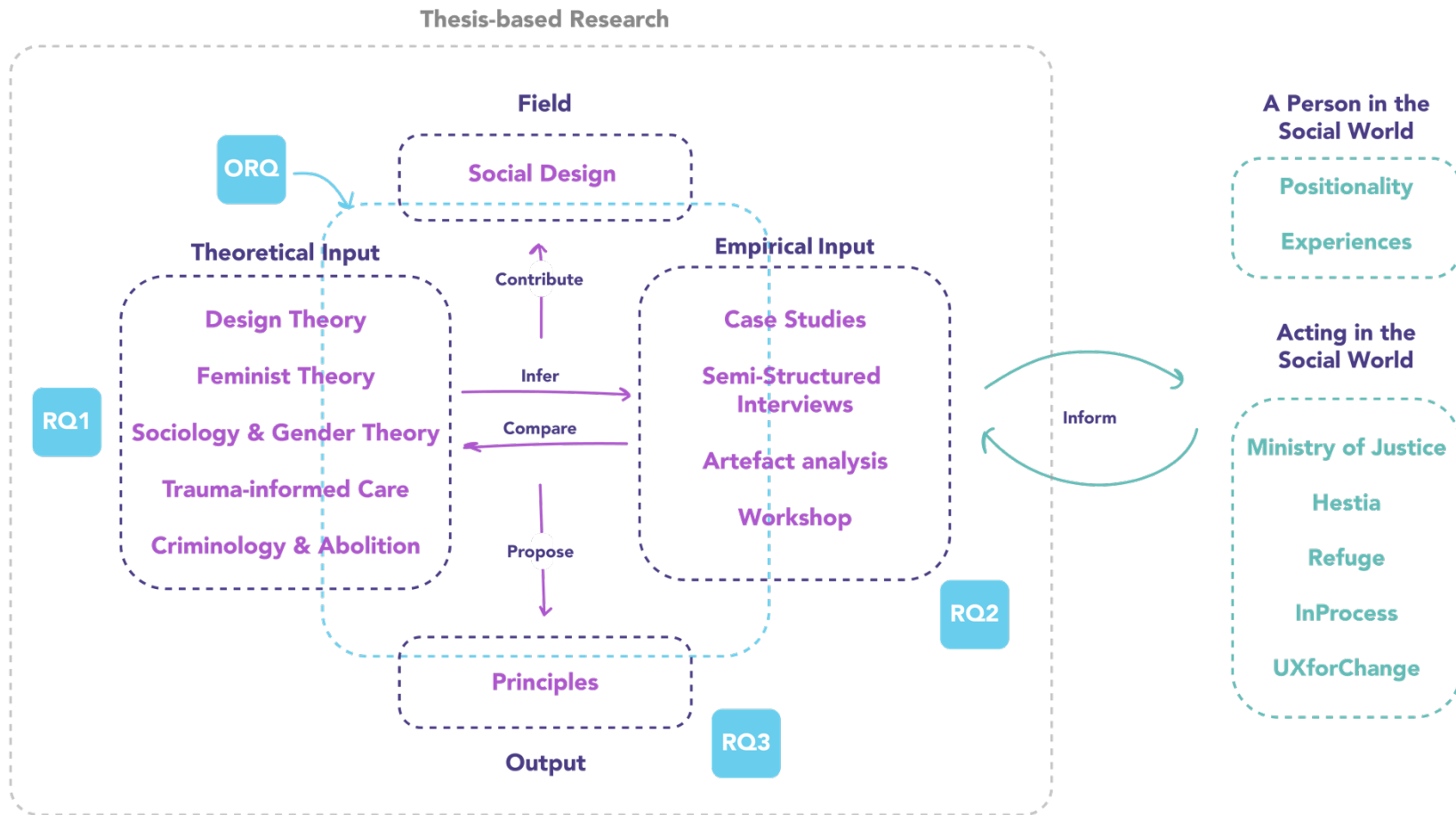


Figure 1.1- Research Strategy

*Although this thesis is written in the third person, for the sake of sharing my personal experiences, I will be writing in the first person in the following subsections.*

### 1.2.1 A person in the social world: positionality and the personal in the research

I am a European white, able-bodied, and cisgender woman who immigrated to the UK to pursue an education in arts and design. I studied Product Design Engineering at a UK institution, Brunel University London, where I developed skills in identifying design problems and solving them with physical products. While this education excelled in developing my Western design thinking skills, it also lacked critical thinking components. This experience prompted me to pursue an Masters in Research (MRes) at the Royal College of Art (RCA), where exposure to critical thinking in design deepened my interest in questioning 'what it means to 'do design''

In her book *'Living a feminist life'*, Ahmed (2017) states that we each have a feminist story - how we became feminists. For me, this occurred through reading and engaging in discussions at the RCA; this combination allowed me to articulate my experiences in the world and begin my feminist journey. Nevertheless, engaging in feminist work can be emotionally taxing; as Ahmed (2017) shared, throughout her thesis, she often recalled previous memories of racism she had experienced which would snowball into recalling more. In my thesis, I would consistently recall experiences of gender based violence (GBV).

I must be open and honest: this research has been challenging. At times, it felt as though the world was hopeless. I entered this topic with a history of sexual harassment and violence. Some of these experiences only became clear to me through engaging in the literature, which helped me name my experiences as sexual violence. This realisation led to experiences of re-traumatisation, which gravely affected my research. Furthermore, while conducting this research, I repeatedly experienced sexual harassment in the streets and, later, sexual assault. I found myself moving back and forth between writing about violence and experiencing it first-hand, sometimes recalling experiences as I write these words.



As I gained more knowledge on the subjects, I began to "talk back" at my harassers but I was still left with the thought of "what's the point?". I lost hope and joy in researching GBV. However, I eventually rediscovered my motivation through engaging with the designers whose voices you will read in this thesis, seeking counselling, reading the powerful work of others involved in similar research, and becoming a helpline volunteer.

There was a pivotal moment when reading Bellini's (2019) thesis, where she discusses experiencing vicarious trauma. It was then that I realised I wasn't alone. Like Bellini, I intend to be transparent about what I have experienced throughout this thesis to shed light on the realities of such work. The current ethics procedure primarily considers those who participate in this research as at risk of the research, overlooking the researcher and their supervisors. I have advocated for changes to the RCA ethics application to address this oversight.

### **1.2.2 Acting in the social world: work experience**

Throughout the PhD, I have been engaged in many activities and work experiences. These include research assistant jobs in academia and an internship in government, which provided a space to learn and practice research amongst trained professionals in the field. Two notable work experiences that have shaped my thesis are working at the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) and the National Domestic Abuse Helpline (NDAH). Finally, I had an opportunity to apply the research findings in an event by UXforChange.

At the MoJ, I worked in the Data Analysis Team in the Victims And Vulnerability Unit as a policy intern for three months in 2023, as part of the UK Research and Innovation Policy Internship funded by the London Arts and Humanities Partnership. In my role, I researched and developed a comprehensive systems map of Independent Domestic Violence Advocate and Independent Sexual Violence Advocates roles supporting victim-survivors, which aimed to inform policy development. Here, I mapped out the current infrastructure of support that a person with experiences of violence may interact with, influencing my structural understanding of IPV in the UK.

As a helpline volunteer at NDAH at Refuge, I provide emotional support and signposting information to IPV survivors, professionals, and bystanders who come to our services for help. As part of my role, I received extensive training on the support system in the UK and service options for individuals. Interacting first-hand with people in situations of abuse has provided me with a profound understanding of the nuances of experiences. Equally, as a Arts and Crafts Volunteer at Hestia I learnt about the value of entering in dialogue with each other about our lives and experiences while crafting

At the same time, throughout my PhD, I have been part of founding and facilitating a feminist design research group at the RCA. This group provided a safe space to explore, question and test ideas related to design and many elements of feminism and politics. All these activities and work experiences are threaded into the backbone of this PhD. Although topics were not always focused on GBV, new skills and different mindsets and attitudes were learnt that inevitably shaped how I engaged in this topic.

Finally, insights from this thesis were applied in a workshop by UXforChange in 2024.

UXforChange works with social innovation founders or non-profit organisations to run events (hackathons or workshops) with diverse industry designers (from banking to government) to support them in developing their products. In this particular event, Pillow, a digital platform to help survivors of IPV thrive, was supported by industry designers with concept development. Here, findings from this thesis directly supported designers in understanding the context (see Conclusion Chapter).

### **1.3 Overview of contributions**

This thesis offers three main contributions that interrelate to address the identified research questions in section 1.1. It is through a combination of theoretical and empirical input, but also acting in the social world, that has led to developing these contributions to the field of social design. Additionally, it offers a contribution through the methodological approach used in this thesis.

- First, the thesis contributes by constituting a design that addresses IPV. It identifies and outlines intimate harm as a distinct form requiring the designer's attention. Furthermore it uncovers design's role in addressing IPV. It reframes design's role in social issues from effecting change to supporting change.
- Second, this thesis presents design adaptations in IPV contexts. It identified designers mindsets as critical in this area, capturing these into two interrelated orientations that may support designers in adapting design practices for IPV contexts. It offers principles that also address areas of concern identified in the literature review related to design and harm and build on existing trauma-informed design principles.
- Thirdly, it offers a conceptual framework for what space might support designers engaging in IPV. This framework, alongside the principles, re-centres the designer's journeys and agency in the design process.
- Finally, building on Gaver et al.'s (2022) strategies for an emergent feature in methodologies, this thesis offers additional strategies for implementing a feminist emergent methodology (FEM) in areas of potential risk. It introduces structural materials as sources of inspiration and centres researchers' experiences and journeys as part of the methodological emergence.

## 1.4 Validation and reliability

Validation is essential for verifying the accuracy and credibility of findings obtained through specific procedures during the research process (Creswell, 2009). Based on Creswell's (2009) eight primary strategies to assess accuracy and ensure validity, the following were employed:

- **Reflexivity:** being transparent about the researchers positionality and how this affects their interpretation of the research;

- **Conveying findings:** rich and thick descriptions (Geertz, 1973) of the findings were developed to provide readers with the diverse perspectives and contextual understanding;
- **Present** negative or discrepant information;
- **Checking** transcripts for mistakes. Contacting participants for clarity in interpretations or any statements that were not clear to the researcher;
- Developing **definitions** for themes to ensure there is not a drift in their meaning;
- **Member checking:** in the final stage of the research, through a workshop, the qualitative findings were presented back to participants as well as other audiences (see Chapters 7). This provided an opportunity for them to comment and determine whether designers found the research's interpretation accurate and useful for their work.

## 1.5 PhD journey

### *I will now return to the first person.*

Part of emergence research presented in Chapter 4 involves 'telling the full backstory' – describing how projects came to be (Gaver et al., 2022). When I first applied for this PhD, I was exploring how design can foster women's empowerment in disaster situations. Drawing from my experience delivering aid in Lombok, Indonesia, after the 2018 earthquake, I wanted to explore the role of design in improving aid delivery and how disasters could serve as a moment for women's empowerment.

This exploration was first developed during my MRes thesis. During my studies, I soon understood that traditional women's empowerment models assume that power dynamics remain essentially the same, with those in power needing to give some to those without. Instead, I learnt that we should be reimagining the systems that create these power dynamics in the first place. This led me to adopt a more structural perspective on the subject.

During my first year, I encountered critiques about humanitarian design as a practice of new imperialism/post-colonialism/modernity (Nussbaum, 2010; Johnson, 2011; Escobar, 2018; Scott-Smith, 2016; Sandvik, 2014). They argued that design approaches often overlook the social structures and political contexts they are situated in, resulting in outcomes that reproduce or exacerbate existing inequalities in crisis situations. To better explore a way to counter this, I conducted exploratory conversations with nine practitioners who operated at the intersection of humanitarian assistance, design and gender. This study explored the realities and possibilities of design working in relation to women in disasters.

The overall findings indicated a need to shift how designers engage with people in disasters from participation to leadership. This approach emphasised the importance of ownership, capacity-building, and trust. Consequently, the design process should begin before a disaster occurs to ensure women are already in place to lead the response while having a long-term vision. Additionally, it is crucial to consider contextual and situational dynamics that can emerge and stagnate the process.

The gender perspective offered a broad scope and required focusing on a specific aspect of gender-related issues that commonly arise in disasters: gender-based violence (GBV). At the time, the world was in the midst of COVID-19, lockdowns, and its effects. Furthermore, there was a limited development of GBV products by designers in disaster contexts, so I decided to broaden my research beyond disasters to investigate GBV as a global crisis, eventually focusing on IPV as the most common form of GBV.

Although the research above has not been included in this thesis, it has been instrumental in developing the thinking that underpins this work.

## **1.6 Relevant publications**

Throughout the development of this thesis, significant findings and concepts have been disseminated to the broader academic community via peer-reviewed journals and conferences.

This process of discussions and constructive feedback from colleagues in the field has contributed to developing ideas presented in this thesis.

Fiadeiro, R., Stevens, J., & Bichard, J-A. (2023). Structures Surrounding the 'User' in User Engagement: Gender-based Violence Design Engagements. *Diseña*, (22), Article.2.  
<https://doi.org/10.7764/disena.22.Article.2>

Fiadeiro, R., Bichard, J., and Stevens, J. (2023) Against the norms: designing violence prevention through engaging men, in De Sainz Molestina, D., Galluzzo, L., Rizzo, F., Spallazzo, D. (eds.), IASDR 2023: Life-Changing Design, 9-13 October, Milan, Italy. <https://doi.org/10.21606/iasdr.2023.359>

## 1.7 Structure of the thesis:

Following this introduction (Chapter 1), the thesis has been structured into ten chapters. In Chapter 2, three stories of people in IPV situations are introduced and used across chapters to contextualise and add nuance to the often complex landscape of IPV. Below is a brief overview of each chapter.

The literature review is divided into two chapters. **Chapter 2** begins by outlining the context of this thesis. It starts with introducing the theory and history of IPV globally and in the UK and conceptualises IPV as a social structure that serves as a theoretical framework throughout the thesis. The chapter then situates the thesis within the field of social design and examines the history of existing literature at the intersection of design and IPV. It concludes by identifying the gap in knowledge.

**Chapter 3** presents an argument for the research approach adopted in this thesis. It begins by reviewing key discourses that theorise design practice in various contexts and examines how principles can serve as a mechanism for communicating design adaptations back to the field. It explores how spaces may support designers in adopting said practices and exploring adaptations. The chapter then deconstructs the following terms: harm, risk, trauma, safety, and healing,

followed by discussing the methodological and practical implications of working with these concepts.

**Chapter 4** describes the methodological approach used to address the research questions. It begins by detailing the feminist emergent methodology that has been adopted and adapted. Furthermore it positions the researcher as a feminist. Next, it describes the rationale behind the chosen methods—case studies, workshop, and interviews—as well as their procedures. The chapter concludes by outlining the data collection and analysis methods employed to derive the findings presented in the subsequent chapters.

The following two chapters present the two case studies. **Chapter 5** focuses on interventions aimed at response and recovery, while **Chapter 6** focuses on prevention with men. Both chapters follow a similar structure: they begin with a background literature review on the situational context of the interventions, followed by the cultural contexts of the projects. After this, the findings from the data collected are presented, followed by a discussion and analysis of the implications.

**Chapter 7** builds on Chapters 5 and 6 by presenting a cross-case analysis. It identifies key patterns and differences across the case approaches, emphasising the need to shift designers mindsets as a core element. It then presents six principles to guide designers addressing IPV.

Given the suggested shift in mindsets, **Chapter 8** explores what space may support designers entering and designing at the intersection of these fields.

After presenting the empirical data and subsequent analysis in Chapters 5-8, **Chapter 9** brings together these insights and situates them within the wider field and literature review conducted in Chapters 2 and 3. It discusses key topics raised in this thesis and summarises the findings. Finally, it critically reflects on the methodological approach employed in this thesis.

The **Conclusion** offers the implications and contributions to knowledge presented in this thesis. It discusses the limitations of the research approach taken and offers recommendations for future research directions.

# Chapter 2. From isolated incidents to patterned behaviours

## Chapter overview:

This chapter outlines the context in which this thesis is situated – at the intersection of intimate partner violence (IPV) and design. It begins by introducing three fictitious stories of people in IPV situations that will be recalled throughout the thesis. Following this, it explores the social, political, and historical landscape of IPV, identifying the risk factors and impacts of abuse, while providing a framework for understanding IPV and the potential role of design in addressing this social issue.

Although this doctoral research is located within the UK, it studies interventions developed worldwide. Thus, it includes a brief overview of the global landscape of IPV and its social implications, which is then complemented by a UK-focused historical and legislative perspective.

Following this, the chapter presents a theoretical framework for ‘thinking structurally’ about IPV as an analytical tool to support the interpretation of the literature and empirical data in subsequent chapters. It then discusses the development of interventions to address IPV. Given the rise of social design, the chapter considers design as one potential mode of intervention. It delves into its history and contemporary applications in situations of harm, identifying the exploration of ‘intimate harm’ as a particular area in need of further research.

The chapter concludes with a preliminary examination of existing published work at the intersection of IPV and design. It identifies that, while this is not an entirely new field, literature remains fragmented, highlighting a gap in knowledge for research that explores cohesion in design’s application to IPV to inform design practice.





Figure 2.1- Literature Review for Chapter 2

## 2.1 Experiences of IPV: three stories

Intimate Partner Violence (IPV), most commonly known in the UK as domestic violence and abuse, is the most common form of gender-based violence (GBV). It includes all forms of violence and abuse experienced in the context intimate partnerships, e.g. marriage cohabitation, which can include both current and past (Sardinha et al., 2022). IPV can take the shape of physical, sexual, psychological, (Ali et al., 2016), financial (Bellini, 2023) or coercive behaviour. These are examples of several forms of abuse that someone may experience, along with their definitions:

- Physical violence is the use of physical force to inflict pain; shoving, hitting, biting (Ali et al., 2016);
- Sexual violence is forcing a partner to do a sexual act or forcing them into doing something they don't want to do (Ali et al., 2016);
- Psychological abuse, also known as emotional abuse, includes behaviours intended to humiliate someone or control them, e.g. verbal abuse, criticising, monitoring and restricting movements (Ali et al., 2016);
- Financial abuse, is the intent to target a partner's financial independence, stability, and well-being (Bellini et al., 2023b);
- Coercive control is a pattern of behaviours, including intimidation and assault, to harm, punish or frighten their partner (Women's Aid, n.d.);
- Identity abuse, includes leveraging sexism, gender identity and ableism or racism to cause harm or to control an individual (Rogers, 2021).

Most recently there has been an increase in technological-facilitated abuse where perpetrators use technology to enhance their abuse abilities (Leitão, 2021).

Given the highly complex nature of IPV, where people's experiences of abuse are influenced by many contextual and situational factors, this thesis introduces three stories of people experiencing abuse. They aim to bring nuance to the often abstracted complexities of abuse, to offer moments of grounding to the reader, and are recalled throughout this thesis. These stories, while fictitious, are inspired by materials and articles related to IPV. Specifically, they are influenced by the researchers training at NDAH in Refuge, UK which used stories based on the experiences of helpline workers and have been sense checked with a subject matter expert. They have been designed to highlight the different forms of abuse a person can experience, the different stages of abuse, varied harms experienced, and intersectional and contextual factors that can shape how abuse and reaching support can be experienced. Furthermore each story aims to cover a different perspective related to each intervention discussed in the case studies in Chapter 5 and 6. It is important to note that these stories only provide a snapshot, and as will be covered in the following sections (2.2 and 2.3), there are many more mechanisms at play.

The research will now introduce the stories of **Joseph and Grace, Maria, and Ben** in Box 2.1<sup>3</sup>.

**Joseph and Grace** focus on a situation which might lead a couple to engage in a prevention programme. The story draws on Starmann et al.'s (2017) article situated in Uganda, the cultural context of one of the projects studied in Chapter 6. **Maria** focuses on someone experiencing financial, sexual, emotional and physical abuse, coercive control and non-fatal strangulation, and draws on NDAH work. Finally, **Ben's** story focuses on someone enacting emotional, physical and tech abuse, built from a combination of stories shared in Respect UK's (n.d.) Phoneline website.

See Appendix B for more stories.

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<sup>3</sup> The face illustrations are inspired by Henry et al.'s (2024) work on developing a chatbot for image-based abuse. They sought to create an androgynous and ambiguous image that can represent multiple images simultaneously. Like their character, the one used in this thesis can be interpreted differently. One can see it as a feminised character with a bob haircut, a headscarf, a masculine character with short hair, or gender-neutral depictions. Its gender and race are not determined (Henry et al., 2024).



**Joseph and Grace** have been married for 8 years. Joseph has recently been struggling to provide for the family financially due to job losses, which has led to Grace seeking work. As a result, he feels that his role as breadwinner is being challenged and judged. He feels trapped in a low mood and uses drinking and gambling to escape his feelings, using the money he earns to gamble. Their love for each other has been decreasing, and they frequently argue (no power and control/coercive control is present).



**Maria** has been married for three years to a police officer called Tom and has two children. Tom has consistently put Maria down, saying she is a terrible mother and criticises her cooking and cleaning. Tom made Maria quit her job when the second child was born in order to look after them, stating that she was not very good at her job either anyway. The children are experiencing the abuse but no actions have been directed at them<sup>4</sup>. Two weeks ago, he threatened her with violence and threw a glass at her feet; last night, he punched her several times and forced her to have sex with him; during the assault, he strangled Maria. Maria is frightened and worried that her husband might kill her. Tom is highly respected in his small countryside village mainly due to his work as a police officer. His job also makes Maria worried about going to the police as she is concerned that they will not believe her, and he could find out<sup>5</sup>.



**Ben** has been dating Josh for the past two years. Ben grew up in an abusive family where his father would emotionally abuse his mother. He describes the early stages of his relationship with Josh as happy and enjoyable. Recently, he has been struggling with feelings of jealousy regarding Josh's new friends at work. He is worried Josh may be unfaithful and leave him. To help him feel more secure, Ben frequently calls and texts Josh while at work and monitors his movements. If Josh doesn't respond or has been somewhere he doesn't recognise, Ben would start arguments and make harmful remarks about Josh. Recently, the abuse has been escalating, and Ben has been using physical violence and punching him. These behaviours have been a pattern in Ben's previous relationships, and he feels unable to manage his emotions without resorting to violence.

#### Box 2.1- IPV stories

<sup>4</sup> In the UK, under the Domestic Abuse Act, children will be automatically treated as victims of domestic abuse regardless of whether they are present during abusive incidents (CPS, 2022).

<sup>5</sup> In the UK, over the six month period of October to March 2022 there were 1,177 recorded cases of police-perpetrated VAWG, making up 0.7% of the workforce employed (College of Policing and National Police Chiefs' Council, 2023).

## 2.2 The prevalence of IPV in the UK and globally

IPV is a global public health concern that can have grave impacts on the individual and any dependent's physical and mental health, including injuries, depression, and substance abuse, posing a risk to people's safety. Moreover, the impacts of IPV may persist post-abuse, for instance, through lasting trauma, such as post-traumatic stress disorder<sup>6</sup> (Karakurt et al., 2015).

Significantly, IPV can also lead to death, where it is estimated to cause 38-50% of murders of women globally (Sardinha et al., 2022). Every five days in the UK, a women is killed by her intimate partner (Refuge, n.d.). Globally, **140** women and girls are killed a day by an intimate partner or family member (UNODC & UN Women, 2024)<sup>7</sup>. In 2018, in a study by Sardinha et al. (2022), they found that globally:

"more than one in four (27%) ever-partnered women aged 15–49 years had experienced physical or sexual violence, or both, from a current or former intimate partner at least once in their lifetime; and one in seven (13%) had experienced it in the past year. This finding means that in 2018, up to 492 million ever-partnered women aged 15–49 years had been subjected to this type of violence by an intimate partner at least once since the age of 15 years."

They also found that IPV is most prevalent in low-resource countries. However, these insights may be incomplete as they do not include all forms of abuse, such as economic and coercive.

Additionally, the data relies on women's self-reported experiences, which may result in gaps due to the culture of silence that often prevents reporting - where women may not wish to risk escalating abusive situations at home. Furthermore, definitions of violence and abuse differ across cultures (The World Bank, n.d.). Despite these limitations, the statistics are still concerning. However, they

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<sup>6</sup> Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) can be triggered following exposure to a traumatic event (i.e. violence). Here, people may re-experience the event through flashbacks, have difficulties sleeping, and avoid event reminders (Karakurt et al., 2015).

<sup>7</sup> Femicide, also known as Feminicide, is the term used for men's fatal violence against women. Around the world there has been greater attention to counting and documenting these killings to demonstrate that these are not isolated incidents but rather patterns (Femicide Census, n.d.). To further explore its intersection with design see Catherine D'Ignazio's (2024) book *Counting Femicide: data feminism in action*.

primarily focus on male violence against women and do not take into account men's experiences of violence from women, non-binary people, same-sex relationships and within the trans community. These latter dynamics of IPV, and also amongst people in different social locations, can bring about specific forms of abuse, such as identity abuse (Rogers, 2021)<sup>8</sup>.

The impacts of IPV are not just individual and but can also lead to substantial social and economic costs to governments and communities (Sardinha et al., 2022). In 2021, the Domestic Abuse Commissioner estimated that England and Wales spends around £74 billion yearly. For governments, this includes direct and indirect costs to health services, policing and housing, and for the economy, there is a loss from time off work and reduced productivity (Domestic Abuse Commissioner, 2021).

How violence is experienced and perpetuated can look different for each individual, as these are situated within the larger social structures that affect people's lives. Many scholars have theorised how IPV manifests itself in societies and what risk and protective factors may lead to abuse. Most notably, Heise (1998) developed the socio-ecological framework to help understand how different factors related to attitudes, practices, social norms, resources, and gender roles can drive IPV. Demonstrated through models, as illustrated in Figure 2.1, it is a multifaceted perspective grounded in the interplay of multiple layers and demonstrates how interpersonal factors such as division of labour or communication can be further exacerbated/influenced by structural and cultural factors such as cultural norms and women's access to employment (Prevention Collaborative, 2021). Within this, there are situational triggers and events that can cause conflict in a relationship, which can precipitate an incident of violence. For instance, failing to meet gendered expectations or excessive drinking – see Box 2.2 (Prevention Collaborative, 2020).

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<sup>8</sup> See Faith's story in Appendix B for an example.



After Joseph lost his job and Grace sought work, he feels that his gender expectations are being challenged. This situation, combined with his resorting to gambling and drinking, has escalated conflicts in their relationship.

#### Box 2.2 Situational triggers in Joseph and Grace's story

The prevalence and patterns of these factors differ worldwide and depend on people's social identity (i.e. gender) in a given context (Flood, 2015)—further emphasised by interplays of overlapping structures of oppression that can impact state provisions and exploitation (Vergès, 2022; Greig and Flood, 2020). This enhances risks for individuals at different social locations, impacting not only how they experience abuse but also how they seek support.

The multiple factors that constitute our societies today influence IPV, making it not a singular phenomenon but rather a behaviour (social outcome). With this in mind, it is crucial to have a structural understanding of IPV to help explain the meaning behind behaviours and the causal relationships that perpetuate them, examined in section 2.3.

## Community

- ▶ Rigid norms around expected male and female roles and behaviours
- ▶ Norms condoning male authority over women and children
- ▶ Norms linking men's honour to women's behaviour
- ▶ Norms accepting VAW
- ▶ Norms of family privacy
- ▶ Lack of social / legal sanction for VAW
- ▶ Local poverty + unemployment

## Society

- ▶ Gender-discriminatory laws / policies
- ▶ Other forms of discrimination (e.g. racial, religious)
- ▶ Collectivist cultural orientation
- ▶ Armed conflict
- ▶ Political instability
- ▶ Corrosive macro-economic forces

## Interpersonal

- ▶ Male dominance in decision-making
- ▶ Violence seen as an appropriate form of discipline
- ▶ Poor communication skills
- ▶ High relationship conflict
- ▶ Lack of trust / emotional intimacy
- ▶ Association with violent and antisocial peers
- ▶ Social isolation

## Individual Man

### (risk of perpetrating violence)

- ▶ Age (young men are at higher risk)
- ▶ Depression
- ▶ Experiencing violence in childhood
- ▶ Witnessing violence in childhood
- ▶ Attitudes accepting violence / VAW
- ▶ Gender inequitable attitudes
- ▶ Low education level
- ▶ Psychological dysfunction
- ▶ Harmful alcohol / substance use

## Individual Woman

### (risk of experiencing violence)

- ▶ Age (young women are at higher risk)
- ▶ Depression
- ▶ Experiencing violence in childhood
- ▶ Witnessing violence in childhood
- ▶ Attitudes accepting violence / VAW
- ▶ Disability
- ▶ Low social support

### Factors that increase or decrease risk depending on context

- ▶ Women's employment / income generation
- ▶ Women's asset ownership
- ▶ Women's access to credit

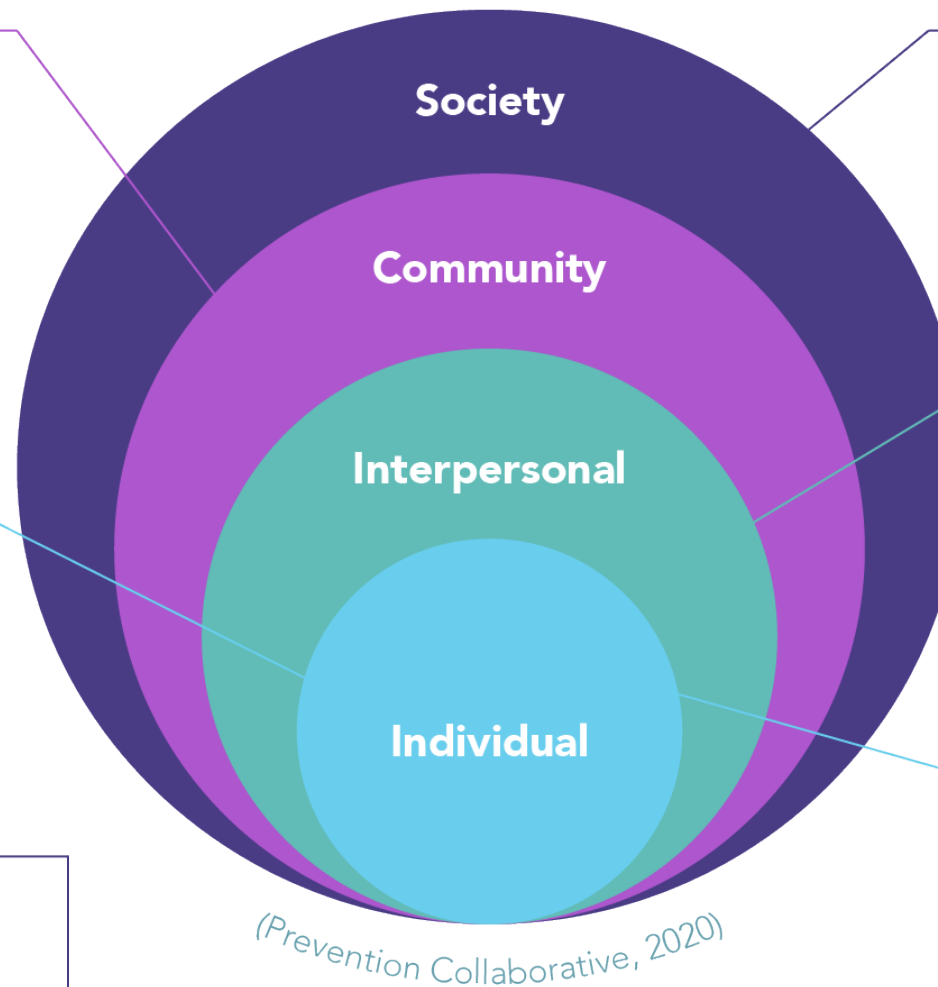


Figure 2.2- Socio-ecological model of IPV adapted from Prevention Collaborative (2020)



## 2.2.1 Criminalisation as a dominant discourse in IPV in the UK

While this thesis explores IPV globally, it will consistently use the UK to contextualise and outline the structural influences and norms that may be at play, thus highlighting the dominant discourses shaping the context and design. The research will now introduce the legislative history of IPV in the UK, by drawing on the Centre for Women's Justice (n.d.) published timeline. In the UK, IPV is formally named as Domestic Abuse.

The history of interventions political and legislative changes for IPV is quite recent, with IPV being considered previously a private matter rather than a public one. Starting in 1895 in London, UK, wife beating was prohibited between the hours of 10pm and 7am because the noise kept neighbours awake. The political movement against IPV gained momentum during the feminist movement of the 1970s shifting it into a public concern. In 1971 the first refuge<sup>9</sup> for victims of IPV is opened in the UK by activist and novelist Erin Pizzey in Chiswick, West London. In 1974 the National Women's Aid Federation (now known as Women's Aid) was founded, bringing together nearly 40 independent refuges into a national network. In 1976 the Domestic Violence and Matrimonial Proceedings Act was the first legislation to combat domestic violence by offering civil protection orders<sup>10</sup> (injunctions) for those at risk of abuse. The 1977 Housing Act classifies women and children at risk of violence as 'homeless,' thereby granting them entitlement to state-funded temporary accommodation. In 1979 Southall Black Sisters is founded, initially focusing on women fighting racism soon involved to supporting and defending black victims of IPV. In 1987 the first national IPV helpline is established by Women's Aid. In 1990, the first IPV perpetrator programme was set up to help perpetrators change their behaviours. Only in 1991 was marital rape made a criminal act in England and Wales. Up until then marriage implied consent.

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<sup>9</sup> A refuge is safe and anonymous temporary accommodation for individuals and their children fleeing IPV situations.

<sup>10</sup> Civil protection orders are legal protections to keep individuals and their children safe from abuse. They can prevent someone from, for instance, contacting or approaching them.

In the late 1990s and 2000s there was a shift from IPV as a feminist issue to a criminal justice issue. Specifically, the Conservative government identified the Home Office as the lead government department responsible for violence against women and girls (VAWG) (Harvie & Manzie, 2011). The Crime and Disorder Act in 1998 contributed to defining IPV within a criminal justice ethos. This emphasised legal and bureaucratic policies, with an increased focus on crime prevention and the criminal justice system's role in addressing IPV. Thus, marginalising the central role of women's agencies and feminist groups (Harvie & Manzie, 2011). Harvie & Manzie (2011) note this "confirmed that policies on domestic violence were to remain within a criminal justice ethos." (p.84). Prioritising a managerial culture and short-term performance measures, which according to Harvie & Manzie, do not effectively address the complex and long-term needs of victims. In 2005 the Home Office publishes the first national action plan on IPV.

Jumping forwards, in 2021, the Domestic Abuse Act becomes law, providing the first legal definition of IPV, introducing a Domestic Abuse Commissioner to oversee performance. From here, many more criminal offences related to IPV have been amended and become law, for instance, non-fatal strangulation (2022), amendment of coercive control offence to include situations where partners are not living together or in a relationship (2023), and Online Safety Bill (2023) which included image-based abuse offences. With the new Labour Government introduced in the UK in 2024, they have pledged to halve VAWG in the next decade (Home Office et al., 2024).

This timeline illustrates that interventions for IPV are framed as a criminal justice issue in the UK. It highlights the development of legislation aimed at criminalising abusive acts which offers guidance for services that support people in abusive situations. Under the strong commitment from the Labour government, addressing IPV is a priority in the UK. As design increasingly influences social issues - particularly within governmental and public entities (Julier & Kimbell, 2019)- it is essential to examine potential role of design in addressing IPV.

## 2.2.2 The Abolition perspective



For Maria, whose husband Tom is a police officer, turning to the police for support is not an option.

### Box 2.3- Experiences of police abusers

In the UK, statistics concerning the criminal response to violence against women (VAW) indicate that only 2.6% of rape offences were assigned a charge or summons outcome (Evennett, 2025), and it is estimated that less than 24% of IPV gets reported to the police (National Centre for Domestic Violence, 2023). Considering the structural aspects of IPV, a single system cannot adequately address the diversity of experiences of abuse. Responding to the central role the criminal justice system (CJS) plays in responding to VAW, and the harm that the CJS inflicts on communities, abolitionist feminists have been calling for and developing strategies that counter CJS reforms. Abolitionist Futures (2024), based in the UK, published a chart of such strategies including, bystander de-escalation training, and prevention-focused education – supporting people to understand the root causes of violence and how to prevent them through communities.

One Million Experiments is a platform that showcases US community-based strategies that keep communities safe. Damon Williams (in Kisslinger & Williams, 2021) shares the philosophy behind this: “The truth is, we don't need one new thing. We need a million experiments in which we will practice and learn to create the systems and the world that we want.” (1:21). This statement, highlights how harm is present in many forms in our communities and therefore to respond to it, contextual implications are vital, as well as learning, sharing and envisioning. The projects outlined in Chapter 5 and 6, are a few of many experiments in the making, however, what sets these apart is design's central role.

Harm will always be present in our societies, it is how we respond and reinforce it that will make the difference of sustaining healing and safety. This thesis draws on the abolitionist perspective to question dominant ideologies related to carcerality that find its way into design (Chapter 3). While

this may not be the dominant view of designers who are centred in the empirical study (Chapter 5-6), it is still vital in outlining the realities and possibilities of doing IPV work.

## 2.3 Thinking structurally about IPV

One man abusing a woman is a case of personal violence, but millions of men abusing women is a case of structural form of violence (Wathen & Varcoe, 2023). The previous section concluded with an understanding of intimate partner violence (IPV) as a pattern in societies. Understanding IPV as a *structural form of violence* situates it within broader systems of oppression—such as patriarchy, capitalism, and colonialism (Vergès, 2022)—and recognises it as part of a spectrum of socialised behaviours from given contexts rather than isolated incidents or individual acts (Bates, 2022) that avoidably target certain people (Wathen & Varcoe, 2023). These overlapping systems shape societal norms, regulations, and cultures (Vink & Koskela-Huotari, 2021), influencing how violence is experienced, perpetuated, and even rewarded, particularly along gendered lines (Anderson, 2007). This research does not seek to contribute directly to sociology but engages with theories of social structure and agency to explore how structural conditions shape behaviours (Risman, 2018) and to consider design's potential role in influencing social change.

The structural perspective critiques individualistic approaches (Risman, 2018) and examines how durable economic, political, and cultural relations can maintain oppression (Van Amstel et al., 2023). Looking at the gendered dimension of IPV, Risman (1998; 2004; 2018) conceptualises gender as a social structure operating at three levels: individual (identities), interactional (relationships) and macro (institutions). These levels recursively interact, shaping and constraining human behaviours while defining possibilities and options for individuals. As Risman asserts, “Each structure of inequality exists on its own yet coexists with every other structure of inequality” (2004, p.444).

Building on Risman (1998), Anderson (2005) argues that sex differences do not determine violent behaviours, rather they emerge from gendered social processes embedded in social institutions and relationships:

"Structuralist gender theory is needed to understand how women and men encounter different constraints to the perpetration of violence and different barriers to stopping the violence or leaving the relationship." (Anderson, 2005, p.859).

At the macro level these dynamics are invisible yet entrenched harms built into "the fabric of society" (Montesanti & Thurston, 2015, p.2) . Montesanti and Thurston (2015) state that:

"Rather than focusing on dichotomised notions of 'victims' and 'perpetrators', which locate the problem of violence within individuals who are deemed good or bad, violent or non-violent, our attention to structural violence directs us to examine the "everydayness" of violence from the vantage point of complex political, social, historic, and economic processes" (Montesanti and Thurston, 2015, p.3).

In this, IPV becomes part of a much larger framework of systemic inequality.

While some structures can oppress, others can support individuals—such as state-provided social housing. A key challenge in thinking structurally is avoiding reducing individuals to victims of oppression. Instead, structures interact with agency (Risman, 2008), in ways that reinforce or challenge it. Freire (2000) argues that when people become conscious of oppressive structures, these grievances motivate collective action<sup>11</sup>, stating, "It is only the oppressed who, by freeing themselves, can free their oppressors" (p.30), emphasising the dynamic and responsive nature of structures and the vital role of agency.

IPV evolves alongside shifting social structures, with deep-rooted dynamics sometimes persisting. For instance, advances in digital technology have enhanced mechanisms of abuse, known as 'tech abuse'. Adopting a structural perspective allows researchers and designers (Vink, 2019) to uncover and critique the societal conditions underlying violence, making the world "less natural

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<sup>11</sup> Freire (2000) sees it as a vital component where there is a process of "conscientização"—conscientisation, or critical consciousness—where people become conscious of their oppressive structure, leading to collective action.

and more social" (Van Amstel et al., 2023, p.2). This perspective not only reveals IPV dynamics but also creates space to envision new realities (Van Amstel et al., 2022).

Thus, the following subsections explore 'thinking structurally' as a theoretical framework to support the research interpretation and analysis. Consistent with Risman's (2008) conceptualization of gender as a social structure and the socio-ecological model introduced in Section 1.2, the following subsections briefly explore this framework at the **individual**, **interactional**, and **macro** levels. The findings highlight the interplay between situational and contextual implications that require consideration when not only developing interventions, but as will be later (Chapter 5 and 6) demonstrated, integrated into how design process' are approached.

### 2.3.1 Individual level

The individual factors refer to development features that shape peoples response to the other levels (interactional and macro) (Heise, 1998). There is a correlation between experiencing or witnessing abuse in children's formative years and experiencing or enacting IPV. Others may come from families where parents are absent, struggle with substance abuse, or are placed in the care system; these factors increase the likelihood of experiencing violence but also witnessing it in adults. This may lead to at a later stage seeking relationships that mirror their childhood environment (Heise, 1998; Montesanti & Thurston, 2015) – Box 2.4. At a young age, children are put or found in social circumstances where cycles of aggression and abuse impact how they might later encounter or enact violence.



As a child, Ben witnessed abuse, which has influenced him to enact abuse in future relationships.

Box 2.4 Ben's risk factor for enacting abuse

Access to resources and systems of support is another influencing factor that shapes IPV (Flood, 2019). In queer relationships, people might experience loss of social networks and ties in their communities and families, this puts people in vulnerable positions without support to leave their relationship (Montesanti & Thurston, 2015). Box 2.5 outlines this in the context of Josh and Ben's story.



For example, Josh may have lost social connections with his family, making it more difficult to receive support during the abusive relationship.

Box 2.5- Josh's support network

In the UK, women with disabilities are twice as likely to experience IPV compared to non-disabled women, as their experiences have been overlooked, leaving them ill-equipped to recognise and respond to abusive behaviours (Save Lives, 2017). Racialised women risk encountering further violence if they seek support of the police (Powell & Phelps, 2021). People with insecure immigration status may fear being deported if they seek support (Women's Aid, 2019). In refugee camps and disasters, where people are living in poor conditions, aid workers have been known to take advantage over women's bodies coercing them into sex (rape) for aid (Naik, 2022). The list goes on.

### 2.3.2 Interactional level: interpersonal and community

The interactional level refers to the interactions between people, and how meanings are given to them (Heise, 1998). Both in the interpersonal relationships and community interactions. An interactionist approach to gender considers gender as an outcome of social practices that involve "doing gender" through our interactions in society, where social expectations encourage people to perform "masculinities" or "femininities" (West & Zimmerman, 1987; Butler, 1988; Anderson, 2005). "Thus, the interactionist approach shifts our thinking from the question of how masculinity causes violence to the question of how violence causes masculinity" (Anderson, 2005, p.856). Masculinities are shaped by the cultural meanings related to being a man, the way men organise

their lives and relationships, and the actions they adopt through the chosen social practices. Thus, there are multiple forms of masculinities (Flood, 2015; 2019).

Anderson (2005) suggests that, as aggression is one of the components of the cultural image of masculinities, violence can be used as a mechanism to perform masculinities. Thus, men might use violence when they perceive their authority/power in their relationship is being challenged.

"Because violence is defined as "masculine" within popular culture, audiences expect, acknowledge, and encourage men's violence as normal behaviour." (Anderson, 2005, p.857).

Thus, men have and are persistently being socialised to constitute their masculinities through aggressive behaviours in the eyes of cultural expectations (Olufemi, 2020; Bola, 2019). From this perspective, violence is used to construct masculinities in spaces where it is threatened (Anderson, 2005). For example, in disasters when poverty increases and livelihoods drop (where masculinities, of being the 'provider', are threatened) women are more likely to endure GBV (Murphy & Bourassa, 2021). This does not mean that violence is an inherent male behaviour but masculinities can be constructed through the practice of violence (Anderson, 2005); and norms in societies preserve these behaviours.



For instance, Ben feels threatened by Josh's recent friendships at work. It is not Josh's actions but Ben's reactions to these events that lead to violence.

Box 2.6-Bens sense of power being challenged

This inadvertently impacts men when they experience IPV (from women or other men) as they may face personal and social barriers to reporting violence and abuse. Internally, men may experience intense feelings of shame due to societal norms that value strength. This is reinforced socially, where men who experience violence can face stigma and are often seen as less masculine (Bola, 2019; Anderson, 2005). Finally, culturally the practice of violence can be evaluated differently depending on gender attributions where men's violence is viewed more seriously than women's violence (Anderson, 2005). Both these external and internal factors



contribute to men being less likely to report abuse. In the UK, men are two and a half times less likely to disclose that they are victims of IPV (Brooks, 2021).

### **2.3.3 Macro Level: societal and institutional process**

Anderson (2005) argues that men have more access to opportunities to learn violence than women. Bola (2019), from a UK perspective, affirms this through his analysis of how aggression is socialised into boys at a young age and through their formative years. At a young age boys are given violent toys (guns, trucks, weapons), which put boys in more aggressive and physical modes of playing. Later on in secondary school, boys will often play fight as a means of testing who is the strongest among the group and establish a hierarchy (Bola, 2019). Finally, men may be encouraged to pursue careers that involve training in the use of violence such as military and police forces (Anderson, 2005). This isn't to say that boys becoming abusers is directly related to whether they played with violent toys growing up, but rather a demonstration of how year upon year boys are socialised into performing violent and aggressive behaviours that may continue into their relationships.

Once people are in relationships, due to how our gendered structures organise caregiving (women) and breadwinning (men) responsibilities, women may more likely find themselves in economic dependency of their partners but also hold responsibilities over children (if they have them). This also intersects with symbolic violence factors were prescribed gender roles discouraging women into paid positions (Montesanti & Thurston, 2015). In situations where abuse is occurring these gendered roles can constrain whether someone can/will leave an abusive relationship. In these circumstances, women might often face financial constraints that make leaving difficult, particularly due to their economic dependency on their partners (Anderson, 2007; Montesanti & Thurston, 2015) – illustrated in Box 2.7. For men experiencing abuse they may often occupy the structural role of breadwinner in their relationship and might feel compelled, due to cultural gendered norms of provider, to stay in their relationship (Anderson, 2007). In regions where forced and arranged marriages are prevalent, it diminishes women's decision-making power

to choose a partner, leading them into potentially abusive relationships. For others this could force them to stay with abusive partner because of the bride price paid (Montesanti & Thurston, 2015).



Although Tom coerced Maria into quitting her job, this is further exacerbated by societal norms that prioritise women as caregivers. As a result, Maria has become financially dependent on Tom, making it more challenging to leave the situation (Bellini et al., 2023a).

Box 2.7- Marias experience of financial abuse

Finally, when it comes to someone leaving a relationship there might be other systems and institutions of structural violence that may further prevent people doing so. For example,

"lack of trust in workers and fear of consequences of asking for help [28]; difficulties in accessing services (i.e., transport cost and inability to contact service providers while they lived with the abusive families) [28, 69]; lack of knowledge of rights or services [35, 54] and systemic prejudices by government and society [33]." (Montesanti & Thurston, 2015, p.9).

Overall, systems restrict and influence what social conditions a person navigates at the macro level. This then influences, at the interactional level, the behaviours, attitudes, and social practices people adopt, which reinforce harmful gender and cultural norms. Finally, situational factors at the individual level make people more likely to experience those behaviours.

## 2.3.4 Interventions to address IPV

Thinking structurally supports practitioners in evaluating how economic, political, legal, physical and social environments can produce and reproduce risk and thus, make informed changes to modify risk at multiple levels of the social ecology (Bourey et al, 2015). Thus, there must be multiple approaches to addressing IPV. Given the breadth of manifestations of risk, interventions have been varied. Ellsberg et al. (2015) have classified the growth of interventions since 1995 into two generations:

- 1) Provision of support services for people experiencing VAW and development of legislation to criminalise VAW and make the CJS more effective;
- 2) Changing attitudes and norms supporting VAW, mainly in low-income and middle income countries, focusing on community programmes aimed at affecting the individual by economically and socially empowering women, and promoting positive behaviours.

Building on Ellsberg et al. (2015) work, Bourey et al. (2015) argues that recent generations are focused on preventing IPV through transforming societal and community gender norms – structural intervention.

Michael Flood (2019), a leading voice in violence prevention with men, stated that a common way to classify intervention efforts to prevent and respond to IPV is to focus on *when* they occur in relation to the violence. While there are many ways these approaches have been named<sup>12</sup>, in this thesis efforts are defined as following:

- Before the abuse occurs: **Prevention**. Interventions aim to prevent initial perpetration or victimisation (Flood, 2019);
- Once the abuse has begun: **Response**. Immediate interventions after abuse to address and respond to short-term risks and consequences and prevent the abuse from escalating or reoccurring (Flood, 2019);
- Responding after the abuse has occurred: **Recovery**. Long-term responses to address the lasting consequences of violence, heal from its impacts, and prevent further perpetration or victimisation (Flood, 2019).

In this thesis all three categories are explored. It focuses in particular on a generation of interventions being developed by designers dating back to 2011, see section 2.5.1. In Chapters 5 and 6 it explores eight different projects along the intervention continuum, from supporting people

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<sup>12</sup> Respectively, these classifications are also known as: primary prevention, secondary prevention, and tertiary prevention.

to understand the dynamics of abuse to learning better communication skills amongst couples. These interventions, however, have all focused on the individual and interactional level of the social ecology. While these may not be considered structural interventions, they do take into account how norms and structures restrict and influence peoples behaviours.

## 2.4 Design adapting to address social issues

As previously pointed to, this thesis considers design as a potential mode of intervention, and situates itself within the field of social design, which is concerned with actively addressing social issues. Victor Papanek (1971) is often credited for putting socially responsible design on the mainstream design agenda by calling out the rampant consumerism in design seeking to get individuals to buy products they neither need nor want (e.g. Resnick, 2019; Abdulla, 2018).

The turn of social design aimed to reconfigure the dominant practice of design in the twentieth century from designing commercial products into designing to make tangible change to "improve" the life of *others* (Resnick, 2019). This implies that these social issues aren't experienced by designers themselves. In her deconstruction of the term 'social design', Resnick (2019) outlines the different ways the 'social' element has been introduced into design:

- the 'social' emphasises that the focus of design is on social issues that require 'urgent' interventions;
- it is a process, often involving participatory approaches, aiming to improve people's well-being and generate social change;
- designers are increasingly aware of their roles and responsibilities within society.

These configurations point towards shifts in self-reflection and awareness, and implementations of practice with the goal of change.

Tonkinwise (2015; 2019) argues that social design actively employs different mindsets, attitudes, and processes, and should be a distinct practice separate from "design's commercial genealogy"

(Ibid, 2019, p.16). Both Resnick (2019) and Tonkinwise (2015; 2019) demonstrate that social design is an active adaptation of design away from commercial value and can manifest itself in many forms. But in all its forms there is an inherent value claim that comes with it - to want to change the social.

From this perspective, this research focuses on studying designers which employ different practices to create social change in IPV, rather than those working in commercial settings who, by not considering the potential threat of intimate partners (Leitão, 2021), may enable conditions for tech abuse to emerge.

Although social design may seem applicable to any social issue, Julier and Kimbell (2019) note that its political agency is often undetermined, where designers do not question the structural conditions causing these issues. They point out how this is reflected by internal limits of design, where its emergent qualities (learning through doing) do not provide a space for testing thinking and approaches. This is compounded by the fact that designers operate within external environments, such as policy landscapes and economies, that shape and reshape design (Julier & Kimbell, 2019), promoting certain ways of working. Consequently, design is being developed under aspects of neoliberal conditions (e.g. precarity (Julier & Kimbell, 2019)), but also patriarchal – promoting binary thinking (Canli, 2017)), and colonialism – reproducing Eurocentric design outcomes (Schultz et al., 2018). These conditions produce effects such as trauma, lack of safety, and harmful gender norms, which are prevalent in situations of IPV. Without critical engagement, such aspects can be overlooked in social design practices.

As mentioned in Chapter 1, designs intersection with harm has become a prevalent focus. However, this thesis argues for the need to distinguish intimate harm. It still acknowledges the social, but recognises that intimate aspects can shape peoples behaviours and thus design interactions – e.g. Box 2.8.



Maria and Tom's story reveals that the harm Maria experiences from her husband has persisted for many years within their home.

Box 2.8- Intimate harm illustrated in Maria and Tom's relationship

To preliminarily demonstrate the intersection of intimate harm and design, although further expanded on in Chapter 3, this review touches on Hirsch's (2020) article that relates design research to psychotherapeutic techniques. The intimacy of such engagements, for example semi-structured interviews which prompt reflexivity, can become therapeutic encounters. While this method is common in social contexts, it might not present itself the same way when discussing issues like recycling, but it becomes crucial in others. Therefore, it is essential to acknowledge situational factors that may affect how methods are deployed and received.

The findings suggest that by engaging in social design, designers actively adopt different mindsets, attitudes, and processes. However, as Julier and Kimbell (2019) provocatively state: "as currently configured, social design practice is destined not to tackle the causes and consequences of inequalities" (p.20). Designers ability to recognise structural causes of inequality are being questioned (Bakırloğlu & Yetiş, 2024; Agid 2022; Keshavarz, 2020; Costanza-Chock, 2020; Agid, 2019, Julier & Kimbell, 2019). By studying how designers have approached IPV and *if* and *how* design has been re-configured to address it, this research might bring the field closer to understanding social design practice that actively considers conditions of intimate harm.

## 2.5 IPV as an emerging contemporary concern for design

To conclude the chapter now turns to the application of design to address IPV. This space has evolved significantly since its initial documentation in 2011. To contextualize this emergence, this section examines the history of design's engagement with IPV through published materials including articles, blogs, talks, and projects. Yet, gaps may persist in this account as some initiatives may have included design but were not explicitly labelled as such. Furthermore, the analysis is limited to English-language sources, potentially excluding international examples.

The first subsection briefly introduces the published material in chronological order and its contexts. The subsequent subsection collates findings from the review and outlines where authors have indicated contextual implications when practising.

### 2.5.1 Developments from 2011 to 2023

The application of design to IPV was first documented in 2011 with Damazio and Leitão's *Bringing Peace into the Family*. This project aimed to raise awareness about violence against children in Brazil through live performances. However, due to the psychological strain on the team, they transitioned to an educational video that included local actors and interviews with experts and people with lived experiences, validating the information and promoting a 'pedagogy of peace'. They noted the need to move away from a condemning the community perspective to 'deconstructing it' with them, where **design will not eradicate familial violence** but can reduce its intensity.

In 2013, Hera Hussain founded Chayn (n.d.), a UK-based non-profit, to support survivors of gender-based violence with digital tools. Frustrated by a **lack of accessible information**, she created a platform that combined crowdsourced and professional content, including the "DIY Online Safety Guide' (2016). Chayn's work demonstrates the importance of accessible information in supporting survivors.

Jeffery Allen's 2016 blog highlighted the integration of design thinking into international development to address IPV, which emerges in time with the mainstream of humanitarian innovation (Scott-Smith, 2016). He noted that he had to work against challenges, common in the humanitarian field, of **limited context knowledge and short timeframes**. While he aimed to interview experts instead of engaging with people in IPV situations, which may have reduced the potential risk to participation harm (see section 3.3.2), Allen's observations reflected humanitarian design's broader reliance on rapid, scalable methods that often overlook structural harm (Keshavarz, 2020) (section 3.4.1). This emphasises the importance of slow engagements for larger social impact (section 3.4.2).

In 2017, Rachel Lehrer's from International Rescue Committee's Airbel Impact Lab gave a talk on the Becoming One project, a couples program led by trained faith leaders to IPV. Lehrer (2017) advocated for a blended approach, **combining design thinking with evidence-based programming**, emphasising the need for interdisciplinary teams that include designers, subject matter experts and local researchers. She underscored the importance of **adapting IPV programming to better integrate design** (Prevention Collective, 2021), however, this thesis argues that it is still necessary to examine design adaptations too.

In 2017 Eggleston gives a talk on trauma-informed websites for IPV organisations in the US. Around this time marks the establishment of the intersection of trauma-informed care and design – trauma informed design, expanded in section 3.2.3.1. Later in 2021, Chayn's founder Hussain (2021) publishes a blog focusing on describing trauma-informed design and how Chayn has developed principles to help guide them. This marks a greater attention to the ways in which **trauma requires designers to adapt their process** and outcomes to better support users especially in IPV.

From 2018 onwards, design's role in IPV expands at a faster rate. In 2018, Roxanne Leitão's PhD research focused on digital technologies and IPV is published, exploring how technology could both facilitate abuse and support survivors. Her work culminated in the design of a chat-bot for a UK-based charity, demonstrating the **potential of technology to provide tailored support to survivors**. In 2019 Rosanna Bellini begins publishing her doctoral work, completed in 2021, applying a human-computer interaction approach to IPV services, specifically in interventions for individuals enacting abuse.

Also in 2019, Eva PenzeyMoog (2019) presents at Women Troublemakers highlighting the importance of integrating safety considerations into the design process – later publishing a book in 2021 called *Design for Safety*. She provided examples of how **common design choices could inadvertently facilitate IPV** and proposed a framework for design for safety which argues that all designers are responsible for considering IPV into their products.



Subsequent interventions targeting IPV also focused on counselling services (Danitz et al., 2019), women's shelters (Whitman, 2019), and educational games for teenagers (Pearson et al., 2020) and bystanders (Müller et al., 2023).

## 2.5.2 A gap in knowledge at the intersection of design and IPV

The publications above highlighted methodological implications in doing this work including experiencing vicarious trauma (Bellini, 2021), challenges in recruiting people with experiences of abuse (Leitão, 2018), and limited time-frames (Allen, 2016). They also highlight practical considerations, such as reducing the cognitive load of websites (Eggleston, 2017), offering emergency support services information (Leitão, 2018), providing personalisation to avoid retriggering (Whitman, 2019), and avoiding portrayals of the process of leaving abusive relationships as quick or simple (Müller et al., 2023). These implications will be explored in more depth in Chapter 3, however, at initial glance these preliminary findings demonstrate that changes in design practice are required in order to work within the circumstances of IPV. Studying them as a pattern of activities across contexts may reveal the broader ways in which design has been adapted to work in IPV.

This timeline reveals vast and varied efforts to address IPV, from couples programming to bystander interventions, figure 2.3. More recently, it has focused on design technology and how it may be reproducing IPV. It demonstrates a larger tendency to focus on individuals who experience abuse and supporting them to recover (Chayn; Allen, 2016; Leitão, 2018; Danitz et al., 2019; Whitman, 2019), then some (Damazia & Leitão, 2011; Lehrer, 2017; Pearson et al., 2020; Müller et al., 2023) focusing on more preventative approaches before violence happen, and less so on those who enact harm (Bellini, 2021). The current understanding of design's role in IPV remains fragmented with each article centring on learnings from isolated practices in specific contexts. Greater cohesion is needed to inform best practices and equip designers to address the complex nature of IPV work leading to meaningful engagement. Uncovering the patterns in design practice

may reveal common implications and processes that provide opportunities for new and existing designers to apply design in IPV.

Ultimately, if designers were designing for users such as Maria, Ben, and Grace and Joseph, what considerations would they have to take into account? How could designers support them to address the abusive situations in their lives? Is there a design practice that could be applied across the three or do they need their own practices?

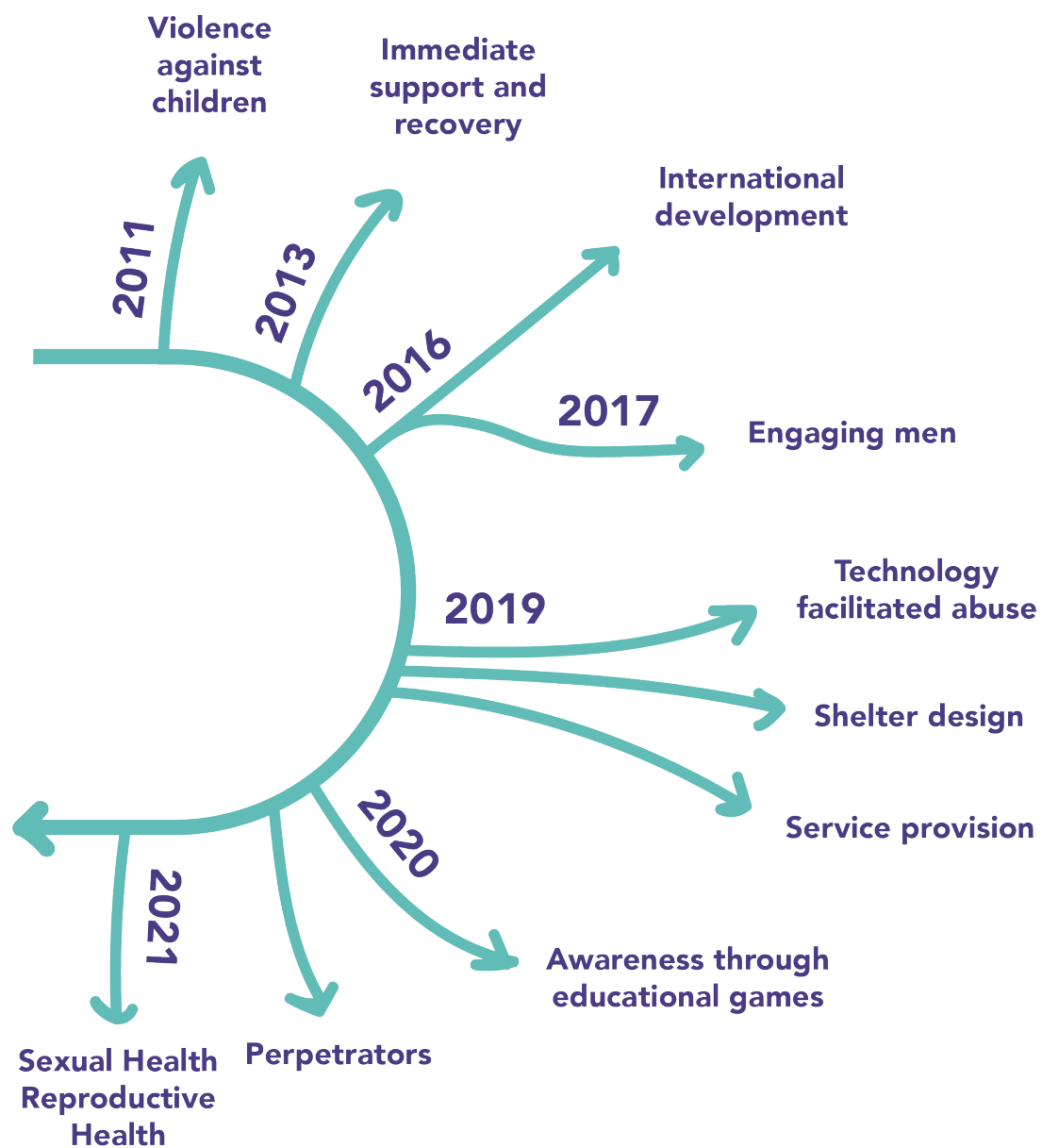


Figure 2.3- Timeline of publications and focus areas

## 2.6 Summary of the research context

The first part of the literature review, presented in this chapter, focused on outlining the research context. Given the complexity and ideologies surrounding IPV, namely the predominant criminal justice ethos, this thesis has taken much care in laying the groundwork for a critical understanding of IPV. Chapter 3 juxtaposes these ideologies with design practices to demonstrate how they may shape contemporary design approaches.

This chapter then presented ‘thinking structurally’ as a theoretical framework to support the research in analysing and interpreting the theoretical (Chapter 3) and empirical findings (Chapters 5-7). It emphasises that although this thesis focuses on interventions located at the individual and interactional level, it acknowledges and emphasises the macro dynamics that influence not only experiences of abuse but also design situations. Throughout these sections, concepts such as harm, risk, trauma, and safety become prominent in understanding IPV and are thus further explored in Chapter 3.

This chapter positions social design as a potential mode of intervention and outlines intimate harm as an area that requires further attention. It concludes by reviewing the history of published work on design and IPV. It identifies a gap in knowledge for studying design patterns across various contexts (Chapter 5-8).

# Chapter 3. Design and harm: methodological and practical implications

## Chapter overview:

This chapter aims to build the rationale for this research, which is further discussed in Chapter 4. The previous chapter identified a limited scholarly focus on design that addresses intimate harm, distinguishing it from other forms. Additionally, it highlighted the need for a broader exploration of design addressing IPV across its various applications, from prevention with men to supporting people to recover. To address these gaps, this chapter further explores these areas, arguing the importance of studying existing designers' practices when addressing IPV rather than adopting a practice-led research approach to develop an intervention.

The chapter begins by discussing key design academic discourses that theorise design practice. It then demonstrates that designerly knowledge can be found in how designers frame the design context, the methodologies they implement, and what they communicate through their practice. This provides a framework for understanding how design has been adapted when applied to new contexts. The chapter then examines how design principles can serve as mechanisms to communicate these adaptations back to the broader field of design. It then explores the concept of the designer mindset, centring their agency to effect change. It complements this by examining what physical or theoretical spaces may support this transformation.

The chapter then examines key concepts introduced in Chapter 2, including harm, risk, trauma, safety, and healing, while positioning design within these concepts. It highlights trauma-informed design as a predominant practice applied to areas such as IPV and reviews it to identify existing gaps.

To better understand these concepts in practice, the literature review explores these through analysing methodological and practical implications in existing literature spanning criminology, sociology, and design. It identifies risks and harm arising from research and design practices in IPV contexts and illustrates strategies implemented in response to intimate harm. The review demonstrates a prevalent deficit-based perspective and emphasises the need to shift towards more desire-based approaches, which require a shift in designers' mindsets.

Overall, this chapter reviews existing knowledge across these fields and identifies implications for design. It sets the stage for a research approach centred on studying designers' experiences in diverse contexts. Furthermore, it highlights themes derived from the literature on tensions in design when applied to contexts of harm, which will be further explored in Chapters 5 to 7.

The chapter will now begin with exploring knowledge contained in design practice.

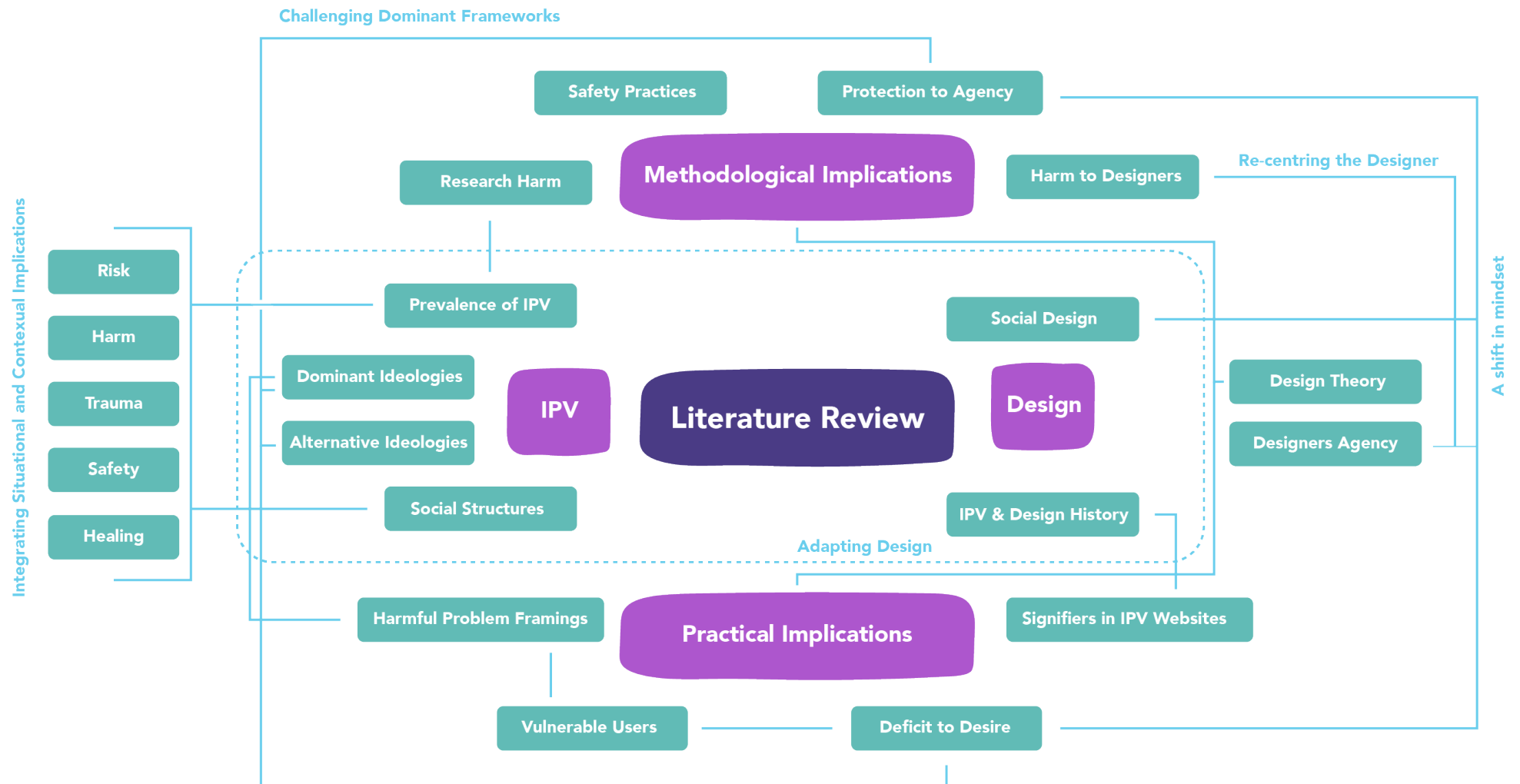


Figure 3.1- Literature Review Structure for Chapter 3 building on Chapter 2

### 3.1 What knowledge could be derived from studying design practice?

What is a 'designerly way of knowing'? From where does designer knowledge derive, and how can knowledge be derived from design? Key academic discourses have conceptualised design as an individual activity of addressing the ill-defined (Cross, 2006) by "defining, redefining and changing the problem-as-given in the light of the solution that emerges from their minds and hands." (Cross, 2006, p.24). Cross (2006) demonstrates how design knowledge is contained within the design process and its outcomes. During the process, designers are pattern synthesising (i.e. user requirements), and the outcome is not "found" but instead actively constructed by the designer. He argues that designerly knowledge within the process is reflected in how designers translate individual organisational and social needs into artefacts. Artefacts, he argues, also carry knowledge on how future artefacts should be designed, how a requirement is satisfied, and how tasks are performed - where they 'embody new messages'.

Similar to the cognitive focus of 'framing' described by Cross (2006), Donald Schön's theory of the reflective practitioner examines how designers continuously make sense of the situations they encounter, rather than accepting them as given. Schön (1983) suggests shifting the focus from problem-solving to problem-setting, acknowledging the boundaries that designers set. He defines this process as "a process in which, interactively, we *name* the things to which we will attend and *frame* the context in which we will attend to them." (p.40). Through this approach, designers transform complex social situations into an understandable form (a frame) and then develop actions to address those situations. Feminist scholar Lucy Suchman (2002) challenges notions found in Schön's work regarding designers' perspectives and constructions of problems, critiquing the idea of 'design from nowhere' – which fails to hold designers responsible for their choices. She argues instead that a designer's "vision of the world is a vision from somewhere" (p.96). Suchman's (2002) work demonstrates that there can be multiple frames for the same 'problem' based on the designer's situated perspective.

Considering the complexity and potential approaches to addressing IPV through design, framing becomes a crucial aspect to explore. In following sections 3.4.1 and 3.4.2, the thesis demonstrates how framings can reinforce dominant ideologies that can create further harm. For example, understanding IPV through a punitive ideology lends itself to flattening the complexity of relationships (Levine & Meiners, 2020), consequently focusing on interventions that separate relationships. Whereas it may take different meaning when under a public health frame which centres peoples agency to change (Mazzarella & Schuster, 2022; Frater & Gamman, 2020).

Cross (2006) and Schön (1983) have captured and generalised what it is that makes an individual a ‘designer’ and how that gets performed (Kimbell, 2011). However, what these lack is a consideration of how the systemic contextual factors shape the activities of designers (Kimbell, 2011; Agid, 2019). Kimbell (2011; 2012) through critically reviewing predominant theorisations of design proposes a shift in the level of analysis **from individuals to practice** –

“moving away from a disembodied, ahistorical design thinking to a situated, contingent set of practices carried by professional designers and those who engage with designs, which recognizes the materiality of designed things and how they come to matter.” (p.131).

Kimbell (2011) suggests that focusing on design practice includes not only (1) what designers do, know and say but also (2) what users and other stakeholders involved, do, know, and say and (3) the object and materials that are essential for the design process. In doing this, she urges the field to decentre designers and relate them to the contexts and actions that emerge from them – thus the diversity of designers activities.

These findings suggest that while studying the designerly knowledge that is contained in

- the ways designers propose frames of the situation (frames);
- translate needs into the tangible (design process);
- in the messages communicated through artefacts (outcomes),



these must be done with contextual sensitivity.

### 3.1.1 Studying design adaptations

This relational and contextual nature of design practice is important to recognise, especially as design continuously engages with new contexts, primarily through the social design turn (see section 2.4). Dorst (2015) argues that:

"When core principles are transposed to other fields by practitioners abstracting from everyday design practices and connecting these fundamentals to the corresponding needs in the target field, the actor must delve much more deeply into the practices, and adapt this understanding to the new use context." (p.23).

Each context presents new questions and settings to explore and expand design fundamentals, influencing both the design process and the rationales behind the design outcome (Bijl-Brouwer & Malcolm, 2020). Dorst (2015) observes that such adaptation, when done intensely, could influence both fields. Although this thesis is positioned from a design perspective, he mentions that interactions across fields often emerge from cultural and practical changes within them that enable adaptations to occur. Hence, while this research explores design adaptation to IPV contexts, it also acknowledges that the IPV field will equally shift or has shifted (section 2.2.1, 2.5.1, and 6.1) due to design expansion into addressing social concerns.

Putting Dorst's (2015) perspective into practice, Bijl-Brouwer and Malcolm (2020) study the adaptation of design in addressing complex societal challenges where they document a systemic design practice emerging. Taking a similar approach to that of this thesis, they use case studies to investigate how expert practitioners carry out systemic design work (Chapters 5 and 6) and explore what can be learnt from their practices and design rationales, uncovering design principles (Chapter 7)(see section 3.1.2). They argue that design practices are the activities of designing, whereas rationales are the reasonings behind the design choices. Their research shows that while designers' practices can have varying characteristics, underlying rules or heuristics often guide them to influence complex situations - rationales. Through each principle, they demonstrate

methodological and practical implications that arise, for example, moving beyond dominant design focuses of exploring the end user's needs towards focusing on the many perspectives across stakeholders. They argue that researching adaptation can allow design practitioners to adopt systems thinking into their practice.

Bijl-Brouwer and Malcolm's (2020) study demonstrates the potential significance that a research study on the adaptation of design in IPV work may have. While studying the activities of designing (practice), through designers experiences, the research will aim to analyse the rationales behind them, in order to uncover the underlying factors that guide designers in this context.

### 3.1.2 Principles: capturing design adaptations and offering guidance

To capture the adaptation of design with systems thinking, Bijl-Brouwer and Malcolm (2020) focused on identifying recurring patterns in design practices applied across diverse contexts. Hence they derived foundational principles from practitioners' experiences of what works. They state, "Principles inherent in the outcomes of design processes reveal the rationales of how practitioners are seeking to influence complex situations through their work" (p.391). Reinforcing that studying designers' experiences may bring the research closer to understanding the rationales behind addressing IPV and revealing principles – a communicative form of design knowledge.

Similarly, Fu et al. (2016) conducted an extensive literature review examining the methodological approaches used to extract, derive, or discover design principles. They defined principles as "A fundamental rule or law, derived inductively from extensive experience and/or empirical evidence, which provides design process guidance to increase the chance of reaching a successful solution" (p.3), primarily through the analysis of existing designs. The authors argue that design principles fall within a category of knowledge explication; they articulate and render explicit, often implicit or tacit design knowledge, facilitating communication of practices and advancing approaches to complex problems.

A blog series by Jenny Winfield (2023) details the trauma-informed principles behind Chayn, a global design non-profit supporting GBV survivors. It illustrates how principles manifest through the behaviours of designers and their design choices. For instance, in user research, the principle of power-sharing means participants are assured that they can stop the interview anytime. Her writings exemplify how principles support designers in prioritising user well-being and ensuring consistent application throughout the organisation's actions. Thus, principles may significantly influence design decisions. For instance, Bardzell (2010), in proposing qualities of a Feminist HCI identifies pluralism as one, which "refers to design artifacts that resist any single totalizing, or universal point of view." (p.1305) - encouraging designers to engage in critical practice. Consequently, principles can serve as a point of friction, prompting designers to acknowledge when they must put aside common best practices and focus on prioritising people's needs (Roberson & Hussain, n.d. ), requiring a more reflective approach (Decker, 2022).

Following the examination of existing literature, several rationales emerge as to why principles are suggested to complement shifting design practices. They:

- Establish a foundation for the development of new methods, tools, and techniques (Bijl-Brouwer & Malcolm, 2020);
- Provide clarity and solidify an agenda (Bardzell, 2010);
- Challenge existing ways of working (Roberson & Hussain, n.d. );
- Offer guidance on how designers perform their work (Bijl-Brouwer & Malcolm, 2020);
- Prioritise key user considerations (Decker, 2022; Roberson & Hussain, n.d.);
- Ensure designers do not develop harmful designs (Rudd, 2024);
- Guide and shape the organisational goals and actions (Winfield, 2023);
- Evaluate processes (Bardzell, 2010).

The findings suggest that deriving principles from the experience of designers engaged in IPV could clarify and solidify the contemporary design agenda in this context (Chapter 7). Moreover, given the circumstances of IPV, principles could communicate key considerations for designers to question their practices.

### 3.1.3 Designers: the self, skills and knowledge

"The history of design is not merely a history of objects. It is a history of the changing views of subject matter held by designers and the concrete objects conceived, planned, and produced as expressions of those views. One could go further and say that the history of design history is a record of the design historians' views regarding what they conceive to be the subject matter of design" (Buchanan, 1992, p.19).

This thesis argues that design addressing IPV has led to a shift in how designers perceive the subject matter, particularly through the lens of intimate harm. From this perspective, the designer is a critical agent in this process. However, defining 'the designer' is complex and contentious. Some argue that designers are trained experts (Cross, 2004), while others argue that everybody has the ability to design (Manzini, 2015). This thesis focuses on professional designers - those currently working in design or related fields, or developing design-related outcomes such as websites and physical products. Given the niche nature of the IPV field, professional designers are often not trained IPV specialists. Consequently, they may rely on contextual design materials, such as toolkits and methods, or adopt frameworks from other fields, which might not have been created with design areas in mind (Eggleston & Noel, 2024).

Avle et al. (2017) note a predominant standardisation of design methods, processes and tools to define what is recognised as design. Flesler et al. (2021) argue that this is connected to the "dominant solutionist paradigm of design education" (p.207). This trend is evident in the UK through the 'Double Diamond' framework developed by the UK Design Council (n.d.), and similarly in the US through IDEO.org's (2015) '*Field Guide to Human-Centred Design*,' designed in the US. Both aim to communicate the nature and potential of design to other disciplines, and provide clear (if simplified) process guidance for students and novices. However, Agid and Akama (2018)

caution that the overemphasis on methods "means one practitioner can become inter-changeable with another who has the training and capability to use them" (p.801). In return, this neglects the values and ideologies that inform designers' work and diminishes the ever-diverse landscape of contemporary designers.

Lima (2023) envisions the 'designer of the future' as "a mix of psychologist and anthropologist, sociologist and ecologist, system theorist and futurist, activist and reformer" (p.197). He redirects the prevalent misplaced responsibility on users to make the "right choices" back to the designers themselves for making the decisions and reiterates their agency to effect change. He asserts, "The designer of the future cannot continue to be shackled by such constraints, nor be overly infatuated by design tools, processes, and standardization." (p.199). Instead, Lima advocates for designers to self-reflect, understand their positionality, and build critical awareness within and beyond design to include disciplines like sociology and cultural studies. Arguing that this is an essential component for designers to develop an ethical design framework in their professional and personal lives. Similarly, Noel (2023) calls for designers to develop their **critical awareness**, which she defines as a generative process that encourages people to question the world around them, examine the structural root of social issues, and explore their agency in addressing them.

Both Lima's (2023) and Noel's (2023) arguments align with calls from trauma-informed design practitioners, expanded in section 3.2.3.1, for a transformative, long-term practice with sustained commitment (Dietkus & Place, 2023; Eggleston & Noel, 2024; Fathallah, 2024). Such a practice embeds critical awareness of the social conditions people may be experiencing and encourages skills in advocating, organising, and systems modelling amongst others (Lima, 2023). This perspective marks a significant shift in design, moving from entering social contexts with a beginner's mindset to one of critical awareness. This shift supports designers to grasp the necessity of adapting their work, emphasising that this work is an ongoing practice rather than a check-list exercise (Fathallah, 2024). There is now a greater focus in scholarly work, on asking questions (Flesler et al., 2021; Abdulla, 2022; Armbrust, 2023; Akama et al., 2023), building critical awareness (Noel, 2023), and critical training (Van Amstel et al., 2021). While change through

designers taking small individual actions is crucial, Noel (2023) emphasises that lasting change and impact is achieved through collaborative efforts. The following sections therefore focus on exploring what spaces can be fostered for designers to build their critical awareness and practice, and offer opportunities to collectivise?

### 3.1.4 A space: a pathway to connecting principles to contextual conditions

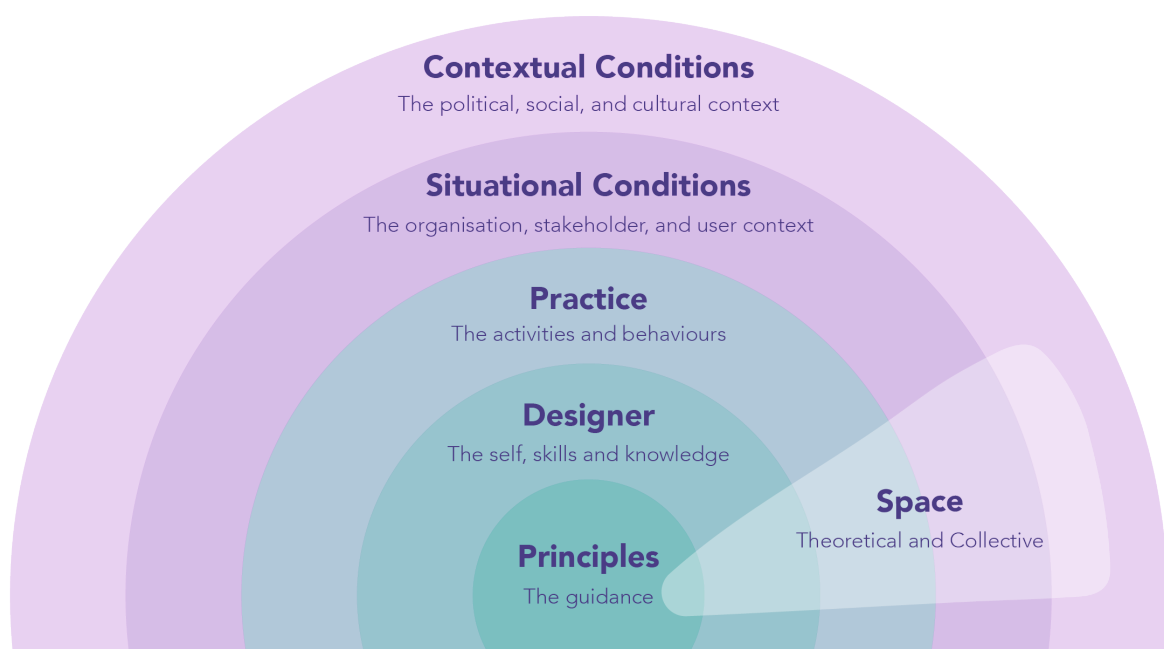


Figure 3.2- Theoretical framework for the research investigation

This section will begin by consolidating an ongoing framework illustrated in Figure 3.2, which integrates the insights from the previous sections of the literature review. This diagram is inspired by and adapts the Relationships Projects framework for a relationship-centred practice. The framework begins at the centre with intentions (principles), followed by behaviours, knowledge and skills, organisational conditions, and external conditions (Robinson, 2024). Robinson (2024) shares that, similar to arguments in this thesis, relationship-centred practice is a craft that is learnt and is both influenced and supported by the conditions it is in (organisational and environmental). This thesis adapts it to a design perspective and swaps skills and knowledge with behaviours to demonstrate that practice is a negotiation between the context and what knowledge the designer holds. Finally, it adds space to the adaptation process.

This framework will be applied throughout the thesis and reflected in the subsequent research. At the edge sits the contextual conditions (Chapter 2); this is the context for IPV work conditional to where designers operate and, therefore, influences the work designers do (Keshavarz, 2020). Following this are the situational conditions (Chapters 3, 5 and 6), where what stakeholders and users that are involved do and say affects the designer's practice (Kimbell, 2011), as well as the organisational structure the designer is in (Julier & Kimbell, 2019). Given the contextual and situational conditions, design practice follows as a set of activities and behaviours implemented by designers in response to these conditions, aiming at a problem frame, which is an interplay of all the layers (Chapters 3, 5, and 6). Emerging from the interplay between the three levels are the design implications (methodological and practical) – an area of focus in this thesis. Following this, we have the designers themselves, their rationales, and the skills and knowledge they bring into this work (Chapter 7) (and) or must develop. When entering different contexts, the reasoning behind design choices may be guided by principles (Bijl-Brouwer & Malcolm, 2020), setting the agenda, and determining what crucial considerations must be considered (Chapter 7). Finally, running through all the layers is space – a (metaphorical) place for designers to explore the dynamics between these layers towards consolidating their practice at the centre to be applied in IPV (Chapter 8).

Typically, academic projects yield models or toolkits that may not foster ongoing engagement, and thus might not keep up with ever-changing social structures. However, this thesis is concerned with producing an output that contextualises the principles suggested in section 3.1.2 and later on in Chapter 7, that remains open to questioning these shifts. While design education is one way designers can deepen their design practice, as the focus here is on designers actively practising, these sections will explore spaces that have emerged and brought the classroom 'outside'. This thesis explores space as both theoretical (section 3.1.4.1) and collective (section 3.1.4.2), to understand what generative processes might move alongside ever-changing structures in the adaptation of practice. The third research question around building spaces for adapting design, aims to further explore how designers can be supported to do the work that people experiencing IPV deserve.

### 3.1.4.1 From theory to questions: reflective spaces

Literature provides a rich space for exploring theories, philosophies, and practices that can nurture critical reflections in design. As bell hooks states, theory is "to be most meaningful that which invites readers to engage in critical reflection and to engage in the practice of feminism" (hooks, 1991, p. 8). Noel's (2023) book, *Design Social Change: Take Action, Work Towards Equity, and Challenge the Status Quo*, is an example of a space for this – for reflection and action. Through the book she consistently focuses on the reader, the designer, supporting them to understand their capabilities and imagine otherwise by prompting them to engage with different mindsets – found in liberation, emancipation, and abolition – and question their surrounding and process'.

Other works, such as Danah Abdulla's inventory, *Designerly Ways of Knowing: a working inventory of things a designer should know* (2022) and Armbrust's questions in, *50 Questions for Every Designer* (2023), similarly prompt designers to question their practices. Abdulla's (2022) interactive inventory contains entries ranging from ethical questions, like "How one's modernism is another's colonialism" (p.50) to practical questions like "How to defend ideas" (p.25) that provoke critical dialogue. Armbrust (2023) uses targeted questions for designers to explore design concepts and their impacts and prompt self-reflection. Both works emphasise the need for spaces that complicate designers' decision-making process rather than provide prescriptive solutions. However, such general approaches can overlook specific questions and knowledge required when working in particular situations of harm. For instance, "Have you thought about how a user's intimate partner could potentially use your design to cause them harm?". Questions offer designers a reflective moment to slow down and sit with the complexities of their work while "committing to an ethical practice" and resisting harmful practices (Akama et al., 2023, p.3). Through this, there are opportunities to become vulnerable and experiment with expertise (Akama et al., 2023).

Literature and reflective questions can support designers' capacity to approach the complexity of social issues with critical awareness and confidence. From this space, when designers encounter



ethical questions, they are equipped with the mindset to work through them. At the same time, this must not diminish the value of learning and growing with others.

#### 3.1.4.2 Collective spaces for critical practice

Beyond individual reflection, collective spaces are pivotal in fostering critical engagement and examining design practices. A growing body of networks, groups, and academic work have sought to revise learning spaces to involve raising collective consciousness (Fiadeiro et al., 2023c).

Groups such as the Design Research Society (DRS), Special Interest Groups (International), Design Justice Network (International; US-based), the Design & Oppression Network (Brazil), and InProcess<sup>13</sup> (RCA, UK), have recently emerged within higher education, adjacent to it, or external. Through shared commitments (political and social) characterised by each group (e.g. justice, oppression, and feminism), rather than matters of concern (Van Amstel et al., 2021), these create environments for learning, solidarity and reflexive critique. These groups facilitate activities ranging from working groups and reading circles to more participatory practices like activism and participatory theatre (Van Amstel et al., 2021). McEntee (2021) describes such environments as rehearsal spaces, where designers can take risks, expose vulnerabilities, and refine their practices. Thus, centred on developing processes rather than exclusively divulging information.

Collective spaces, therefore, are not merely sites for skill-building but are transformative processes in themselves, learning how to participate differently and collectivise (Fiadeiro et al., 2023c). Through shared commitments to care and solidarity, designers collectively confront dominant design paradigms and reimagine ethical and liberatory practices. This collectivising process, as argued by Van Amstel et al. (2021), McEntee (2021), and Fiadeiro et al. (2023c) – balancing relational care, building capacity, collectively challenging oppression, and structural critique – holds the potential for supporting design adaption into different social struggles.

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<sup>13</sup> I was one of the founders of InProcess and what brought us (postgraduate researchers) together was an identified gap for feminist thinking in our education. But after a while of us collectivising and learning together, we began to build solidarity, and working together to shape the wider postgraduate educational experience, and supporting each other through the doctorate journey.

Yet, as argued by Fiadeiro et al. (2023c), organising can be challenging without a support infrastructure. Bellini et al., (2023) argued that in contexts like IPV, in academia, research communities are vital however, they must be supported by institutions. They stated:

“Research communities can promote safe work with at risk users by acknowledging this invisible labor and building support infrastructure (e.g., training resources and mentorship programs) [15, 92]. To make safety-focused labor visible, institutions should give researchers time and incentives to do it [81], and by training new researchers through workshop and conference development.” (Bellini et al., 2023, p.13)

They emphasise the necessity of support infrastructures, in particular when working with at risk users. Collectives can provide a reduced risk space for experimentation and personal growth. For instance, learning to notice moments of distress in participant interviews (section 3.3.2) by practising the interview procedures<sup>14</sup> with others. Supporting design adaptation through a theoretical or collective space may ensure that practice remains relevant and effective in addressing the unique challenges and needs of each situation – exploring the multiple layers in the framework, Figure 3.2. The research in particular will use the work of Abdulla (2022) when designing the workshop with designers in Chapter 8, to engage designers in developing an inventory.

This chapter will now turn to key concepts that shape the contextual and situational conditions designers will be engaged with, followed by a literature review examining existing methodological and practical implications that emerge. The aim is to support the empirical studies to "identify and

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<sup>14</sup> When becoming a helpline worker, as part of our training we'd do role-playing where existing staff would act as people looking for support and we'd practice supporting them. This allowed us to make mistakes and take risks, while receiving feedback in a safe environment. I remember at the beginning I was so concerned about saying the wrong thing, not being supportive enough. But after some feedback from existing helpline workers, I realised I had the capacity in me to do it, what I needed was the confidence to trust my gut. It also gave a space for me to, for instance, identify safeguarding concerns, and practice the procedure of raising them within the organisation. Providing designers with the same environment to be able to practice noticing distress, providing support if it comes up, and noticing how that affect themselves, could enable such design adaptation to happen in a safe environment without putting people with experiences of abuse at risk.

critique the practices and design rationales" (Bijl-Brouwer & Malcolm, 2020, p.393) in Chapters 5 to 7. Which later provides a foundation for what spaces might be uncovered for designers.

## 3.2 Examining key concepts in IPV interventions

Throughout Chapter 2, key concepts critical to this work, including risk and harm, trauma, and safety, were raised. These terms are used throughout this thesis to describe the research context and implications, thus are vital to examine. This section also emphasises scholarly design work that has incorporated these concepts, as understanding their interconnections is essential for examining how IPV manifests in society and how it can be addressed. It also introduces healing as a critical component of recovery.

All these concepts are interrelated. **Trauma** results from **harm**, which can be alleviated by addressing **risks** and fostering **safe** relationships and processes. **Healing** follows as a step to enable individuals to recover from **trauma**. Equally, these dynamics also occur in design. Where designers' actions without considering **trauma** may put people at **risk** of experiencing further **harm** or actively experiencing **harm**, designers can actively mitigate these **risks** by designing with **safety** and **healing** in mind. Figure 3.3 demonstrates how these concepts interrelate.

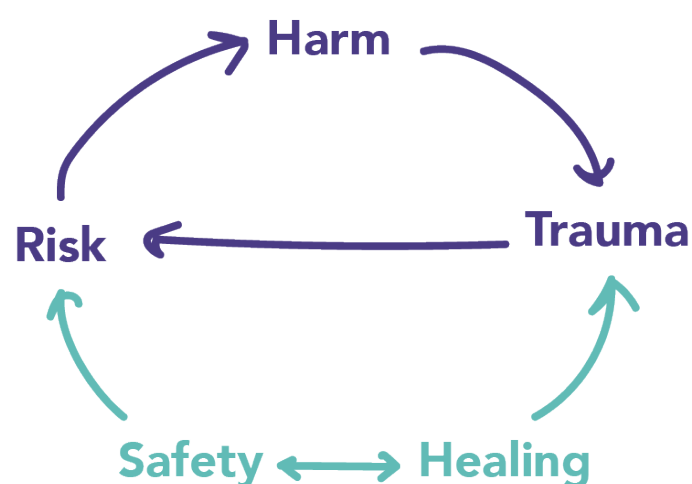


Figure 3.3- Key concepts interrelated

The findings offer a critical perspective on how integrating these concepts in design emphasises the importance of context and individual circumstances. Finally, this section highlights the

importance of considering the implications (methodological and practical) of how they are integrated—or neglected—in design processes.

### 3.2.1 Risk

Risk lies in the probability that a person, group, or community will experience or cause harm (Bellini et al., 2023). This probability may be shaped by factors such as economic, social, institutional, and environmental. Recalling the socio-ecological model of IPV shared in section 2.2, it emphasises how factors across the different systems can create particular risk conditions for IPV (Heise, 1998). As stated by Heise (1998) "the framework helps visualize why a potentially abusive man might become violent in one moment in time and not another, or why one man might become violent in a certain situation, whereas another would not." (p.285). Thus, risk can to a certain extent be predicted. Maria's story in Box 3.1 highlights how risk can be uniquely individual and affected by interpersonal and societal factors. Risk, therefore, cannot fall under one universal banner as this may put people at further risk of harm (Bellini et al., 2023).



Maria is experiencing abuse from her husband, who is a police officer. She is at a greater risk of death due to his access to weapons as a police officer (SafeLives, 2019). Equally, as she lives in a small countryside village, she might be isolated from friends and family, and support services may be limited. Furthermore, she is financially dependent on her husband; these risk factors are a more significant barrier to seeking support (Bellini et al., 2023a).

Box 3.1 Prevalent risks in Maria's story

From a design perspective, understanding risk as a probability for IPV to occur supports designers in identifying where interventions may be most effective. For example, targeting alcohol and substance use, as it is a known risk factor for abuse in relationships (Prevention Collaborative, 2020). When it comes to the research process and intervention itself, risk is important to consider to understand whether someone's risk may increase when engaging in the process or outcome (respectively, expanded on in sections 3.3.1 and 3.4.4). For example, people in abusive relationships are more likely to be at risk of digital surveillance (harm) from their partner. Thus,

when designing digital devices, designers must implement strategies to mitigate such risks. For instance, integrating quick exit buttons (see section 3.4.4).

### 3.2.2 Harm

Harm can have a detrimental effect on an individual's emotional, physical, financial, or social state and includes harm to people's safety and rights (Bellini et al., 2023). Box 3.2 illustrates how abusive behaviours prevalent in Ben and Josh's relationship causes harm. This thesis not only focuses on how harm caused by IPV (Chapter 2) is addressed but also how it emerges during the design process and outcome due to risks of working in these contexts.



In Ben and Josh's relationship, Ben consistently calls and texts John and monitors his movements. When his emotions are activated, he makes harmful remarks. These behaviours indicate emotional and tech abuse. Although Ben's actions are not physically harming Josh, they are psychologically and emotionally harmful.

Box 3.2 Prevalent harm in Ben and Josh's story

Bellini et al. (2023) use the term *research harm* to describe how participants, the groups they represent, the public, and researchers may experience harm due to the research design, activities, and outcomes involving '*at-risk users*'. For instance, participants' abusive partners may accompany them to research activities and influence their response. While harm is not an outcome of all forms of research, if risks are not acknowledged and mitigated through safety practices, it becomes prevalent. Yet, this is not standard practice in research, where these "strategies stand in contrast to, or generate friction with, research norms" (Bellini et al., 2023, p.12), thus, requiring changing process'. Their findings suggest that studying frictions (implications) that emerge from contexts can uncover underlying rationales for changing process', continued in section 3.3.

Building on this, the term 'designed harm' may be conceptualised. It captures how users, groups they represent, the public, and societies may experience harm as a result from ingrained logics within the outcome (Agid, 2022; Keshavarz, 2020), users who are constructed or excluded in the

outcome (Bardzell, 2010), interactions that are enabled (Eggleston & Noel, 2024) or not (Costanza-Chock, 2020), and social conditions that are made visible (Fiadeiro et al., 2023a). Studying these practical implications may build an understanding of frictions in outcomes designed to address harm, expanded in Section 3.4.

### 3.2.3 Trauma

An outcome of harm that can have lasting effects on people's physical and mental wellbeing is trauma (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2014). Generally, while many people may encounter varied forms of traumatic events in their lifetime not everyone becomes traumatised as a result (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2014; Dietkus & Place, 2023; Wechsler, 2024). Trauma is an emotional and bodily response to a distressing event, or a series of events, that often made a person feel unsafe - where power and control is lost<sup>15</sup>. Thus, trauma emerges from how people experience these events.

When designing in harmful situations, safety concerns for participants and users emerge due to the trauma often associated with their experiences. This trauma can affect how people engage with the design process and its outcomes. Presenting trauma in the context of content design, Wechsler (2024) outlines the cognitive impacts it has:

“Cognitive impacts include difficulty concentrating and processing information, as well as memory issues. People can find it hard to trust others and feel safe, avoiding certain places, people, or activities. Trauma can shape a person's thoughts, worldviews, relational capacity, physical health, memory, imagination, and creativity.” (Wechsler, 2024, p.3)

Applying this description to design, a few implications begin to emerge. Trauma informs people's experiences; thus, during interviews, it may impact how participants recall and discuss them. Avoiding certain places, people, or activities, means that people might not engage with certain designed activities or outcomes. Finally, difficulty concentrating and processing information can

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<sup>15</sup> More recent conceptualisations of trauma also include structural forms of harm like institutional violence (Kirmayer et al., 2014).

make interacting with websites and their content challenging, especially if not designed with these considerations in mind. To actively address this, there has been an growing field of trauma-informed design (TID) practice emerging.

### 3.2.3.1 Trauma-informed design

Behavioural health practitioners have been at the forefront of developing the working concepts a trauma-informed approach (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2014). The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), in the United States (US), proposed a framework for trauma-informed practice, which has become widely used and foundational to developing it in design (TID). They state how people with experiences of trauma will not only be interacting with behavioural health but also with wider public institutions and service systems that while intending to support can often be trauma inducing. Thus, though a trauma-informed approach, programmes, organisations, or systems will aim to: (1) have a **realisation** of trauma and its affects, (2) **recognise** the signs of trauma, (3) **respond** by applying trauma-informed principles (shared below) putting knowledge into practice, and (4) **resist** re-traumatisation of service users and also staff. Evident in these four assumptions is that these are actively incorporated into the services operations but also into the organisation culture by being informed and action-based.

To offer grounding on the fundamentals of practicing a trauma informed approach, SAMHSA (2014) developed six principles. These are not intended to be procedural but rather a practice continuously adapting:

- 1) Safety;
- 2) Trustworthiness and Transparency;
- 3) Peer Support;
- 4) Collaboration and Mutuality;
- 5) Empowerment, Voice and Choice;

## 6) Cultural, Historical, and Gender Issues.

SAMSHA's (2014) principles demonstrate that responding to trauma rests in supporting individuals to feel safe (1) where their strengths and experiences are recognised and built upon (5), while taking into consideration their social location and respectful of traditional cultural connections (6). In this is also a collective element, where individuals with trauma experiences support each other (3), but also partnerships are established between staff and users, and amongst the organisation where everyone has a role to play (4). Finally, the organisation itself is made accountable, and decisions are conducted with transparency (2). These principles have been adopted to adapt design practice to become trauma-informed (Dietkus, 2022)

Building on the work of SAMSHA, many design practitioners have been applying a trauma-informed approach into design including Deitkus (2022; 2023), Eggleston (2022), Every (2023), Hussain (2023), Eggleston and Noel (2024), and most recently (December 2024) from Rachel Edwards' (2024) published edited book on trauma-informed content design – Wechsler (2024) and Winfield (2024). Their work has been researched in more detail here to outline the practice.

Dietkus (2022) describes TID where:

“Being trauma-informed means accounting for the potential presence of trauma within our work and examining how and why we design could be more trauma-informed while also acknowledging that we, too, may have experienced traumatic events that influence the patterns we design. “ (p.28)

Another definitions centre the need to design environments for recovery and healing, while preventing re-traumatisation. Every (2023), outlines three key reasons why developing such a practice is vital:

- (1) the risk of harm to users, teams and designers;
- (2) the power held by designers in their public service positions that can increase risk of re-traumatisation;



(3) uniquely positioned to influence process', policies, and information.

She and other scholars (e.g. Eggleston & Noel, 2024) emphasise that practicing trauma-informed design does **not mean treating trauma**, instead “It means knowing your own boundaries and capabilities so you are prepared to handover to a professional if and when needed.”.

Wechsler (2023) outlines a few of the ways that common practices in human-centred design are not trauma-informed. Table 3.1 lists a few of these, highlighting how contextual implications are vital to consider when working with people with experiences of trauma. Putting these examples into IPV contexts, in an abusive relationship people's emotions and experiences are consistently dismissed or gaslighted, which means they have been denied the possibilities to fully express themselves. Responding to disclosure with awkward silence or failing to acknowledge their experiences can be harmful and invalidating (The Mend Project, 2021).

Research Planning	Conducting Qualitative Research	Disclosure of Trauma	After Conducting Research	Researcher/Team Wellbeing
Not considering what participants might need to enable them to participate safely	Lack of transparency on how research is going to be used, research goals and context	Responding to disclosure with awkward silence	No referral paths if participants become distressed	Ignore trauma on your own team and within yourself
Researchers not having enough contextual knowledge in advance of research engagement	Intrusive research questions with disregard for safety	Asking for details about traumatic experience (forcing disclosure)	Lots of promises and no outcomes (we over estimate our own ability as designers)	No staff support/wellbeing services engaged
Being inflexible with time and location	Too many observers, not introducing observers or not disclosing who might be watching from another room	Fail to acknowledge participant's trauma experience	Don't close the loop with participants so they don't know what resulted from the research	Do not debrief after research sessions

Table 3.1- Common practices in human-centred design that are not trauma-informed (Wechsler, 2023)

The practices outlined demonstrate that what is at stake is not developing a new methodology for design. Instead, it requires slight shifts when applying common methodologies, informed by a mindset that considers trauma in all its activities. Nearly all authors referenced here cite Hirsch's (2020) article (see section 2.4) to demonstrate that research settings can be experienced therapeutically.

Dietkus (2023) describes that TID is a necessary shift, noting that designers often adopt exploitative and manipulative strategies while neglecting essential safety and care strategies, such as asking for informed consent<sup>16</sup>. She states that rather than being a transactional and extractive act between designers and participants, it should be transformational and relational work. In TID, there is a greater concern and focus on ensuring user safety and preventing re-traumatisation (Hussain, 2021). As founder of Chayn, Hussain shares her learnings of applying TID:

“We must not generalise or flatten user experiences into needs that neatly fit into one post-it. People live in a multi-dimensional world and therefore, our understanding of their needs, journey, challenges, fears, hopes and aspirations must hold space for that complexity and richness of nuance.”  
(Hussain, 2021)

Consequently, TID practitioners have taken much care in developing safety practices in order to make design practices trauma-informed (see section 3.3.2). In response, Chayn has developed TID principles, building on SAMHSA, as a framework that enables them to test, rationalise and question their decisions. These principles include safety, agency, equity, privacy, accountability, plurality, power sharing, and hope (Hussain, 2023).

Eggleston (2022), on a blog on her website Bird Call UX, states that what separates TID from trauma-informed practices like SAHMSAs is that it's a combination of both trauma-informed practices **and** design skills<sup>17</sup>, as skills in accessible design and digital tools overlap with what is

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<sup>16</sup> Where people have all the information they need to make an informed decision about accepting the risks to participating in research.

<sup>17</sup> She makes an insightful remark that if not non-profit and healthcare organisations would have better websites.

needed to become TID. A later article (Eggleston & Noel, 2024) emphasises that design is also vital part of support services being trauma-informed, thus design has a clear role in this aspect. Therefore, what is called for is not a different way of designing but design choices that are informed by the effects of trauma, which can better support people with experiences of trauma when they interact with products and services.

Every (2023) and Dietkus, (2022) highlight how TID isn't simply added to design.

"This work takes continual practice. It is not a step which you can add to the design thinking process, or slot into the double diamond. As with accessibility and inclusive design, we need to be thinking about it throughout the research and design lifecycle. We need to bring this lens to each new project, and think about how we can apply trauma-informed principles in that specific context." (Every, 2023)

She highlights that implementing TID will look different in each new situation and must be adapted accordingly to the contextual implications. Similarly, Deitkus (2023) argues that TID is a transformational and intentional practice that never leaves designers; one cannot simply turn it off and on, and thus it's not just in the work, but also within themselves. "Overtime you will start seeing the world differently" (Deitkus, 2023, p.99). A TID goal is not static, and designers must shift alongside social structures:

"Becoming trauma-informed is a long process. It can take years for individuals and organizations to develop the maturity required for a consistent baseline of awareness, care, and mitigation strategies (Missouri Department of Mental Health and Partners, 2014). Becoming trauma-informed is an ever-changing goal, as our understanding of trauma, its impact, and potential harm mitigation strategies in digital design increase each year." (Eggleston and Noel, 2024, p.14).

Yet designers often encounter situations where they must engage with such a mindset without time to do so, working in design consultancies or by exploring new spaces. Without a centralised space and framing it may lead people to searching and deciphering content from different disciplines framed for different purposes. To engage in TID, there must be dramatic shifts in

education, training with a need to personifying care principles, and building **new patterns and ways of practicing** (Deitkus, 2022). Such an approach is present in all things design, requiring care, attentiveness, sensitivity, and possibly procedural changes.

These findings indicate that current practices in design are not suitable for working in circumstances where trauma is prevalent, such as IPV. Thus, as iterated by TID practitioners, it is a mindset that is taken into all aspect of practice and continuously built upon. While trauma-informed principles may vary from organisation to organisation, “the fundamental goal remains the same: to create environments where individuals feel safe, respected and supported.” (Wechsler, 2024, p.17), and not to address the trauma. When it comes to IPV, while such a goal is vital, **IPV practitioners are concerned with addressing harm**, and changing behaviours and systems that reproduce them. This means, that while TID is a vital component of IPV work, there are crucial further considerations when aiming to address IPV.

### 3.2.3.2 Trauma and violence-informed care

Trauma and Violence Informed Care (TVIC) expands the concept of trauma-informed care to account for the intersecting impacts of systemic and interpersonal violence and structural inequalities, distinguishing violent traumas from other types, e.g. natural disasters (Wathen & Varcoe, 2019; 2023; Wathen et al, 2021; Ponice et al, 2016). TVIC focuses on “a person’s experiences of past and current violence to situate problems as residing in both their psychological state and their social circumstances” (Wathen et al, 2021). This approach emphasises not only historical trauma but also ongoing violence in an individual’s life. This is particularly important in IPV as people might be interacting with services while still experiencing abuse.

Wathen and Varcoe (2019) illustrate how the socio-ecological model is critical to situate peoples experience within the broad social circumstances, acknowledging that they may be experiencing more than one form of trauma or violence. Scholars have proposed the following principles for TVIC:

1. understand structural and interpersonal experiences of trauma and violence and their impacts on peoples' lives and behaviours;
2. create emotionally, culturally, and physically safe spaces for service users and providers;
3. foster opportunities for choice, collaboration, and connection; and
4. provide strengths-based and capacity-building ways to support service users.

The focus is on breaking cycles of abuse and preventing continued and future violence (Ponic et al., 2016) and having a more dominant focus on change e.g. integrating strength-based ways.

Wathen and Varcoe (2023) pay close attention to the provider-client interaction. They state that each principle is based on the belief that each interaction is **influential**<sup>18</sup>. The following quote can also be read from the perspective of a researcher implementing these actions with a participant instead of a service provider.

“That is, each time a provider conveys an understanding of the pervasiveness of violence and of traumatic impact, and each time a provider seeks to create an emotionally safe environment, foster opportunities for control, and take a strength- and capacity-based approach, those actions help steer the person seeking service toward greater safety and capacity” (Wathen & Varcoe, p.1894)

Thus, validating experiences, recognising and helping identify people strengths and provide clear information and expectations are crucial. The findings suggest that incorporating a more violence informed perspective may build on TID, by not only focusing on how design choices can create safe interactions, but also understanding how safety is embedded within their current social circumstances. Designers and researchers are always in pivotal moments where, through each interaction, they can begin breaking down abusive conditions towards safety.

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<sup>18</sup> In the helpline, we are very intentional with the phrases and reactions we use. We ensure people feel validated, that dynamics of abuse are conveyed, and their agency is central among others. This begins to break barriers put in place to isolate people experiencing abuse.

### 3.2.4 Safety

As discussed, when taking into consideration risk, harm, and trauma during the design process it requires designers to develop and implement safety practices. When addressing IPV, safety is often a key component in supporting those experiencing abuse and is typically the goal of any intervention—aiming for conditions where people can live safely without violence. Like IPV, safety should be understood through a structural analysis (Wathen & Mantler, 2022). This section explores orientations of safety to better understand the objectives of designing for and addressing IPV contexts.

Around the world, some governments may view IPV as a criminal concern, leading to responses through the enforcement of the CJS (section 2.2.1). This perspective can lead to misconceptions, such as the belief that the safest solution for someone in an abusive relationship is to leave their partner. In reality, leaving is one of the most dangerous moments in an abusive relationship (The Hotline, n.d.). Mosher (2015) notes that this reductive and incident-based perception of safety - as a single act through separation - obscures the fact that following separation, abuse may persist<sup>19</sup>. Consequently, there has been a paradigm shift in IPV, including considering what safety means for those who do not wish to or cannot leave an abusive situation and who do not want to engage with state provisions.

In the UK, IPV providers will often collaborate with people experiencing abuse to develop a '**safety plan**'. This personalised plan outlines actions they can take to address the risks and mitigate the impacts of violence. For instance, it may include strategies for moments when violence is escalating, such as moving to low-risk rooms in the house, avoiding areas with potential weapons

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<sup>19</sup> Many of the women I speak to on the helpline are indeed often experiencing post-separation abuse, for example stalking from their partner through persistent contact and leveraging court cases to continue abuse.

(i.e. kitchens) or reaching out for support from friends and families (Schrag et al., 2022) – contextual examples are provided in Box 3.3 and 3.4.



For Maria, if she was planning to leave her abusive relationship, her plan might include discussing her situation with her children's school teachers and discreetly storing a essential items at school. This would prepare her for when she is ready to seek refuge with her children.

Box 3.3- Potential safety planning for Maria



Safety planning for Josh could involve addressing the issues of technology monitoring by Ben.

Box 3.4 – Potential safety planning for Josh

The findings indicate that safety in IPV is not a universal material state but instead centred on people's experiences and perceptions of what is safest for them in their given context. There is a fundamental belief that **people experiencing abuse will always know what strategies are safest for them**. Wathen and Mantler (2022) emphasise that understanding safety requires a combination of a person-centred approach and structural factors influencing IPV.

Abolitionists have critically considered and strategised for safety within our societies. Mariame Kaba and Andrea J. Ritchie (2022), prominent US abolitionists, in a blog, challenge dominant notions of safety in relation to policing, stating,

"We also need to let go of the idea that safety is a state of being that can be personally or permanently achieved. Safety isn't a commodity that can be manufactured and sold to us by the carceral state or private corporations. Nor is safety a static state of being. Safety is dependent on social relations and operates relative to conditions: We are more or less safe depending on our relationship to others and our access to the resources we need to survive."

They argue that safety is more relational than categorical, functioning as a "set of resources, relationships, skills, and tools that can be developed, disseminated, and deployed to prevent, interrupt, and heal from harm.". Safety is thus viewed as an action-oriented process practised daily.



Relating this back to design, it becomes clear that design cannot manufacture and sell safety to users, such as through women's safety apps (see section 3.4.2.2). However, design as a practice that develops or suppresses resources, relationships and skills plays a role in supporting such systems.

In design, Shana Agid (2019), through an abolitionist lens, argues that taking such a perspective that challenges safety as linked to the CJS redefines the 'sense of the problem'. Similar to authors above, they challenge us to understand safety as **contingent**, meaning it is not an absolute, universal state but depends on specific factors<sup>20</sup>, contexts, and conditions such as time, place, culture, technology, resources, and social dynamics. This framing opens up new possibilities for different design approaches (Agid, 2019).

Angelika Strohmayr, Rosanna Bellini, and Julia Slupska (2022) argue for shifting the paradigm from security to safety in HCI, proposing a feminist orientation. They argue that designers cannot fully design a technology that 'designs out' all forms of harm to make people entirely safe. Designers must remain conscious that harm may always manifest in many forms. Thus, departing from such incident-based approaches - as mentioned by Mosher (2015) - they propose a focus that implements a "measure in place that reduce the likelihood of this event, and that provide direct avenues for support and change when this happens." (p.64). They argue that a shift toward safety in design signifies a move from focusing on **fixed entities that need protection to systems, resources, or ecosystems that prioritise people's well-being**.

Agid (2019) and Strohmayr et al. (2022) highlight how designers must consider the orientations of safety guiding their rationales. From the findings above, this research focuses on safety as a practice dependent on relations, resources, and processes. Designers must look at how they implement safety into their processes (e.g., through TID) and how they support enhancing systems of safety in our societies. The question rests on how designers may do this.

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<sup>20</sup> Safety is closely tied to people's social locations, for instance - racial identity, where white people often can afford a lack of consciousness and concern over their safety. In contrast, racialised communities have become heavily aware of it (Battle & Powell, 2024).

### 3.2.5 Healing

Where safety prioritises well-being and systems of support to reduce risk and harm, healing involves recovering from harm, specifically trauma. A study by D'Amore and colleagues (2021), synthesised themes of healing and posttraumatic growth in women survivors of IPV. They found that healing from IPV “involves a multidimensional, personalized, nonlinear, and often transformative process that operates within themselves and through relationships” (p.2). Key themes identified include awareness and insight, renewal and reconstruction, and transformation and meaning that moved women to look both inward and outwards.

These aspects involve reflecting on past experiences and coping mechanisms, redefining self-perception and relationships, and discovering new life perspectives through hope and purpose, such as through helping other women who have experienced IPV. These process' while forward looking with courage, connection, happiness and hope also interplayed with feelings of loneliness, sadness, fear and discouragement (D'Amore et al., 2021). In D'Amore et al.'s (2021) article they share the following quote from a participant within the theme awareness and insight:

“I always thought that he lost control, that's why he would hit me, but he was in total control . . . I always thought that I made him lose control but I learned in counselling that he was in total control . . . And that was a hard thing for me to come to terms with.” (p.2707)

Healing, therefore, is not a linear journey from A to B, sometimes with progress and setbacks.

From a design perspective, it seems contrary to design principles, taking a user from a state A to a preferred state B (Simon, 2008). But rather creating space for the back and forwards and also the ups and downs where the preferred state comes from the individual. Equally, as noted by D'Amore et al., (2021) interventions should support the development of relational resilience, where relationships take a big part in the healing journey. Focusing on individuals user journeys can hinder supporting through relational resilience.

In design, when discussing TID in her blog, Hussain (2021) demonstrates the vital part of healing when designing in spaces of trauma and the immense care and consideration that must go into designing any intervention that intersects with it:

“Healing abuse is not a business. It must be active, adaptable, interactive, communal, and questioning. We don’t need performative interventions — we need effective and soulful ones, which understand the nuance of complex emotions and realities. When a survivor’s self is damaged in the act of abuse, the self must become central to our restorative practices — lest we repeat the violence of abusers.”

Harm results from actions implemented across societies, ranging from interpersonal interactions to institutional policies. These actions affect people differently, and individual risk factors can increase the likelihood of experiencing harm. Trauma is a response and long-term effect of harm. Therefore, responding to harm involves critically engaging with both situational and contextual understandings of risk. Interventions that respond or prevent these effects requires focusing on processes rather than products. The chapter now turns to exploring how these concepts emerge and are addressed in practice.

### **3.3 Identifying existing methodological implications**

From deconstructing key concepts in IPV and how they surface in design, this thesis now delves into existing scholarship that examines the methodological (in this section) and practical (in section 3.4) implications. These sections aim to identify key themes and questions from the literature to support conducting the studies in Chapters 5-8 and for analysing the research findings. This thesis recognises the vast field of IPV, and continues to be informed by scholarship in sociology, more specifically in criminology and gender studies, but does not aim to contribute to these. It continues to take care in situating findings from these fields in design and complementing them with design scholarship and perspective.

For this section, the review focuses on qualitative elements of doing social research in IPV situations that more closely align with design research, such as interviewing and conducting

workshops<sup>21</sup>. Since this research examines IPV interventions from prevention with men to recovery for survivors, special attention is given to the methodological considerations that arise for these different groups of potential participants.

In design, engaging with the user, has become a core element of any social design work to understand and design for their needs (Salvo, 2001). Drawing on the work of Irani et al., (2010) and Suchman (2002), this thesis understands design research engagements as shaped and staged encounters in which both parties (designers and user/participants) are affected. Under this frame, engagements are not static but rather experienced in a hybrid state between the user's and designer's domain (Zhang & Zurlo, 2020). Much design scholarship has explored how design research can be harmful through reducing of the complexity of lived experiences (Hussain, 2021), intrusive and harmful research with communities (Harrington et al., 2019), and an extractive process (Costanza-Chock, 2020). These critiques rest on critically exploring power between researcher and participant and the harm that arises from it. Yet, very little has considered the implications of intimate harm – relations that can affect engagements. Moreover, the harm that such research can cause on the designers themselves.

While ethical concerns are always at the forefront of any social research; "there are aspects of gender violence research that transcend those in other areas because of the potentially threatening and traumatic nature of the subject matter" (Ellsberg & Heise, 2002, p.1599). IPV research requires special ethical and safety considerations (WHO, 2016) where standard research activities, like research planning, conducting interviews, and disseminating results, may intensify risks to participants and researchers (Bellini et al., 2023, p.1). This may also be compounded with contextual factors, such as cultural norms, humanitarian situations, and existing state infrastructures for support.

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<sup>21</sup> For other research purposes such as collecting data on prevalence of IPV, there are further concerns on how disclosure rates of IPV are affected by the design and working of questions, to read more please explore (Ellsberg and Heise, 2002).

There is a challenge, and thus a gap, in this review as (1) scholarship in IPV research methodologies is mostly centred on understanding the prevalence of IPV and evaluating programmes, (2) design research scholarship focuses mainly on participant safety due to trauma, and (3) there is limited work in design focusing on working with people who (may) enact abuse. Less is understood about the *rationale behind design processes that inform designers on how they might address IPV*. What needs are they looking to understand? How do they take on the complexity of the structural aspect of IPV? These questions while not possible to answer here, are later addressed during the case studies in Chapters 5-7. All in all, this section emphasises how designers must critically adapt their methodologies to research ethically and meaningfully.

### 3.3.1 Research harm: risks in research

One of the main concerns that comes when researching IPV situations is the potential for causing harm or distress to participants. This raises concerns about people's emotional and physical safety during research activities. For instance, if interviews are not designed carefully, people may become distressed when prompted to recall traumatic experiences. Additionally, participants may face risks if their abusive partner discovers they have been discussing their relationship with someone else (Bender, 2017; Ellsberg & Heise, 2002) or if they disclose information that their partner disapproves of (Bellini et al., 2023). Participants might even be intimidated by abusers to self-censor or be coerced to attend research activities with their partner present (Bellini et al., 2023).

While researching into people's experiences of abuse has its risks and harms, Ellsberg and Heise (2002) argue that:

"We must remember that women living with violence are already at risk. Researchers cannot eliminate this reality, just as they cannot fully eliminate the possibility that further harm will be caused by their study. They do, however, have an obligation to carefully weigh the risks and benefits of any study, and to take every precaution possible to restrict possible harm and maximise possible benefits. At the very least, we must ensure that when

women take risks to share their stories, we honour that risk by using the findings for social change” (p.1603)

IPV research is not approached lightly and will often slow the research process (Bellini et al., 2023). Nevertheless, as Ellsberg and Heise (2002) recognised, it is still important to collect this data and use it to propel social change.

### 3.3.2 Safety practices for researching experiences of abuse

To mitigate (as much as possible) the harm and risk involved in conducting IPV research, researchers must consider deploying safety practices in their work. There are World Health Organisation (WHO) guidelines that outline researchers' ethical considerations when researching VAW, upon which many of the cited scholarly work in this section draw on. Besides these scholars, this review also draws on Winfield's blogs on practicing TID.

To begin with, Bellini et al. (2023) suggest to pay close attention to the research design, e.g. establishing professional partnerships with subject matter experts, such as researchers or front-line practitioners, to help identify appropriate safety practices and potential risks beforehand. They also suggest applying threat modelling, which includes identifying abusive capabilities and goals. Likewise, when choosing the research methods themselves, they suggest that researchers select the lower-risk method while still addressing the research goals. They note that:

“Typically the highest-risk method (aside from entirely ignoring at-risk user needs) is to directly engage at-risk users as part of the research. However, it may also be possible to learn what is needed in lower-risk ways that avoid direct engagement (e.g., indirect measurement or proxy studies)” (p.10)

For instance, proxies in IPV could be working with advocates, such as service providers.

If researchers intend to use high-risk methods such as interviewing or focus groups, safety practices have also been developed. In preparing for such engagements, support services referrals must be identified in the event of participant distress (Bender, 2017; Ellsberg & Heise, 2002; WHO, 2016). For example, researchers may offer a “pamphlet after being asked if it would

be safe for them to receive it” (Ellsberg & Heise, 2002, p.1605) with information on services and options. Bender (2017) suggests that such preparation involves more than just creating directories to refer participants to; it also includes calling the helpline to verify that the numbers are still active and reaching out to the services themselves to ensure they are ready for any increase in referrals that the research may generate<sup>22</sup>. Bender (2017) argues that in the case of participants who live in rural areas, do not speak English, sexual orientation, or gender identity it may make accessing refuges more challenging due to their scarcity. Likewise, WHO (2016) suggests that if no services exist, researchers might have an ethical obligation to have the internal capacity to handle crisis situations (e.g. through counselling and safety planning).

Before research engagements, informed consent must be obtained, and participants should have “an opportunity to consider the sensitivity of the research topic and are fully informed about the kinds of questions that will be posed in the interview” (WHO, 2016, p.9) and with this an opportunity to challenge them (Winfield, 2022). The interviews themselves, especially with those who may be experiencing abuse, should be done in privacy (Ellsberg & Heise, 2002). Winfield (2022) asks participants to reflect on the safest place (physically and emotionally) to do online interviews as while home might be safe for some, for others they might still be living with the abusers.

Ellsberg and Heise (2002) suggest that interviewers must be “trained to be aware of the effects that their questions may have on informants, and how best to respond, based on a woman’s level of distress.” (Ellsberg & Heise, 2002, p.1600). Through training, interviewers must be able to identify distress or high-risk situations, understand appropriate action to take and how to end the interview safely. Nevertheless, recognising that people might still want to proceed. Most importantly, that as part of training, researchers must also analyse their own attitudes and beliefs of IPV:

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<sup>22</sup> Additionally, WHO (2016) suggested that escorted referrals - providing transport to the support service - should be offered.

“Interviewers frequently share many of the same stereotypes, misconceptions, and biases about victims that are dominant in general society. Left unchallenged, these beliefs can lead to interviewers blaming victims and to other destructive attitudes that can prevent an interviewer from responding appropriately, sensitively, and supportively. This attitude may not only undermine a respondent’s self-esteem, but also restrict an interviewer’s ability to obtain good-quality data.” (p.1600)

Winfield (2022) reflected on how she supports people in distress during interviews:

“My participant is taking me through her experience of sexual assault, and although this story is not something I’ve directly asked her to talk about, I can feel in my bones that she needs to. Her tears are those of relief. She’s sharing this for the first time, with anybody, ever.”

She shared how one participant was crying during the interview, prompting her to pause and suggest some breathing exercises. Afterwards, she followed up with the participants to see how they were doing. This reinforces participants' agency to determine what feels safest for them rather than designers making those decisions on their behalf.

All in all, Bender (2017) highlights that any researcher must refrain from undertaking such a study if the basic risk mitigation strategies (like the ones mentioned above) are not in place. However, most of all, scholars suggest that people will always know what is safest for them in any given context (Ellsberg & Heise, 2002; Bellini et al., 2023). Bellini et al. (2023) suggest that participants should be offered the information to decide how they will maintain their own safety while engaging with the research. With the right strategies in place, interviews can also be affirming rather than distressing (Ellsberg & Heise, 2002). Researchers argue that best practice when concluding the interview is to end on: “a positive note that emphasizes participants' strength” (Burgess-Porter, 2015, p.132). To practice design research through safety, means to think about the conditions of the participant and how that could affect and be affected by the research process (Winfield, 2022).



### 3.3.2.1 Protection of the 'vulnerable' may become exclusion: benefits for participating in research

“Yeah, look, it does bring up some emotions that are upsetting, but it’s okay because it is going to help other women. So doing this stuff is helping other women - because it’s awful. I would never wish it on anybody. Yeah, so but it’s much better now. So I know even though it’s hard bringing it up, I’ll be okay.” (Michelle quoted in: Dragiewicz et al., 2023, p.1144)

As outlined above, incorporating safety procedures and practices is crucial for IPV research. Scholars criticise the pervasive use of ‘vulnerable’ and ‘sensitive’ when describing research on IPV, as these imply powerlessness and exploitability. This perspective may overly victimise participants to the extent that they are excluded from the research on the grounds of protecting them from harm, ultimately dismissing people’s agency (Burgess-Proctor, 2015). Downes et al. (2014) argue that increased scrutiny by research governance on research involving violence and abuse, using these labels, complicates obtaining ethics clearance:

“We concur with domestic violence researchers who argue that the blanket designation of ‘vulnerable’ is a paternalistic practice that undermines the agency, capacity and diversity of victim-survivors and their decisions”  
(Downes et al., 2014, p.4).

Burgess-Porter (2015) argues that interviews can include “ethically important moments”, where a participant’s disclosure of abuse prompts the researcher to reflect and determine the best course of action. She notes “that even emotional, upsetting interviews can – if handled with respect, care, and compassion – result in benefits for survivors” (p.130).

Ellsberg and Heise (2002), Burgess-Porter (2015), and Dragiewicz et al., (2023) demonstrate that participating in research can also be positive and beneficial to its participants where the participatory harm may outweigh the costs. For participants, it can be an opportunity to reflect on their past experiences (Dragiewicz et al., 2023) and supporting them to make connections and realisations about their victimisation (Burgess-Porter, 2015) –

“I forgot about the beating. You forget about the beating. [Crying hard now] I forgot about the beating! I forgot about what he did.” (Yvonne quoted in: Burgess-Porter, 2015, p129).

It can be an opportunity for ‘paying it forward’ (Burgess-Porter, 2015) to help others in similar circumstances (Dragiewicz et al., 2023). A moment to tell someone when they have never have told their story to anybody else before (Ellsberg & Heise, 2002), which through researchers expressing and reciprocating emotions, may provide a moment of validation (Burgess-Porter, 2015). Finally, it can be a way of rejecting victim-shaming (Dragiewicz et al., 2023), that it is not shameful or an unimportant issue (Ellsberg & Heise, 2002).

Dragiewicz et al. (2023) note that “being upset or emotional when discussing abuse is not necessarily harmful” (p.1144). That part of being ready to participate can also be the timing, having had time to already process their experiences with specialist support. Therefore, researchers must carefully evaluate the temporality of abuse in their research design, as emphasized by Bellini et al. (2023), to ensure it aligns with the research objectives. This consideration varies depending on the type of research being conducted. For instance, if the aim is to gather data on the prevalence of intimate partner violence (IPV), researchers may encounter individuals who are still in abusive situations.

### **3.3.3 Practices for researching with people who enact abuse**

Research safety strategies shared previously remain relevant when researching people who enact abuse, such as using low-risk methods like collecting data from interactions in online communities (e.g. Reddit, where people might be sharing abusive tactics) (Bellini et al., 2023). However, as will be demonstrated in this section, there are further contextual implications to consider such as colluding with violence and reinforcing patriarchal masculinities. In her PhD thesis, Bellini (2021) explored designing with people who enact abuse, and throughout it discusses how she had to grapple with several methodological and practical considerations to ensure that her design work was ethical, meaningful, and safe.

When engaging with people who enact abuse, Bellini (2021) discussed the challenge of holding them accountable for their behaviours while also respecting and humanising them to enhance their agency and ability to change. During research activities she found that people who enact abuse often use strategies to minimise or deny their abusive behaviours. She stated that: “I personally found it especially difficult to subdue my own views when silence is so often associated with approval of or downplaying sexist statements.” (p.67). During these moments, as she was working alongside service providers in a programme, they would challenge these remarks with documented pattern of events by police, social care, or their partners, providing people with a space to negotiate their views during interviews. She notes how there can be a gradual change in how participants discuss abusive situations as they engaged in the research. She suggests that:

“Perpetrator descriptions of violence, rather than being ‘believed’ in the same way as those of victim-survivors, are best understood as a construction of events subject to temporal change” (p.207)

Unlike common research practices, she highlighted how in this context data analysis needs to be treated with a ‘healthy degree of scepticism’ (Bellini, 2021). Which can only be done by being deeply informed about abuse and its manifestations.

Flood (2013), like Bellini (2021), describes how during interviews he would conceal his rejection of patriarchal masculine, in the process, these behaviour were condoned when reported or enacted with the aim of building rapport. During research, both conceal their intentions and emotional and political reactions. He outlines a debate as to what extent do researchers collude with sexism and whether research should increase the possibilities for social change. Citing Kelly et al. (1994) he highlights the other side of the argument for using ‘challenging methods’ that actively question oppressive attitudes and behaviours. However, he argues that this might undermine the precondition for disclosure. He concludes that even just starting the conversation and getting men to reflect on their involvement in oppressive practices, can already begin to make personal change.

Bellini (2021) noted how during focus groups generating concepts that leveraged technologies for emotional self-management and reflection that, groups gravitated to concepts that could determine the escalation of abuse:

“perpetrators’ suggestions of creating a blood pressure monitor that would warn them, and in one case their victim-survivor, of upcoming abuse. Such a suggestion at best represents a fundamental misunderstanding of what domestic violence is, and therefore an attempt at suggesting (in their view) a reasonable solution to an ill-defined problem.” (p.144)

She noted how this was a subtle manipulation of the design process. To overcome this, she critically evaluated ideas and dismissed ones where that (1) minimises, or blames others for their behaviour, or (2) increases harm to themselves or their partners, or staff. In some cases, Bellini (2021) restricted agency by creating predefined choices, for instance, they could not ‘play the victim’ in stories.

Bellini (2021) provides critical observations noting that such restrictions applied in participatory design may appear paternalistic and counter the emancipatory vision of participatory work. Overall, she points to the importance of working alongside specialist organisations to avoid colluding with violence. This finding suggests that commonly used methodologies must be adapted to reflect contextual factors, but also the importance of designer's critical awareness of IPV in order to be able to challenge potentially harmful situations.

Stepping back and examining the research practices applied to the two different perspectives - those experiencing abuse and those enacting abuse - distinct strategies and approaches emerge. But a pattern amongst them is visible. There is a foundational frame across these practices, as argued by Ellsberg and Heise (2002) and later Bellini et al. (2023), that **“research should be treated as an intervention”** (Bellini et al, 2023, p.8) that can have positive and negative impact on the participants. This is a key shift in mindset towards one that is strategic and informed is required. Researchers across situations are consistently making decisions that are situational and contextually sensitive while also centring participants agency to share their experiences (even if those may reflect harmful notions).

### 3.3.4 Researchers may be at risk of harm

Finally, this also means recognising the impact this can have on researchers themselves. While much attention is often paid to the ways in which safety and ethical considerations must account for the harm research may cause to participants, disclosures of traumatic experiences and repeatedly listening to stories of physical and emotional pain can be distressing for researchers, especially if they have their own experiences of abuse (Bender, 2017; Ellsberg & Heise, 2002). This distress can also affect those without prior experiences as they may experience vicarious trauma. In design, the issue lies in the fact that designers often engage in trauma work without a **code of ethics, practice, or training** (Winfield, 2024). Winfield (2024) shared the results of a study she ran with Every and Deitkus in 2024 revealing that out of 95 designers surveyed 51% had experienced secondary traumatic stress in their work.

IPV researchers have extensive experience in implementing strategies to support researchers. Ellsberg and Heise (2002) and WHO (2016) suggest that before conducting fieldwork, researchers should be provided with opportunities to discuss their own experiences of abuse, come to terms with them, and address them. This process may support researchers to consider whether they need to be reassigned other job duties. WHO (2016) offers recommendations such as acknowledging and sharing information on vicarious trauma and re-traumatisation during training, preparing researchers to identify early warning signs, developing self-care strategies, and providing debriefing opportunities with a team member. They also note that not all people will be comfortable discussing these issues with colleagues or line managers, so it is equally important to provide access to external services

The findings from this section suggest that research practices when applied to IPV, must be adapted with a critical awareness of the contexts they are applying it to. Research engagements are negotiated spaces (Flood, 2013), that require risk mitigation while being flexible to emerging situations, with strategies and decisions ready on hand. This further extends to the researcher, and recognising that this is an intervention in their lives too, their decisions and self-care is vital. However, revisiting Table 3.1. shared in 3.2.1, which outlines common design research practices

excluding trauma, and comparing them to the findings discussed in these sections, it is salient that social design practice as it stands is not prepared to work in IPV contexts.

There is an evident need to better understand these contextual implications from the viewpoint of designers. This is because intentionality behind research will differ from sociologists as they are concerned with designing services rather than understanding prevalence of abuse. Different objective, different circumstances.

### **3.4 Identifying existing practical implications**

Thus far, the review has identified situational and contextual factors that influence research design. It demonstrates that while such factors have been given attention in many IPV-related disciplines, design has generally not (Winfield, 2023; Wechsler, 2023) and remains underexplored. The review now focuses on design outcomes and their practical implications, which also involve examining how problems are framed.

This thesis defines practical implications as the tensions and adaptations necessary for design to engage effectively within a social context. These implications can be identified by examining the messages that design artefacts convey about the world and the choices made during the process (Cross, 2007). This section begins by reviewing literature at the intersection of design and harm, revealing the effect of dominant ideologies that become centred, resulting in harmful outcomes. It will then explore this issue in the context of VAW, revealing how users are constructed as passive and emphasising the need to challenge this towards more agentic perspectives. The section will then examine literature that has begun applying this shift at the intersection of design and violence. Finally, it will discuss a commonly used user experience (UX) element in IPV-focused websites: the 'Exit this Page' button.

### 3.4.1 Design reproducing dominant ideologies

"The infamous phrase "guns don't kill people, people kill people" places the responsibility firmly on the user" (Brunswick in Science Gallery Dublin, 2017). However, it is the design of such an object that makes it practical and feasible in everyday life (Fisher, 2019). What logic, then, created this possibility in the first place? Internalised notions in societies can become centred on design, limiting designers' ability to imagine alternative ways of being (Agid, 2022). In IPV contexts, for example, notions of vulnerability have been discussed in section 3.3.2.1 and argued to limit opportunities for transformative work (see section 3.4.2). Keshavarz (2020) and Agid (2022) demonstrate that without designers critically disrupting dominant logics, they may inadvertently reproduce existing life models and possibilities.

Keshavarz (2020) problematises humanitarian design within the socio-political landscape, pointing out the "fine line between care and control" (p.10). He argues that the framing of policies and media narratives concerning refugees and asylum seekers often revolves around terms like 'emergency' and 'crisis'. In return, this constructs a condition that suggests these situations are an exception rather than part of a broader neo-colonisation process<sup>23</sup>. Consequently, certain designs emerge. For instance, in response to the death of migrants in the Mediterranean Sea, a proposed design solution was to install a line of buoys. In return, this 'crisis' logic justifies creating temporary and surface-level design outcomes, which profoundly affect the people who become users of these designs.

As Keshavarz (2020) notes, "Consequently, these design interventions reconfigure refugees as victims without agency whose identity is constructed as receivers of ingenious and benevolent design." (Keshavarz, 2020, p. 25). He demonstrates how, under dominant discourses, characterising individuals as needing assistance leads to fundamental questions of empathy and hospitality. However, this conceals questions of justice - responsibility and restitution.

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<sup>23</sup> Neo-colonisation is the control of a state over another through indirect means.

Agid (2022) examines projects related to the CJS, noting that reform-led projects aimed to repair trust between the police and communities while maintaining the police station as a central element. In contrast, the Oakland Power Projects sought to decouple medical and mental health care from policing by equipping people with the knowledge to de-escalate emergencies. They argued that by refusing to centre carceral ideologies and focusing on people's capabilities, new avenues for questioning and action are opened, and alternatives are imagined.

They both argue that under this circumstance, certain political agendas are amplified where social movements' calls for justice are overlooked - calling to support those actively resisting harmful structures in communities. Agid (2022) argues that designers must inform themselves of what work already exists and the histories and socio-political contexts. They underscore a commitment to actively engage with communities, listening, questioning, and collaborating to envision alternatives while still addressing their **immediate needs**. They emphasise that by:

"shaping questions, testing understandings, and imagining ways of framing the problems at hand, we create openings for these other ways of knowing to make their way in, to interrupt the common sense with which designers and others may be working." (p.458)

The articles in this review are accounts of design functioning as symbolic violence. According to Boehnert et al. (2016):

"Design functions as symbolic violence when it is involved with the creation and reproduction of ideas, practices, processes and tools that result in structural and other types of violence (including ecocide)." (p.1).

They draw on the work of Bourdieu, where symbolic violence is characterised as a "gentle violence" which naturalises power imbalances, making intolerable conditions appear acceptable and even natural. It describes how certain ideologies, priorities, values and sensibilities become centred in practices. Consequently, design naturalises and depoliticises aspects of society, making other ways of being invisible (Boehnert et al., 2016).



Scholars mentioned above outline that while design may actively try to address harm, it can, through other means, reproduce often more 'invisible' forms. These findings become critical when discussing IPV, as gendered power imbalances have become deeply naturalised in societies, making it appear acceptable. Therefore, it is important to be aware that these ideologies can unconsciously be reproduced. The following section will examine this closer to IPV ideologies.

### 3.4.2 Undoing the symbol of the vulnerable user

In the field of GBV, there are parallels to the problematic narratives of 'emergency', 'crisis', and 'safety' identified by Keshavarz (2020) and Agid (2022). In June 2024, UK Deputy Chief Constable Maggie Blyth the national lead for VAWG, stated that VAWG is a 'national emergency' (Dodd, 2024). Building on Keshavarz's (2020) arguments, this type of narrative creates specific conditions that frame VAWG as an exception rather than a social condition, which may lead to temporary and surface-level (design) outcomes.

#### 3.4.2.1 Paternalistic practices of designating vulnerability to all women and girls

Munari et al. (2023) critically examine the prevalent use of the term 'vulnerable', particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. They argue that this term is often employed in 'nondescript and vague manners' to characterise certain individuals, functioning as a 'convenient term'<sup>24</sup> that professionals and communities consistently reach out for. They argue that consistent use of these terms, without critical examination, focuses on deficit, dependency, and passivity while failing to address the structural conditions that contribute to such vulnerability in the first place:

“use of the term ‘vulnerable’ can specifically imply an inevitable deficit that will supersede other explanations for the situation under consideration. The use of deficit terms like vulnerable can too easily conceal the wider structural causes that lead to health inequities and obscure accountability of those responsible for generating or perseverating these causes and structural power imbalances.” (p.197)

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<sup>24</sup> They also highlight other similar terms, such as 'marginalised', 'disadvantaged', 'at risk', 'underserved' and 'disenfranchised'.

Vulnerability can confine people to their past, making only visible living under the current conditions and obstructing future possibilities. Munari et al. (2023) propose reframing the term – by using 'priority' – to redirect peoples focus towards future opportunities emphasising community needs and essential resources required.

In discussions of GBV, another 'convenient term' used is 'victim'. Alike vulnerability, it perpetuates narratives of helplessness, and passivity while introducing an element of blame (Creek & Dunn, 2011). Creek and Dunn (2011), identify the 'ideal victim' characterisation in US society typically as young, white, middle-class, attractive (but not overtly sexy) women<sup>25</sup>. This concept of an ideal person extends into design, where Bardzell and Bardzell (2015) argue that every design is based on user assumptions, resulting in the construction of an 'ideal user' for every interaction. For a person – the real user - to fully experience the design, it can depend on their conformity to this construction, neglecting other parts of themselves that are irrelevant to the design (Bardzell, 2010). Those who then fall out of these imagined boundaries are excluded.

Understanding this is critical in the context of GBV as "designers design users and not just products" (Bradzell & Bradzell, 2015, p.1). Moreover, labelling and isolating people as either victims or perpetrators - often due to internalised carcerality - reinforces ideologies of punishment, individualism, and surveillance (Fathallah & Lewis, 2021). Fathallah and Lewis (2021) argue that design, similar to policing, focuses on individual actions and behaviours. This is particularly problematic in IPV where Levine and Meiners (2020) argue that it oversimplifies the complexity of relationships that might be both abusive and loving, destructive and positively interdependent. Designers must therefore consider users not only as individuals but as relational beings within their partnerships, which can influence conditions of **intimate harm**.

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<sup>25</sup> In the UK, this is equally prominent and was evident in the fact Sarah Everards rape and murder was well covered in the media and responded to by the police, when Biba Henry and Nicole Smallman, two black women, were not (Bates, 2022).

### 3.4.2.2 Women's safety technologies as narratives of helpless and passive users

Designers are putting into practice the ideologies related to vulnerability and victimhood through the proliferation of women's safety technologies. In an article, drawn from research in this thesis, Fiadeiro et al. (2023a) explore the ways in which technologies have been deployed to respond to sexual violence. Based on existing scholarship<sup>26</sup>, the article identifies three primary forms of these technologies:

- (1) corporeal devices (e.g., anti-rape underwear);
- (2) communication devices (e.g., apps for monitoring journeys);
- (3) hybrid corporeal/communication devices (e.g., wearables that, when triggered, alert people),

These technologies aim to prevent sexual violence through restricting, monitoring, alerting, and sounding alarms when triggered. In addition, the article found that 87% of design interventions took a victim-centric focus on women.

The perspective embedded in these technologies promotes ideologies of surveillance and individualism, suggesting that women are responsible for preventing violence through personal vigilance rather than a robust social safety net (Bailey & Gamman, 2022). For these technologies to be (hypothetically) effective they'd need to be used regularly – or whenever women go out at night - thereby making visible a world where violence is 'inevitable'. Women's bodies become reliant on these technologies, implying that without them, they are at risk. This is what Bellini (2021) notes as a pattern in interventions:

“Historically, it has been the explicit *lack of focus* surrounding responsibility that has inadvertently resulted in undue attention and onus being placed on victim-survivors to make changes in their lives in order to avoid abuse.”  
(Bellini, 2021, p.23-24)

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<sup>26</sup> Bivens and Hasinoff (2018); Eisenhut et al., 2020; Maxwell et al., 2020; White & McMillan, 2020)

The underlying logics of these technologies are narratives of helplessness and passivity, framing women as vulnerable victims before they are victimised, which does little to acknowledge the structural conditions that lead to violence in the first place. Additionally, as highlighted in the article, these technologies overlook evidence that sexual violence is more likely perpetrated by someone known, reinforcing rape myths and ideas of the ‘ideal victim’ - ‘ideal user’. The fact that most of these technologies are behind paywalls and fail to consider how people of colour are disproportionately criminalised for defending themselves further confines users to the profile of an ideal victim - typically young, white, and middle-class. Designers commodify safety, selling it to women as a product rather than recognising it as the process, relationship and resources it is (Kaba & Ritchie, 2022).

The article also references the response to the case of Sarah Everard, who was raped and murdered by former police officer Wayne Couzens in the UK in March 2021. Following the incident, the then home office secretary Priti Patel backed a proposal for monitoring women’s journeys service (Badshah, 2021). This again highlights what Keshavarz (2020) notes: as surface-level design outcomes emerging in response to an ‘emergency’ narrative.

From undoing the symbol of the vulnerable user, this review illustrates how notions of passivity and dependency can become embedded in design. Redoing the user is part of a broader call to see users as active agents (Leitão, 2022). As argued by Renata Leitão (2022); “basic-needs-centered interventions treat people as passive beneficiaries, the capability approach is agency-focused.” (p.260). Feminists have long argued for shifting the term ‘victim’ to ‘survivor’, as they are active always **resisting, coping, and surviving** throughout their relationships and beyond (Creek & Dunn, 2011). This should be reflected in design.

### 3.4.3 From deficit-based to desire-based framings

Eve Tuck (2009) wrote an open letter to the research community stating that research on indigenous communities has historically been damage-centred, intended on documenting pain, defeat and brokenness where oppression defines the community. Instead, she argues that

research should be desire-based. Concerned with understanding complexity, contradiction, and self-determination. Accounting for loss and despair while maintaining visions and hope. This focus on damage-centred frames is reflected in design. Building on Tuck, Leitão (2020) stated that need-based approaches that dominate design are conservative and reproduce an already given model of life. Desire, however, she argues, is open-ended and agentic encouraging new possibilities and models. As emphasised above this is a key shift in frames adopted by design, especially in situations of harm.

Social design's pervasive focus on its role in 'problem-solving' social issues, directly links it to reducing or eliminating pre-existing deficiencies – and a focus on suffering and sadness (Desmet and Pohlmeier, 2013; Noel, 2023) rather than imagining other possibilities. As stated by Strohmayer et al. (2022) (section 3.2.4), design cannot eradicate all harms and must prioritise peoples well-being. In recognising this, Noel (2023) suggests joy as an antidote as it challenges urges to 'fix' and centres promoting users joy while creating spaces for access to health and thriving. In her examples of students projects centring joy, there was a focus on relationship building and resource sharing – key elements of safety.

In the context of IPV, it is less so about "positiveness", "happiness" (Desmet & Pohlmeier, 2013) and joy (Noel, 2023), as these feelings while present and vital in healing journeys, do not account for their interplay with loneliness, sadness, fear and discouragement that happen alongside it (D'Amore et al., 2021). Nevertheless, combining all challenges narratives of perpetual victims. Hope for example is a principle in Chayn's TID, as it recognises how abuse can leave people feeling hopeless and that interventions should serve to validate their experiences and feel like an oasis for them. This sits more closely with Tuck's desire-based research framework that explores the complexities and contradictions, while still accounting for the loss, and also hope and visions. Where there is a call for an epistemological shift.

Furthermore, as noted by Leitão (2020) desire-based framings are complex and contradictory, and when designing in critical situations, for example disasters, they have vital urgent basic needs that need to be met still making needs-based approaches relevant to some contexts. The same goes

for IPV, when designing an intervention at crisis point, where someone is in an abusive relationship and needs support to be safe, basic needs might need to be met. With this in mind, when aiming to design to address intimate harm where abuse and love can happen, where multidimensional emotions are at play, what rationales are designers using to guide their choices? To begin to answer this, the review now focuses on literature at the intersection of design and violence that reflect desire-based frameworks.

#### 3.4.3.1 A shift from crime to public health

A look into the history of the Design Against Crime Research Lab's<sup>27</sup> projects demonstrates a shift from deficit-based to desire-based framings in the field of design and crime/violence. At the start, they focussed on removing people's violent agency by designing out ways of using objects for 'criminal' behaviours, and on how designed products could be a target of crime (e.g. stolen) or misused for crime (e.g. tool for theft). This entailed, for example, making products less distinctive targets for offenders (e.g. securing bags to front of chair) or shielding the product from misuse (e.g. single use syringes) (Ekblom, 2005). While this may have stopped some forms of crime, what it neglected was the reasons for crimes taking place in the first place – relating crime to products rather than *crime as a process*. This was soon recognised by the DACRL, where Gamman in a podcast led by Tolvanen & Toivonen (2022) reflected that "making objects harder to steal is not enough and what is needed is to address deeper issues" (4:30 mins). From here, they shifted towards fostering people's agency to take responsibility for social issues – "Many crime prevention practitioners agree that secure design should not look "criminal" and the need for engagement is about understanding that desirable neighbourhoods are often those where people feel safe, because they look safe and foster and facilitate strong community support mechanisms." (Thorpe

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<sup>27</sup> Design Against Crime (DAC) originated as a design research initiative at Central Saint Martins in 1999, led by Lorraine Gamman, later becoming a Research Centre in 2005 and recently renaming as Design Against Crime Research Lab (DACRL), focusing on crime-related design projects. DACRL's influence has extended internationally, with Gamman supporting the establishment of the Australian Designing Out Crime Research Centre (DOC-RC) in 2006. Over the years, DACRL has worked alongside various organisation, to conduct research and develop innovative solutions to crime prevention. Between 2007-2010, they worked in projects related to the UK Government Home Office's funded Design Council's 'Designing Out Crime' program.

& Gammam, 2020, p.4). Focusing on environmental (or situational) design e.g. community negotiation of street art (Thorpe & Gammam, 2020).

From this shift, DACRL have also begun to engage with system thinking to consider the more structural elements of violence. In Bailey and Gamman's (2022) article, through using a system map as a discursive intervention in exploring youth violence, they highlighted how current discourse and interventions focus on placing the responsibility on young people to change and "naturalises the issue as a matter of crime, safety and policing". The map counters these discourses by tapping into four elements. The first was to bring structural context back in, alike Chapter 2, highlighting factors such as policy decisions (austerity) that led to youth centre closures and systemic violence resulting in poor relationship skills amongst children and young adults. Secondly, they brought in the notion of violence as a social practice – habitually performed actions (Thinking Structurally (Chapter 2)). Rather than analysing the (criminal) individual it recognises them as 'carriers' of such practices. Thirdly, they state that the map is designed in a panoptical manner to illustrate the complexity and causality of violence. Finally, through its visual affordances, the map presents itself as a 'factual object'. At the end they reflected that it

"suggests the need for rigorous reflection, reflexivity, and reading widely around one's subject, so that we are as aware as possible of the discursive ideas we are reproducing and normalizing, or alternatively resisting, through acts of representation." (p.15).

Bailey and Gamman's (2022) article demonstrates that by bringing in a structural lens, as delineated in Chapter 2, ideologies may be disrupted and designers may then become aware of, and recognise what they are reproducing. It disturbs current social design logics focused on producing changes to people's behaviours and thus placing responsibility on individuals. From here as of 2023 the DACRL has expanded beyond the crime remit to more social initiatives (Design Against Crime, n.d.). This thesis continues such an agenda by framing designs role in IPV as a social rather than criminal one.

Putting this systems map into practice, another project born out of UAL named 'Cut' was developed and led by Dr Francesco Mazzarella at London College of Fashion and assisted by Anna Schuster. The project situated in Waltham Forest (London, UK) through prompting young people to engage with fashion skills sought to create a safe space for young people to not only develop their ideas and skills but also talk openly about their concerns around knife crime. They brought people who had been impacted by knife crime together to work on the design and message of the project. Working with local creative organisations they took knives and turned them into buttons and rivets for jeans. Overall, the project aimed to shift the narrative and "turn knives, the very weapons that can take a life, into something that could help nurture a life." (p.11).

Mazzarella and Schuster (2022) stated how it was evident that through engaging in the process young people developed activist mindsets and were supported to explore their potential to prevent knife crime. As noted in their report, "adopting a public health approach was needed to give youth agency, and to produce social change in order to subvert the potent allure of knife crime." (p.7).

Equally, in their report on the same subject matter, Frater and Gamman (2020) stated, "interventions offering a public health rather than a criminal justice approach have the strongest evidence base." (p.55). In both, they aimed to shift the narrative that frames young people's behaviours as deviant and antisocial towards open-ended and agentic (Leitão, 2022) people who can reconfigure their life models.

From both Bailey and Gamman (2022) and Mazzarella and Schuster's (2022) work there is a prominent **shift from developing problem-solving solutions to developing discussions**. Bailey and Gamman (2022) developed the systems map as a discursive object and Mazzarella and Schuster (2022) project is a clear example of more desire-based framings that focus on amplifying peoples skills and agency to make change. They gathered communities to discuss a positive reframing of knife crime, built relational networks between young people, charities, and creative organisations in the Waltham Forest area, and initiated a conversation that more people could continue, creating further opportunities for change.



In no shape or form did either of these projects claim to solve the problem of youth violence, but rather they started conversations around it. This is what has increasingly been explored in design by the Design and Oppression network through the lens of **dialogues**. Drawing on Paolo Freire (1996) they define “dialogue as a process of reality transformation (Noel et al., 2019): «Dialogue is the encounter between humans, mediated by the world, in order to name the world» (Freire, 1996, p. 88).” (Van Amstel et al., 2023, p.2). The review findings suggest that design addressing situations of harm from solving problems to modelling alternative structures. This is reflected in empirical findings in Chapter 7.

Finally, youth knife crime can also be viewed as a form of intimate harm, as it is closely linked to adverse childhood experiences such as parental neglect and physical and sexual abuse, as well as peer influence that encourages weapon carrying (Haylock et al., 2020). Exploring violence from the perspective of intimate harm could further contribute to design scholarship aimed at addressing violence. Before moving on to a more detailed empirical study, this review briefly examines IPV websites to highlight some relevant implications within this context.

#### 3.4.4 ‘Exit this page’: messages found in IPV websites

”Bad websites make me have a very bad experience. You go round in circles finding information and that can become very frustrating. Both user journey and not finding what you’re looking for. Realising that this is just a website. This is the worst part for me. It’s only a website with a number that doesn’t work. I had nasty experiences and they make you feel desperate at the point.” (Snook et al., 2017, p.24)<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Due to the nature of the work I research in friends and acquaintances have often shared their stories with me, one of which wanted my help to understand how they could report their sexual abuse. To support them I went onto a rape crisis website to look for information for how she might be able to self-refer herself to a local rape crisis centres independent sexual violence advocate. I went round in circles looking for this information even using the chatbot to look for information, to which it would send me to website links that no longer exist. While we both were not in a crisis point, this left us feeling quite distressed as we could not find the right information. I have since been in contact with the organisation and they are modifying this.

Design choices can significantly impact how people seek support. Eggleston and Noel (2024) note how certain websites developed to support IPV have overlooked contextual considerations such as using gendered language, lack of quick calling options and overwhelming the user by providing long lists of types of sexual assault. Yet, they argue that good design heuristics combined with trauma-informed principles may support IPV websites in delivering engaging websites.

A preliminary examination of websites dedicated to supporting people experiencing abuse has revealed key signifiers regarding their intended use. A prominent UX design feature often found is the 'Exit this Page' button. As illustrated in Image 3.1, variations of the button are designed to

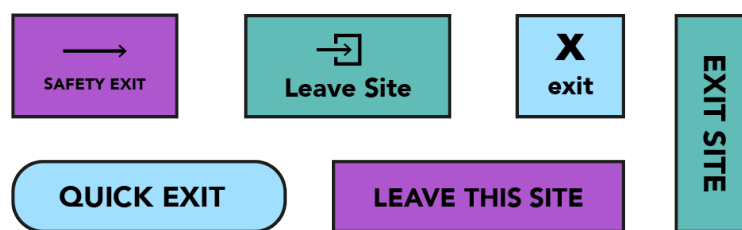


Image 3.1- Illustrations of 'Exit this Page' Buttons found on IPV websites

enable users to leave websites quickly, particularly if the users abusive partner enters the room or they feel at risk – Box 3.5. Subsequently, the users browsing history will be cleared and they will be redirected to a generic webpage, such as news or the weather channel (syrokostas, 2024).

However, syrokostas (2024) noted that such generic pages can present potentially triggering headlines. Instead, he recommends that designers direct user to more calming content, such as images of animals, to mitigate distress. Exit buttons demonstrate that while the design execution may be different, the **rationale** underpinning them is the same – user safety.



Josh may be seeking support and safety options for his relationship with Ben. Since Ben is tech-savvy and uses technology to monitor Josh's movements, it's crucial for Josh to avoid leaving an online trace that Ben could access, as this could escalate the abuse. Additionally, Josh may explore his options while Ben is away from home, although he might return unexpectedly.

Box 3.5 - Josh accessing support online

When examining the National Domestic Abuse Helpline's Website, Image 3.2, it is evident that users are immediately greeted with encouraging messaging, such as 'You are not alone', alongside clearly signposted helpline numbers and exit buttons. The website clearly organises information into concise blocks of information and action. These UX features align with recommendation put forth by syrokostas (2024) such as breaking down information into vital information and small chunks and providing different ways to ask for help – in NDAH's case phoneline and live chat. Additionally, other trauma-informed design choices proposed by syrokostas (2024) include supporting users agency by allowing them to make choices on how content is displayed, designing inviting and welcoming content and colour palates, and avoiding potentially re-traumatising imagery depicting harm.

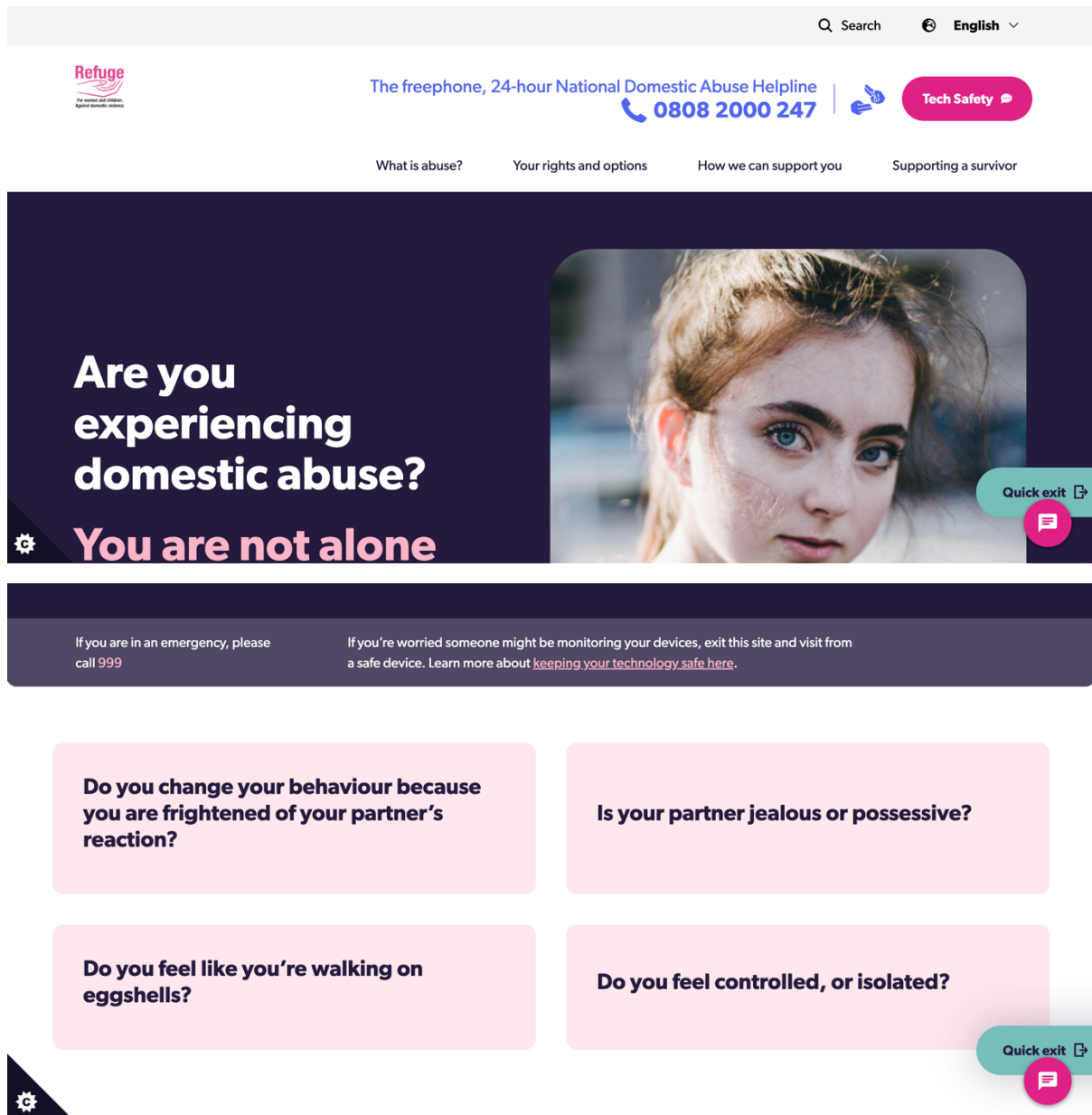


Image 3.2- NDAH Webpage

An 'Exit this Page' button illustrates a critical aspect of TID in UX, as it recognises potential risks of intimate harm. Making it relevant to not only for websites for IPV organisation but also for government websites where people may be seeking sensitive information. While it should be considered best practice for designers who design for situations where users might be experiencing intimate harm, the UK Government only recently (2023) adopted this (Design System Team, 2023). This button demonstrates a scenario that is specific to intimate harm, where abusers might have access to their users devices, distinguishing it from other crime or violence.

Furthermore, when examining IPV websites, a few focused on recovering from abuse, incorporated a grounding button, alike the safety button, which when feeling overwhelmed users may be redirected to grounding exercises (see Our Wave (n.d.) website).

However, when examining websites in Portugal<sup>29</sup>, there were discrepancies in the implementation of aforementioned features. For instance, Associação de Mulheres Contra a Violência (n.d.) (AMCV) - Association of Women Against Violence - featured an exit button and helpline button on its landing page, Image 3.3, whereas Apoio à Vítima (APAV) - Victim Support - did not, Image 3.4. This inconsistency suggests that best practices are not being applied across organisations. It is important to note, that this may also reflect broader issues in the country, such as funding constraints. Nonetheless, this emphasises a gap in research that analyses the common characteristics and principles underlying IPV designs, which may help designers and organisations build effective designs that support their users.



Image 3.3- AMCV Webpage

<sup>29</sup> Portugal has been chosen as I am Portuguese and am therefore able to interact with its contents.



Image 3.4- APAV Webpage

Overall, the findings demonstrate the unique considerations that designers must take into account when designing for situations where IPV may be present. Additionally research may prove beneficial to encompass a more comprehensive understanding of the field. Yet, the question still remains on understanding what is the underlying objectives of these websites design choices. Why are particular interactions being designed, what behaviours are they aiming change?

### 3.5 Conclusions from the literature

Chapter 2 established the context in which this thesis is situated, outlining the complex interplay of social conditions and structures that influence IPV. Building on this, this chapter examined design practice, through reviewing existing literature and state-of-the-art products, to further understand implications and inform the research approach focused on studying the role of design.

The chapter highlighted that there is limited research examining what additional considerations design must employ to address IPV, beyond just user safety. Specifically, there is a lack of research that explores this context from the perspective of those who do and may enact harm. Due to this, there is limited scholarship that consolidates and provides the groundwork of common

practices and theoretical grounding for designers already in the field or entering it. As demonstrated, in section 3.4.4. this lack of consolidation may result in shared knowledge and characteristics not being effectively translated into designs outcomes in these contexts. While TID, discussed in section 3.2.3.1, represents a promising shift in designers' mindsets to better account for the contextual implications of trauma, it falls short of acknowledging the structural elements of IPV and how to address the social conditions contributing to it.

The findings from the literature suggest that every moment in the design process is influential in effecting change, from critically resisting dominant logics, to recognising that research is an intervention that can positively or negatively impact participants, to the outcomes which create certain possibilities visible. These findings suggest several areas of concern for design when applied to harm, especially intimate harm, that warrant further attention:

- Redefining how design problems are framed by challenging dominant perspectives;
- Considering harm as both an outcome of research and artefacts produced, as well as safety practices for participants and researcher;
- Shifting from individualistic, incident-based approaches to systems that prioritise resources, relationships, and well-being;
- Reframing deficit-based mindsets towards mindsets aligned with desire-based ones;
- Changing the focus of behavioural change from placing responsibility on users to adopting more supportive approaches that are dialectical;
- Questioning what social conditions design makes visible through its outcomes.

Synthesising and contextualising these areas to the unique considerations of IPV may help establish common practices in design and provide insight into how design has evolved to address this issue, shedding light on what this reveals about social design. The following case studies,

presented in Chapters 5 and 6, offer detailed accounts of designers' experiences and considerations when applying design to IPV.

This chapter argues that the topic IPV, like TID, should not be reduced to a methodology, toolkit, or checklist to be applied by any designer. Instead, the change comes from the designer themselves and their agency to affect change. What it means to design to address IPV can carry many meanings and approaches, from recovery to prevention, as the risks and harms experienced by each user differ based on their cultural context. In Chapters 5 to 7, the nuances and reflections of designers engaged in this work are explored. Following this, Chapter 8 builds on findings to explore what spaces could support designers. Before turning to the empirical findings, Chapter 4 will outline the methodological approach developed in this thesis.



# Chapter 4. A feminist emergent methodology

## Chapter overview

The previous chapter presented an argument for developing a research approach focused on designers' practices and the rationales that guide them. It explored key concepts – risk, harm, trauma, safety, and healing – and reviewed existing methodological and practical implications arising from the scholarship's contextual and situational conditions. The chapters highlighted the potential for a more thorough investigation into these implications across design approaches in IPV. Under these concepts, chapter 3 outlined how elements of practice found in problem framing, design process, and design outcome are all critical moments of influence that can generate positive or negative impacts on society. Overall, the chapter argued that designers play a critical role in effecting social change, and understanding what informs them is essential to the research study.

This chapter introduces a feminist emergent methodology (FEM) and employs the approach throughout the thesis. As there is no fundamental feminism but rather many feminisms that differ in their motivations and beliefs, the chapter clarifies how feminism informs this thesis. Following this, the research outlines how emergence complements the feminist underpinnings, allowing the research to follow the unfolding of insights and continuously converse with the social world.

This chapter outlines the research choices based on feminist epistemological and political commitments and reflects on their design, procedures, and limitations. It details the chosen methods, which include case studies, interviews, and workshops. Additionally, it addresses ethical considerations, sampling and recruitment strategies, and data analysis processes. Overall, this methodological approach aims to answer the following overarching question: In addressing intimate partner violence, how does design practice adapt in response to contextual implications?

## 4.1 A FEM approach

This section presents the FEM approach adopted in this thesis. It begins by examining what constitutes a feminist methodology informed by theory and political commitments. Next, it draws on feminist standpoint theory as a critical lens for understanding knowledge production in this research. This lens prioritises the perspectives of designers in IPV, both as workers within an IPV field dominated by women and as people with power when implementing the design process. New understandings may be exposed by looking at the design discipline from this perspective. Finally, it presents arguments for emergence in design methodologies (Gaver et al. 2022). The section presents how this feature complements feminist values and how it becomes incorporated into the methodological approach.

### 4.1.1 Feminist methodology: theoretical and political stance

This thesis is informed by feminist theory and feminist political commitments; they are a part of every decision, question, reading and analysis presented in this work and beyond. In this way, the research is less concerned with adopting suitable methodologies to 'do' feminism but rather an everyday approach and orientation to the world (Ahmed, 2017; Fiadeiro et al., 2023c). Jaggar (2016) argues that incorporating feminist political commitments in research motivates researchers to recognise overlooked evidence and to challenge previously unexamined assumptions. In return, this approach has restructured various disciplines' research agendas.

Feminism is a praxis – combination of theory and practice - to respond to sexism, sexual exploitation, sexual oppression (hooks, 2000), and generally the violence of systemic oppression (Davies et al., 2022). Whether or not IPV work is explicitly named as feminist, IPV is still of feminist concern (Bellini, 2021). Therefore, this research is politically motivated, shaping the methodological approach to "produce useful knowledge that will make a difference to women's lives through social and individual change" (Letherby, 2007, p.4). This thesis extends this to recognise its potential impact on all genders' lives. Producing designerly knowledge in the context

of intervening in IPV will support current and future practitioners in producing social and individual change.

Feminist theory has been integrated into design methodologies by scholars. As argued by Smith (2023), "they direct the perspective and purpose of research, rather than the tools used to conduct it" (p.47), making it applicable to various research contexts. Like other disciplines, design has been guided by its different theoretical framings, such as feminist standpoint theory (Bardzell, 2010), ecofeminism (Søndergaard et al., 2023), intersectionality (Costanza-Chock, 2018), and black feminist thought (Rankin & Irish, 2020) - applying it into their design practices - praxis. Feminist design methodologies do not only concern themselves with solely gender (Bardzell & Bardzell, 2011) but aim to focus on the marginal user and design more inclusive futures (Bardzell, 2010; Smith, 2023) (section 4.1.1.1). The findings here outline that feminism and design methodologies are compatible (Bardzell & Bardzell, 2011), and it enriches research approaches to consider further epistemologies (section 4.1.1.1) and direct different motivations. Consequently, there is no prescription for feminist design methodologies. The methodology presented in this chapter, informed by feminist theory, is one of many. Thus, this chapter is open about what informs the methodology and reflects on it later in Chapter 9.

Finally, part of feminist methodologies is also being open about the researcher's perspectives. Letherby (2007) argues that all research is ideological, and therefore, in feminist research, the aim is not to separate the researchers from the world but to acknowledge their entanglements and, to a certain extent, celebrate them. Being open and reflective in feminist research supports readers in understanding the background to the claims made. While this thesis is primarily written in the third person, there are moments of disruption, including footnotes or subsections written in the first person. Section 1.2.1. provides the researcher's positionality to clarify this. This process reiterates the researcher's standpoint and role and explores some of the methodological challenges raised in response (Letherby, 2007) to implementing a FEM approach.

#### 4.1.1.1 Epistemology: feminist standpoint theory

IPV is linked to women's work, where in the UK, 77% of jobs in the health and social work sector (which include IPV support services) are held by women (Francis-Devine & Hutton, 2024).

However, in the UK, design is primarily dominated by masculine environments, with more men occupying roles within the industry and leadership positions (Reimer, 2016)<sup>30</sup>. Therefore, as with other gender-related subjects (Buckley, 1986) e.g. motherhood (D'Ignazio et al., 2016), IPV has generally been dismissed in design<sup>31</sup>. Scholars have argued that design aspects reinforce patriarchal, colonial, and capitalist values (Buckley, 1986; Reimer, 2015; Place, 2023). Therefore, in industry and academia, design has been dominated by male-defined epistemologies (Buckley, 1986; Letherby, 2007). Letherby (2007) argued that:

“male-defined epistemologies deny the importance of the experiential, the private and the personal so it is not surprising that, within feminism, the focus is often on the experiential and the private rather than the abstract and the public.” (p.42).

As presented in Chapter 1, design discourse has not directed attention to the intimate elements of harm – the private and personal – and thus, through a feminist approach, this becomes the focus.

Creating counter-narratives to traditional research and practice models is the *raison d'être* of feminist research (Harcourt et al., 2022). Feminist standpoint theory is an epistemological approach that acknowledges knowledge production as a political act aimed at challenging mainstream positions (Letherby, 2007). Letherby (2007) and other scholars (Harding, 1993; Bardzell, 2010; Jaggar, 2016) argue that feminist standpoint theory is grounded on the belief that experience should be the starting point for knowledge production. It must focus on marginalised perspective to effectively investigate and theorise the social world. By centring these experiences, disciplines can be transformed by exposing unexamined assumptions and generating new, critical questions (Harding, 1993; Bardzell, 2010; Buchmüller, 2012; Jaggar, 2016). This is because the

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<sup>30</sup> While this research does not disclose the participant's identities and, thus, genders, it recognises that designers are still acting within these social structures surrounding both IPV and design.

<sup>31</sup> – evident from the prevailing tech abuse (Leitão, 2018).

social positions of marginalised people produce different types of knowledge from those who hold more power (often conceptualised as men), thus providing a clearer understanding of the oppressors (Letherby, 2007; Bardzell, 2010). Consequently, this critical perspective shapes this research by recognising and amplifying diverse viewpoints in design.

Accordingly, the research seeks to derive knowledge from the particular **standpoint** of designers engaged in IPV work. Based on the arguments above, designers are working in a space of professional marginalisation. Furthermore, given the statistic of 1 in 3 women experiencing abuse, designers might also have experiences of abuse or other forms of oppression informing their work. Nevertheless, they still speak from a position of power influencing the design process. It is crucial to take this into account in the data analysis.

As stated by Place (2023): "Feminist designers are pushing the discipline forward with novel tactics and mindsets to meet the demands of our current political, social, and ecological challenges" (p.6). Thus, seeking feminist epistemologies and centring the voices of designers in IPV work brings other organisational structures, collaborations, knowledge, and **mindsets**. This thesis is not only a contribution to an under-researched area of design but also an *unacknowledged perspective* of design - which may push the social design discipline forward.

Finally, it is important to note that this research does not claim that designers involved in research or the researcher of this thesis are 'speaking for' people with lived experiences of abuse. Further research incorporating their voices when questioning the design of interventions is still necessary.

#### 4.1.2 Integrating emergence

The feminist methodology adopted in this thesis was complemented by embracing emergence (Gaver et al., 2022), a common characteristic of practice-based design research. Its adaptability and flexibility allow researchers to engage with both materials and settings. They define 'emergence-friendly' research as arising out of ongoing activity:

“It is responsive to external influences, material potentials, new learning, ideas and inspirations. Methods, understandings, outputs, even overall topics are all left continually in play, and at the extreme can stray more or less completely from the originally intended course. This is an exploratory form of research, not a predictable one, and one which values surprise.” (Gaver et al., 2022, p.519)

This perspective contradicts intention-driven research.

While this thesis is not practice-based, it incorporates practice elements in Chapters 5, 6, and 8 through interviews and, later, a workshop. Furthermore, as this thesis intends not to create products or tools as research outputs, it enhances its ability to emerge and respond effectively to the areas where knowledge is most needed. Additionally, the subject matter of IPV, which is inherently emergent, continuously at play in societies and responding to external influences makes adopting such a feature pivotal. Furthermore, as argued by Hall and Hohl (2023), while planning is essential for PhD work so is “sensitivity and openness for the unexpected” (p.9). Thus, inherent in doctoral journeys.

From a feminist perspective, emergence recognises that feminism is always responsive to new knowledge, structural change and social relations (Place, 2023). Feminism, as stated by Ahmed (2017), is about questioning, proposing, acting and imagining: “To learn from being a feminist is to learn about the world” (p.7). Feminism does not predict but constantly converses with the given and always looks forward to ‘*what could be*’ (Olufemi, 2020). Feminist design methodologies prioritise several principles, including participation, care, plurality of knowledge, imagination, and transformation (Bardzell, 2010; Place, 2023). These emphasise the importance of allowing investigations to evolve and unfold. This symmetry is equally recognised by Gaver et al. (2022), who note how sociology, science and technology studies and feminist technoscience increasingly embrace the concept of emergence. In 2024, looking at citations of Gaver et al.’s (2022) work, there is an uptake of this approach by feminist design researchers, especially in ecofeminism. Here, they develop feminist methods and approaches that: “may offer opportunities for the emergence of (Gaver et al., 2022) new narratives, framings, and possibilities” (Gladkova &

Matsuda, 2024, p.3) and "embraces accidental occurrences as pivotal" (Søndergaard et al., 2023). Feminist approaches embrace emergence as part of working towards feminist methodologies, equally reflected in this thesis.

Gaver et al. (2022) noted that design researchers may be reluctant to allow emergence in their research or report it and offered 12 strategies as pointers for orienting research to emergent features. Like many of the theories adopted in this work (see sections 3.2.3.1 and 4.1.1), they state that emergence is not prescriptive but rather a necessary mindset; the strategies, therefore, are for inspiration and reflection. Table 4.1 illustrates them and how these have inspired this thesis - in methodological and thesis design choices. The table will now be elaborated on.

Overall, the methodological approach is open to changes throughout the research. This is clearly articulated in Chapter 1, which reflects on the doctoral journey beginning with women's empowerment in disasters and later addressing IPV and documents the influences of work experience and personal journeys. From here, focusing on IPV as an unacknowledged area supports unexpected findings that enter uncharted areas. This leads to methodical choices that focus on how design encounters these settings—case studies and interviews.

However, as stated by Gaver et al. (2022), "unchecked emergence can produce endless digression, just as rigid adherence to intentions can miss opportunities" (p.524). This research was not entirely unintentional. It aimed to address knowledge gaps by answering research questions and implementing study designs and procedures (see sections 4.2.1.3. & 4.2.2.1), along with validation procedures (section 1.4). A limitation in drawing inspiration from their strategies for narrating emergence was its tensions with thesis standards. Dunleavy (2015) states that due to the size of doctoral thesis it can be harder for readers to follow arguments, thus accessibility is vital. These standards value logical development of arguments and managing readers expectations. In an already complex topic of IPV, introducing experimental narrations might further complicate its interpretation. Nevertheless, IPV stories were introduced to engage with a more emerging storytelling feature.

Overall, the emergence feature of this feminist methodological approach was a mindset that complemented feminist theory and political commitments. It offered opportunities to explore new framings and possibilities, alike Gladkova and Matsuda (2024), while equally challenging the design of the thesis.



Encouraging emergence		Managing emergence		Narrating emergence		Assessing emergence	
Gaver et al. (2022)	Thesis	Gaver et al. (2022)	Thesis	Gaver et al. (2022)	Thesis	Gaver et al. (2022)	Thesis
(1) Consider anomalies to be inspirations	Initially, IPV websites were explored to identify unexpected design decisions (section 3.4.4)	(4) Understand emergence in terms of research programmes as well as projects.	Developing a feminist research group amongst colleagues alongside the PhD, allowing for emergence in learning as well as research (section 1.2.2)	(7) Present design research as a journey, not a quest	Being open about the doctoral and personal journey (section 1.2.1, 1.2.2, and 1.5), while maintaining a standard thesis narration	(10) Recognise starting points as provisional	Research question three and stage two of the research studies emerge in response to ongoing findings (section 4.2.2)
(2) Seek idiosyncratic examples of design settings	Considering IPV as an unusual topical setting for design to foster new understandings to emerge (section 2.4).	(5) Emphasise design in settings	Focusing on choosing methods that focus on design encountering settings and situations (section 4.2)	(8) Tell the full back-story	Being open about the fact the research started in a different topic area (section 1.5)	(11) Assess outputs on their own terms	Including a discussion chapter (9)
(3) Allow technical affordances to suggest new	Access to the field was limited by the after-effects of Covid-19. Having to depend on digital engagements offered an opportunity to obtain a global reach (section 1.5)	(6) Be mindful of what emerging directions may contribute	Drawing on theory (section 1.2 & 4.1) and employing validation procedures to inform the research process (Section 1.4)	(9) Seek inspiration from different literary genres	Using stories of experiences of abuse to bring storytelling and nuance to theory. Furthermore, using footnotes to provide personal accounts.	(12) Value agility and responsiveness	Reflecting on combining emergence and feminist methodologies (section 9.4)

Table 4.1- Implementing Gaver et al.'s (2022) strategies in the PhD

## 4.2 Methods

This section outlines data collection methods and tools to create two case studies, followed by further workshops, and interviews. It will demonstrate how each of these methods is an appropriate choice for exploring the experiences and perspectives of designers, as well as the contextual conditions influencing their decisions. The research study is conducted in two stages. The first stage focuses on developing a case study analysis (Chapters 5-6) and answering research question 2 - How might particular circumstances of designing within IPV contexts affect designers' rationale? - and clarifying research question 1 – What are the realities and possibilities of designing in IPV situations? This method was selected because research question 2 focuses on the 'designers' themselves, thus exploring their experience implementing design in real-world settings rather than conducting a research project focusing on the academic design researcher and their choices. The latter projects can often be abstracted from the realities of funding, politics, and organisational procedures that inevitably shape the designs worldwide (Kimbell, 2011), a key area of interest in this research. Thus two case studies have been developed based on the intervention approaches they have taken – (1) response and recovery, (2) prevention.

After the case studies, a second stage was conducted, including a workshop or interviews for those who could not attend. This stage had two parts. The aim of the first part (Chapter 7) was to validate the research findings and to understand where participants found value in the findings. Building on the first part, the second part (Chapter 8) addressed the third research question— which spaces could support designers in adapting their practices? - this part focused on exploring how designers could be better supported.

The following sections expand on why these methods were suitable for the research approach and explore their procedure.

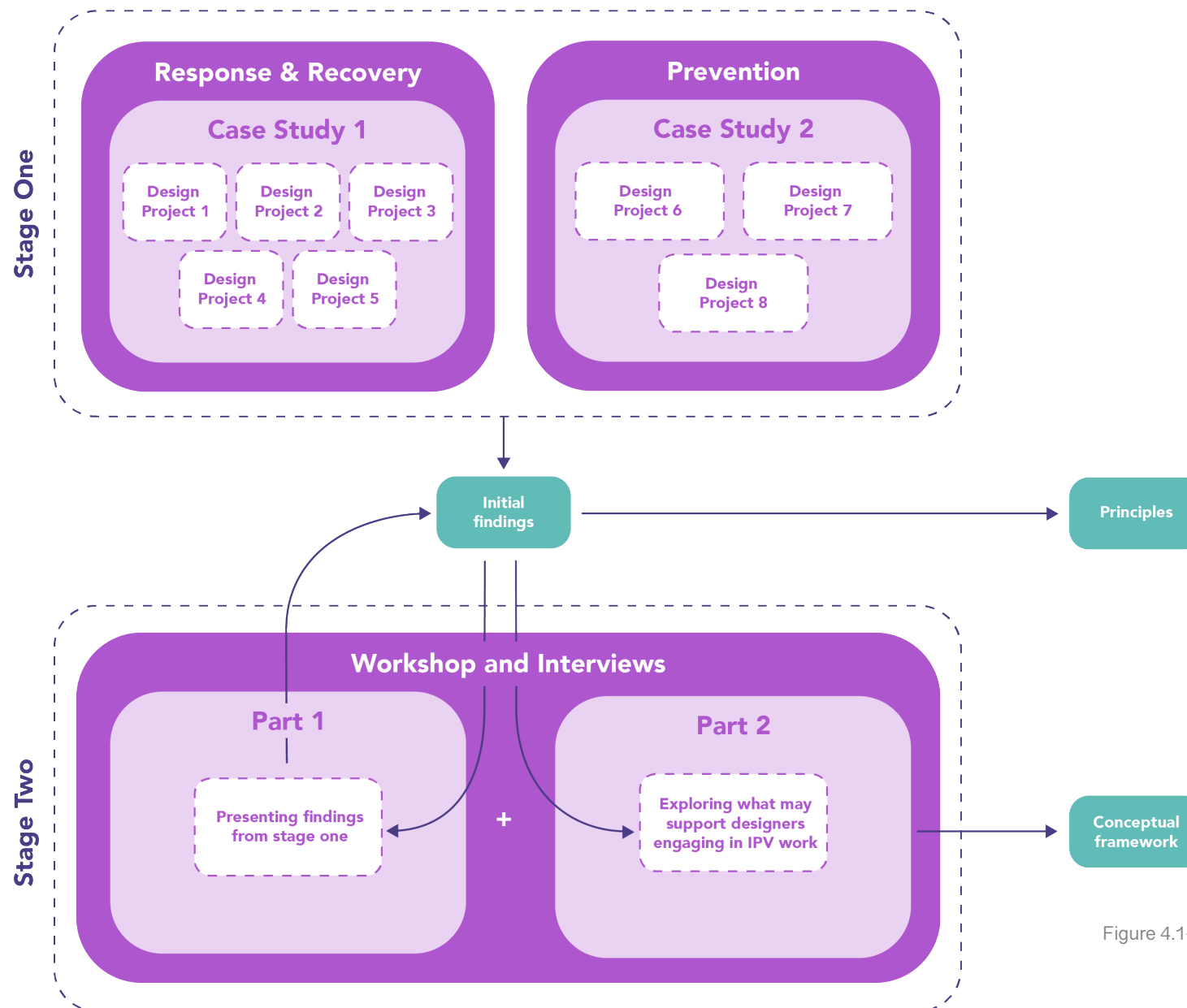


Figure 4.1- Research study framework

### 4.2.1 Stage one: case studies

“Case studies have a rich history for exploring the space between the world of theory and the experience of practice.” (Breslin and Buchanan, 2007, p.36)

Breslin and Buchanan (2007) explain that case studies can be effectively utilised in design research as they bridge the gap between theory and practice. They argue that case studies can support illustrating the social aspects of design by documenting real-life experiences that may inform future design decision-making. Besides its application in design, it is widely used across disciplines to understand complex social phenomena. What makes this research method different to other methods is, as outlined by Yin (2017):

- (1) the form of research question posed exploring 'how' and 'why';
- (2) the lack of control on behavioural outcomes by the researcher;
- (3) focusing on contemporary events rather than historical ones.

He defines a case study as "an empirical method that investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the "case") in depth and within its real-world context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident." (p.15). As the research context, designing interventions for IPV, as identified in Chapter 2, is a contemporary phenomenon heavily influenced by its real-world contexts, making using case studies a preferred method. Thus, as Yin (2017) argued, it is an appropriate way to reveal idiosyncratic settings.

This research applies case studies to explore designers' practices when considering the contextual and situational conditions of IPV they are working in. It provides an opportunity to focus on experiences and, thus, on the standpoint of designers within their contexts and the issues they face (feminist standpoint theory). Revisiting Figure 3.2 in section 3.1.4, Figure 4.2 illustrates how the case studies sit within the subject of study in this thesis—at the same time, generating principles as an outcome of their study. Therefore, this first stage aims to explore an explanatory

question: How might the particular circumstances of designing within IPV contexts affect designers' rationale?

As argued by Eisenhardt (1989), a limitation of case studies is their challenge in producing generalisable insights, as they focus heavily on unique contexts and details. However, she notes that tying the findings back to existing literature throughout the analysis enhances generalisability; thus, as shared in the research strategy (section 1.2), the case studies consistently converse with the theoretical inputs – inferring and comparing. Furthermore, by looking at multiple cases, the researcher can discern their patterns, similarities, and differences. Thus, defining the cases is essential.

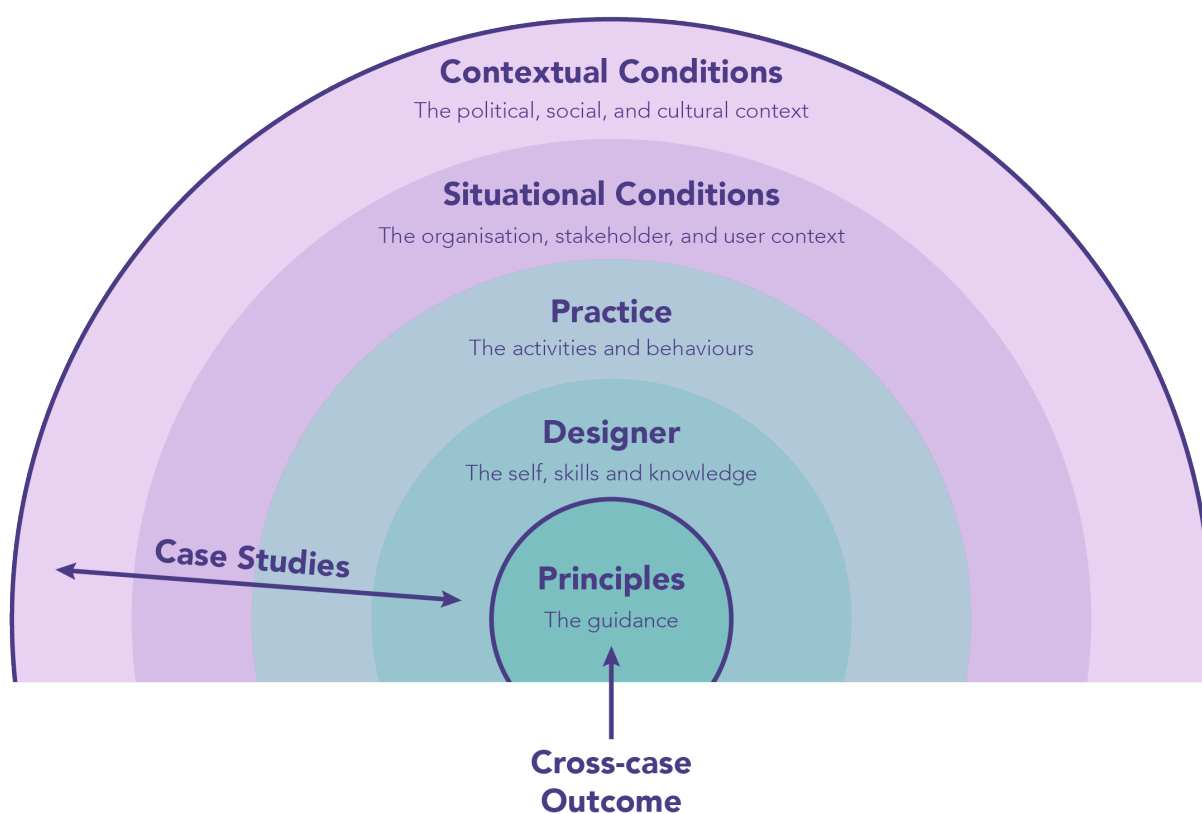


Figure 4.2- Case study responding to research focus

#### 4.2.1.1 Defining the case studies

Following an emergence-led approach, case studies were developed based on participant recruitment (see subsection 4.4). From the pool of participants, it became evident that two distinct case studies could be constructed, reflecting two different approaches that, while part of the IPV

continuum, offer significantly different working conditions: (1) response and recovery and (2) prevention.

Response and recovery interventions focus on immediate interventions after abuse to prevent further escalation (response), and supporting individuals to address long-term impacts (recovery). In contrast, prevention aims to intervene before any violence occurs. These two approaches present different situational contexts, risk factors and harms experienced vary. Consequently, different problem framings and strategies are required. For instance, risk and safety are more significant concerns in interventions focused on responding to abuse than those aimed at developing prevention strategies. Examining two case studies provides an opportunity to compare how contextual circumstances in each approach may exhibit similarities or variations (Eisenhardt, 1989). This comparison may help examine common patterns in practices towards understanding rationales that effectively address IPV situations.

Thus, this research employs a multi-case design, where the designers and their projects become the units of analysis within each case—these are "the case in a case study" (Yin, 2014, p. 241). Figure 4.3 adapts Yin's (2017) diagram, 'types of designs for case studies' (p.48), which illustrates how embedded units of analysis will be used during this research phase. While treating each project as an individual case study could have yielded deeper insights and nuances, the key to addressing the research question lies in the interaction between the contextual conditions and the designers' decisions. Moreover, this study aims to analyse design practice and it's common patterns across different contexts rather than focusing on isolated events (see section 2.5.2).

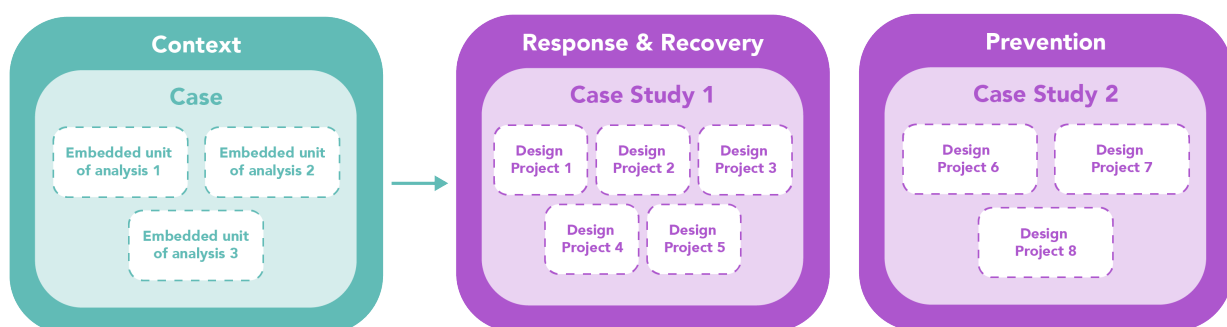


Figure 4.3- Multi-case design (Yin, 2017)

Furthermore, due to the geographical scope of this research, it would require substantial resources and time. Therefore, grouping these contextual and situational conditions into the proposed two case studies, focusing on the designers, may effectively contribute to answering the research question. However, a limitation of defining the case studies in this manner is that they rely on participant recruitment and availability, rather than defined contextual settings and parameters set by the researcher.

#### 4.2.1.2 Collecting study evidence: interviews, documents and artefacts

In order to develop the case studies, the research collected evidence from three different sources: interviews, documentation, and artefacts. These align with what Yin (2014) argues as three of six sources from which case study evidence can be derived. The other three – archival records, direct observation, and participant observation – are ethically challenging and unsuitable for this study, possibly exposing people with experiences of abuse to the research, which could place unnecessary pressure and breach of confidentiality. Furthermore, since many of the projects interviewed had already occurred or are ongoing worldwide, it is impossible to be in multiple places simultaneously.

Semi-structured interviews were the primary source of evidence for the case studies. According to Robson and McCartan (2016), semi-structured interviews do not follow a predefined question order; instead, the researcher uses a guide that outlines the topics to be covered. This approach allows for flexibility in exploring new conversational threads while referencing predefined areas of interest, which aligns with the emergence feature in this methodology. Interviews are valuable as design processes are often hidden within the design artefact, making it difficult to discern the methodologies used to achieve the outcome based on the published information. While the overall aim was to collect information regarding problem framing, process, and outcome, the research was interested in hearing these elements recounted from their perspective, with their experiences and reflections underpinning the data. Moreover, interviews were conducted as a filtering process to determine the participant's eligibility for the research.

Documentation was used to "corroborate and augment evidence from other sources." (Yin, 2014, p.115) – in this case interviews. The primary forms of documentation used in this research were proposals, progress reports, internal records (shared by participants), formal studies or evaluations related to the projects under study and published online, and media outputs (Yin, 2014). These were also used as inferences for further investigation rather than as definite findings, thus helping to prepare for interviews and ensuring that all the relevant points could be thoroughly explored. However, access to documentation was not equally distributed across projects, leaving discrepancies in data availability<sup>32</sup>.

Finally, physical and digital artefacts were especially relevant in developing case studies because, as overviewed in Chapter 3, designerly knowledge is contained in the messages and affordances of the designed outputs. As such, the analysis of artefacts supported interview findings and further explored their implementation. Equally, these were used as preparation materials to inform the researcher of features that required further explanation or attention. In this case, due to most coming from live projects, there was access to their physical or digital artefacts, except for two projects<sup>33</sup>.

This data triangulation - collecting data from multiple sources to corroborate the same finding - satisfies what Yin (2014) believes is the strength of case study research to produce a higher quality of data, address a broader range of historical and behavioural issues, and, more importantly, develop a converging line of inquiry, thus strengthening the validity of the case study. He states that this differs from other forms of triangulation, such as methodological triangulation (see section 1.4). However, collecting evidence in this manner relies on designers' reflections and interpretation of documents and artefacts rather than on observed evidence.

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<sup>32</sup> Appendix C provides an anonymised overview of documentation used in case studies corresponding to the projects.

<sup>33</sup> see Appendix C.



#### 4.2.1.3 Stage one procedure

Overall, 12 interviews were conducted with 10 of them being included in the data analysis (see section 4.5). All these interviews were conducted online, over Zoom and recorded, and lasted 45 minutes. Each interview began with “small talk” to build comfort and fluidity in conversation.

Following this, personal introductions and overviews to the research and the aim of the study were shared. This was an opportunity to demonstrate to the participants that the researcher already held a degree of knowledge in the field and, therefore, ‘spoke the same language’. Following this, the researcher clarified the research objectives with the participants and confirmed their anonymity. The researcher then asked to record the conversation and proceeded with an introductory question to the participants – “Tell me a little about the project and your role?”. Finally, just as the researcher made opening remarks, closing the conversation with “final questions” was also accounted for (Robson & McCartan, 2016), often asking the participants if they had any questions. This uncovered their interest in the research.

Before each interview a topic guide and question structure were generated based on preliminary literature reviews and artefact analysis, and were altered depending on the participants background and project involvement. The first six interviews followed an exploratory process, where general themes - such as exploring methods and tools employed; accessibility; designers role - that had emerged from the literature were discussed. Here, the design process and artefacts were used as prompts to expand on experience, context, and conditions. These six interviews were then analysed, and key areas of interest were highlighted. These included:

- design process,
- design outcome,
- stakeholders’ engagement,
- designer’s position.

These areas then informed the following five interviews, and the pre-prepared questions were structured accordingly, demonstrating the emergent nature of the methodology.

Interestingly, the conversations often flowed fluidly between these different areas, where the participant might often, while talking about designing the intervention, reflect on how they felt it was different to other work they had done before (self). This demonstrated how these topics were heavily interlinked and thus, worth further analysing.

### 4.2.2 Stage two: workshop and interviews

Stage two emerged in response to the findings of stage one – which identified methodological and practical implications and highlighted that a key element of the adaptation of design practice was in designers' mindsets. These findings led to an interest in how a space might support this, leading to the following research question: - Which spaces could support designers to adapt their practices? Figure 4.4 illustrates how this sits within the broader study. Stage two, therefore, was split into two parts. The first aimed to discuss the initial findings with designers to receive their

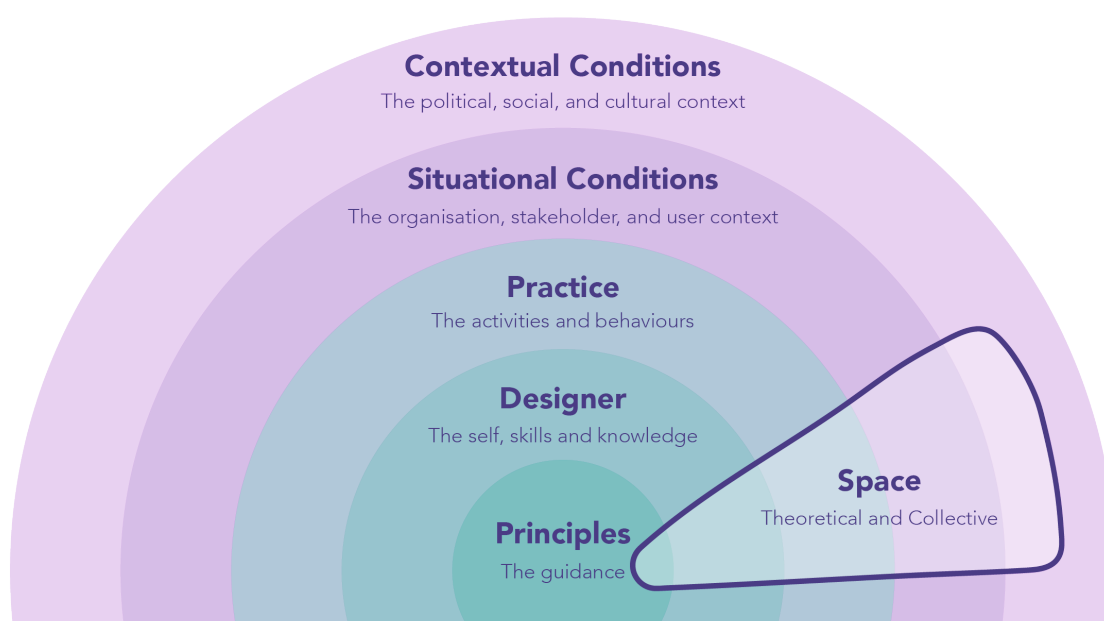


Figure 4.4- Space

input. The second focused on answering the aforementioned. This section focuses on examining the rationale and design behind part two.

Initially, when approaching the workshop, the research aimed to translate the findings from Chapter 5 into an output to test, such as a model or framework, to test how designers' mindsets could be affected when engaging with it. However, inspired by the literature outlined in Chapter 3, section 3.1.4, this process made it apparent that rather than simplifying design into a set of universal guidelines and embedding new norms, the research should aim to investigate matters further.

Drawing inspiration from works mentioned in section 3.1.4 - Abdulla's (2022), Armbrust's (2023), and Akama et al. (2023), the workshop sought to assist designers in developing critical prompts in response to the presented findings. These prompts could take various forms: questions, statements, literature references, personal experiences, authors, or anything they deemed relevant. Consequently, the composition of these prompts aimed to create an inventory of possibilities—a space where other designers could engage, fostering different decisions, perspectives, and threads of thought in response. However, while the designers were asked to build an inventory of possibilities, the actual aim of the workshop was to, through designing it, reflect on what knowledge must be shared and where critical engagement is required. Building the workshop around developing a product, the inventory aimed to elicit designers' embodied knowledge of learning through practice.

The inventory of possibilities served as an epistemic object in the research. As Ewenstein and Whyte (2009) define:

"Epistemic objects are abstract in nature: they are the objects of inquiry and pursuit. Hence, they are characterized by lack and incompleteness. As they appear in temporary instantiations, they are defined at once by what they are and what they are not (or not yet)." (p.9)

Their study illustrates the 'sketch' as an epistemic object. It is an example of exploration and inquiry in the design process where the designer and drawing are in dialogue. They argue that the

sketch offers a projective reflection, thus raising questions. Characterising the inventory as an epistemic object denotes it as an evolving entity that unfolds and can never be considered complete. It aims to provide an abstract space where meanings shift depending on the contributors interacting with it, fostering dialogue. Thus, the research aims to prompt discussions on what kinds of spaces we need to nurture for designers to make the necessary shifts to work within this context. Consequently, the knowledge contained within the inventory of possibilities represents not a practice to prompt designers to reflect but rather knowledge of what designers may seek in a space.

Workshops align with emergence-friendly methods, as they also support imagining new social worlds while simultaneously collecting data (Gaver et al., 2022). However, balancing exploration and timing is a challenge, and the researcher must ensure participants stay on track to workshop goals – thus, a limitation.

#### 4.2.2.1 Stage two procedure

This stage began with brief introductions around the group. Each participant shared their name and professional role and answered an ice-breaker question - "What is something you know now that you wish you knew before?". The question actively aimed to prompt reflective thinking in their practice. The researcher then conducted a 10-15 minute presentation<sup>34</sup> on the initial findings. The presentation included an initial outline of the context, methodology and findings thus far. In the one-to-one interviews, participants were invited to share their feedback after each slide, while the workshop participants shared their thoughts at the end of the presentation. It prompted them to reflect on what resonated with them.

Following the presentation and feedback, the participants were asked to interact with the inventory of possibilities, a framework to fill in on Miro, Figure 4.5. Where each box contained a principles derived from the initial findings. This part began with a brief introduction to the concept of the inventory of possibilities and the proposed activities. In the workshop, they were given 30

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<sup>34</sup> Presentation slides may be found in Appendix (D.1).

minutes. Following the activity, participants were prompted to share their reflections on what they contributed and any insights they had.

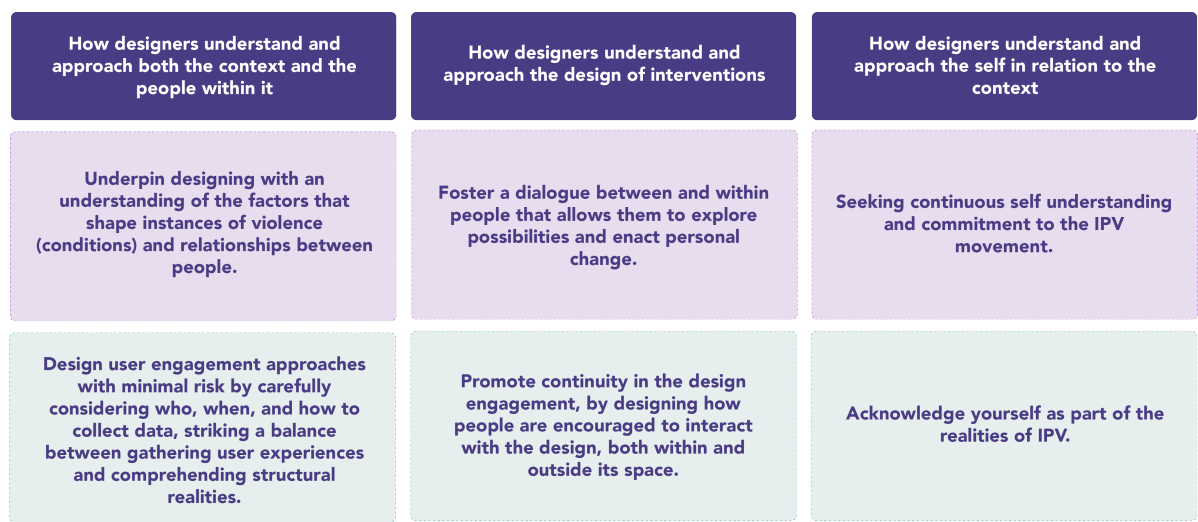


Figure 4.5- Inventory of possibilities framework

Following the presentation, the designers' feedback alongside findings from Chapters 5 and 6 was developed into a booklet that mimicked Abdulla's (2022) inventory, Image 4.1 (complete inventory prototype in Appendix D.4). This inventory also included inputs from stage one findings. Due to the nature of the interviews, replicating the workshop in one-to-one settings was challenging. Therefore, the researcher shared their screen to show the inventory and used this as a visual queue to support the interview questions.

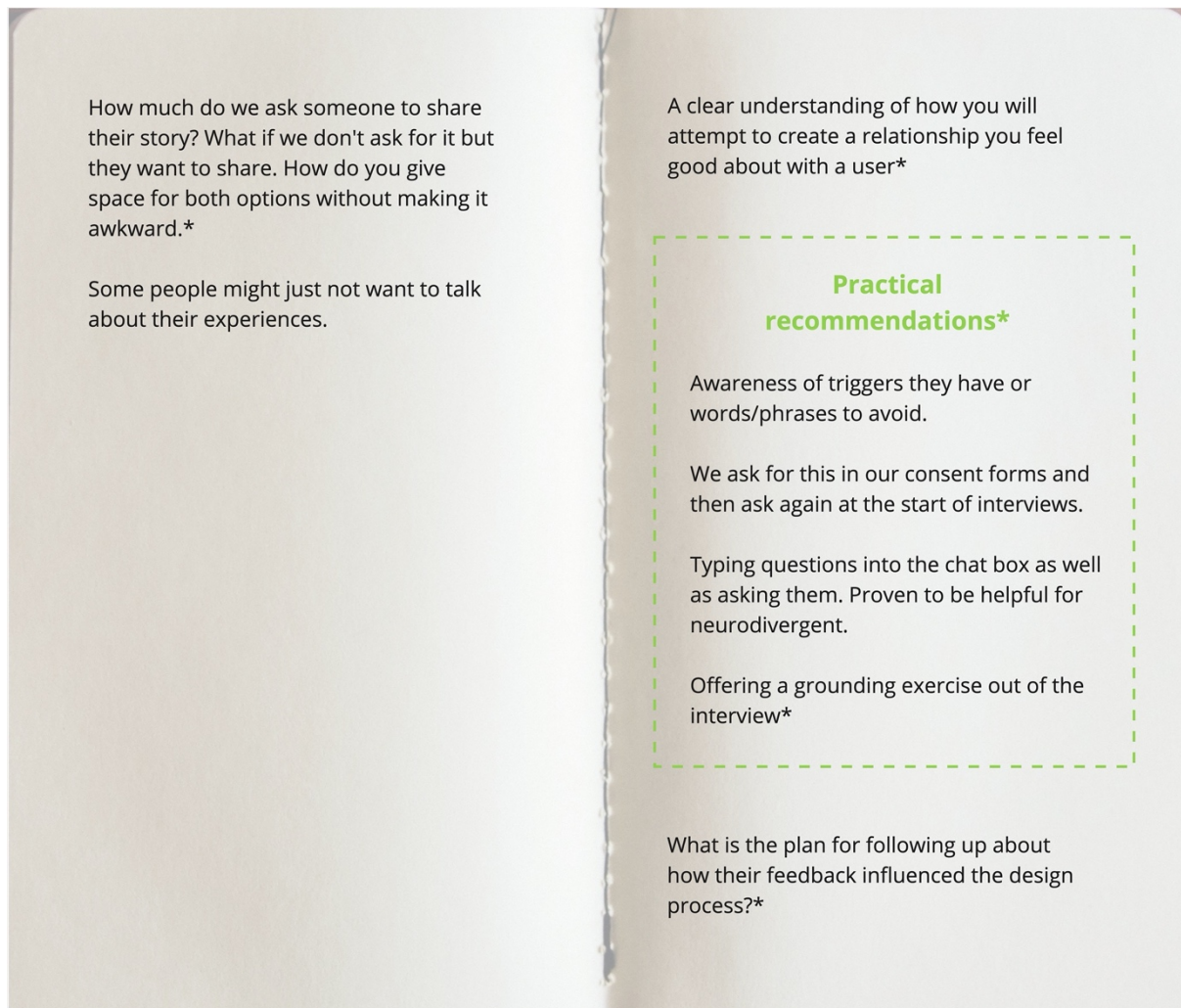


Image 4.1- Example of the inventory of possibilities

### 4.3 Ethics and anonymity

Ethical considerations were paramount in this research, and all participants were offered anonymity. This was particularly important as the research aimed to elicit designers' reflections on practices and personal impacts. As Breslin and Buchanan (2007) note, design processes are often viewed within organisations as protected intelligence rather than public knowledge, meaning they are rarely published. This thesis primarily recruited designers from non-profit organisations, where they were either in organisations that have documented their process or, due to lack of organisational focus on design in their organisation, did not. For these participants, this research offered an opportunity to uncover processes that are typically not public knowledge. While all participants are anonymised, Rachel Lehrer requested de-anonymisation during a follow-up

conversation in stage two, expressing that design conversations should be explored within their context.

The anonymisation of participants was conducted with great care. Given the limited number of designers in the IPV field, revealing the geographical locations of participants would also risk de-anonymising them and thus required omitting references to specific countries and generalising or removing unique project details. However, as Yin (2014) states, the critical particularity of case studies is to investigate the phenomenon in its real-world contexts, which provides essential contextual conditions. To address this limitation, general anonymised context descriptions are provided at the beginning of each case study chapter. The research uses Lehrer's project as an opportunity to deepen the discussion on the socio-historical and political contexts and include a historical overview of IPV legislation in the UK in section 2.2.1. However, it limited the potential to capture the participants' social locations, such as race, gender, and age, unless shared during interviews. This could have provided a more in-depth analysis of the participants' positionalities and should be considered for future research.

Ethics approval was obtained by the RCA Ethics Committee at every stage (respectively RP/1/2021 and RP/2/2023). Consent was secured from participants through consent forms, Appendix E, as outlined by the committee for the semi-structured interviews. The consent form was adapted in Stage 2 into a Google Form for streamlining due to the anticipated high recruitment rate. During this phase, a potential breach of anonymity was identified as bringing participants together through a workshop could expose their participation in stage one. Participants were thus informed of the potential for anonymity breaches when signing the consent form.

While ethics is typically understood as involving the interaction between the researcher and participants, it should extend to consider all research elements including researcher wellbeing and research outputs. Due to the risk of re-traumatisation and vicarious trauma when handling such sensitive data, researchers must have self-care strategies, and organizations should implement risk mitigation strategies, as highlighted by Fathallah and Rabelo (2024). The RCA's ethics

procedure, however, did not flag the potential for researcher harm during the study, the researcher experiencing re-traumatisation. Afterward, counselling from the university was sought, along with self-care strategies like crafting and taking showers to reconnect with the body.

Finally, when disseminating the data in this thesis, the research took care in not disclosing strategies developed to prevent those who intend to cause harm to use products (Chapter 5). This disclosure is crucial to consider as such information may potentially inform people who enact abuse on how to adapt their behaviours to bypass these protective strategies. Bellini et al. (2023) emphasised this concern: "Research may publicize protective strategies in ways that inform adversaries, who then correspondingly adapt or escalate their attacks." (p.5). Since this will be an open-source PhD thesis, there is a risk that people might have access to such information. Therefore, specific details of these strategies are not disclosed and replaced with alternative examples.

## **4.4 Sampling and recruitment**

This section introduces the sampling and recruitment process employed throughout the research studies. Given the thesis's focus on social design, various design-related disciplines and professions were considered (see Chapter 1). As a result, sampling and recruitment were based on relevance to the research inquiry, including designers, design researchers, innovators, individuals fulfilling similar roles to that of design researchers, and individuals overseeing design interventions to tackle IPV.

Finding participants involved identifying relevant projects through web searches, networking at events, and employing a snowball approach by asking for participant recommendations (Robson & McCartan, 2016). Recruiting designers was challenging due to the limited number of practitioners in this field and the lack of focus on whether social or international development programmes used a design approach. To overcome this issue, recruitment also targeted common design interventions such as websites and apps.



The recruitment and interview processes for stage one took place between March and December 2022, with stage two commencing in December 2023. In stage one, recruitment was conducted by directly emailing the participants. The email or direct message on LinkedIn, personalised to the individual, outlined the proposed research, study aims and participation requirements. Interviews were scheduled depending on participants' availability and time zones. While a global recruitment reach was achieved, priority was given to English-speaking participants due to the researcher's language capabilities.

For stage two, a similar strategy was employed, except proposed times and dates were included during recruitment to find the most suitable time for participants, Appendix F. Due to the global reach, the nature of the many designers' freelance work, and competing time commitments, three participants joined the workshop. The remainder were scheduled for a one-on-one interview. Stage two participants included returning and newly recruited participants based on new networks or the discovery of other projects between 2022 and 2023.

Each participant was assigned an ID code based on the chronological order of their interviews, case study allocation, and project description (see Table 4.2). For example, a project focused on recovery for people who have experienced abuse is allocated: 'abuse\_recovery' and recalled in the text under the ID code - AR. A number in parenthesis is added if the study includes multiple people from the same project. This approach accommodates the range of projects examined in each case study, enabling readers to quickly recall the context of each project. At the beginning of each case study, a project description is provided. Finally, for participants who participated in stage two or are providing feedback following exposure to the findings of stage one.

Table 4.2- Participants list

Order of Interview	Project Identification Description	ID Code	Case Study Allocation	Participated in Stage Two
1	Reaching_Support	RS(1)	Case Study 1: Response and Recovery	

2	Humanitarian_crisis	HC	Case Study 1: Response and Recovery	
3	Messaging_Prevention	MP(1)	Case Study 2: Prevention	
4	Messaging_Prevention	MP(2)	Case Study 2: Prevention	Yes
5	Faith-based_Prevention (Rachel Lehrer)	FP	Case Study 2: Prevention	Yes
6	Reaching_Support	RS(2)	Case Study 1: Response and Recovery	
7	<del>Vulnerability design</del>			
8	<del>Game_prevention</del>			
9	Abuse-Recovery	AR(1)	Case Study 1: Response and Recovery	Yes
10	Abusive- behaviours_recovery	ABR(1)	Case Study 1: Response and Recovery	
11	Collectivity_prevention	CP(1)	Case Study 2: Prevention	Yes
12	Prevention_designer	PD(1)	-	Yes
13	GBV_design_researcher	GDR(1)	-	Yes
14	LGBTQIA+_support	QS <sup>35</sup>	Case Study 1: Response and Recovery	Yes
15	<del>Epidemiologist</del>		-	Yes
16	Abuse-Recovery	AR(2)	-	Yes

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<sup>35</sup> Q is allocated instead of L as it represents Queer that better encompasses the already acronym of LGBTQIA+ rather than focusing on one of the identities

Initially, for stage one, 11 participants were interviewed. However, following a review, three participants - 'vulnerability design' and 'game\_prevention', - were removed from the data analysis due to inconsistencies and lack of consent. Although 'vulnerability\_design' expressed relevant concerns about ethically designing for vulnerable populations, they did not specifically address IPV. 'Game\_prevention' was also removed as their engagement was through an informal chat. Although consent was requested to include their contributions in the research if contacted later, this formal consent was not obtained due to a loss of contact. Therefore, they were removed from the study.

In stage two - 'Epidemiologist' received the sign-up form from one of the participants and was subsequently recruited. However, as they were not designers or actively engaged in design work, they were also not included in the final analysis. All participants are still included in Table 4.2, as their engagement have inevitably shaped the research. Finally, although LGBTQIA+\_support was interviewed during stage two, they were also interviewed for stage one simultaneously, as they provided a LGBTQIA+ perspective that was missing in the first case study.

## **4.5 Data analysis**

This chapter ends by examining the data and analysis procedures. Data analysis is "a 'breaking up' of something complex into smaller parts and explaining the whole in terms of the properties of, and relations between, these parts." (Robson & McCartan, 2016, p.408). In this research, thematic analysis is employed as a commonly applied qualitative research method in which data is coded and clustered into common themes (Robson & McCartan, 2016). According to Robson and McCartan (2016), this approach interprets and defines what the data represents, often focusing on participants' experiences, meanings, and realities. This focus makes thematic analysis suitable for interpreting the data collected from designers' experiences within their contexts.

The thematic analysis process began with the researcher noting initial ideas and codes as they were raised while handling the transcripts. This analysis was conducted in waves, where the first six interviews were analysed together to inform the following interview question guides. After

conducting all the interviews, the researcher revised the research questions and coding to incorporate new patterns identified in subsequent interview data. This step led to developing three analysis phases, detailed in the following paragraph, where the themes were updated, and sub-themes were created to add nuances and details.

In this research, the data analysis was divided into three phases, as Figure 4.6 illustrates. The first phase involved grouping the critical themes from all the projects into their respective case studies and creating a qualitative narrative to present the data (sections 5.2 and 6.2). This qualitative narrative is based on common themes identified in section 3.1 - frames, design process, and outcome - as three areas of designerly knowledge. Following this, the second phase aimed to uncover the methodological and practical considerations within these (sections 5.3 and 6.3). Finally, the third phase conducted a cross-case analysis to synthesise the findings from the two case studies and compare their similarities and differences. It sought to uncover themes that spanned the cases (Cruzes et al., 2015) and identify gaps or asymmetries in these themes that differentiate the case studies (Chapter 7).

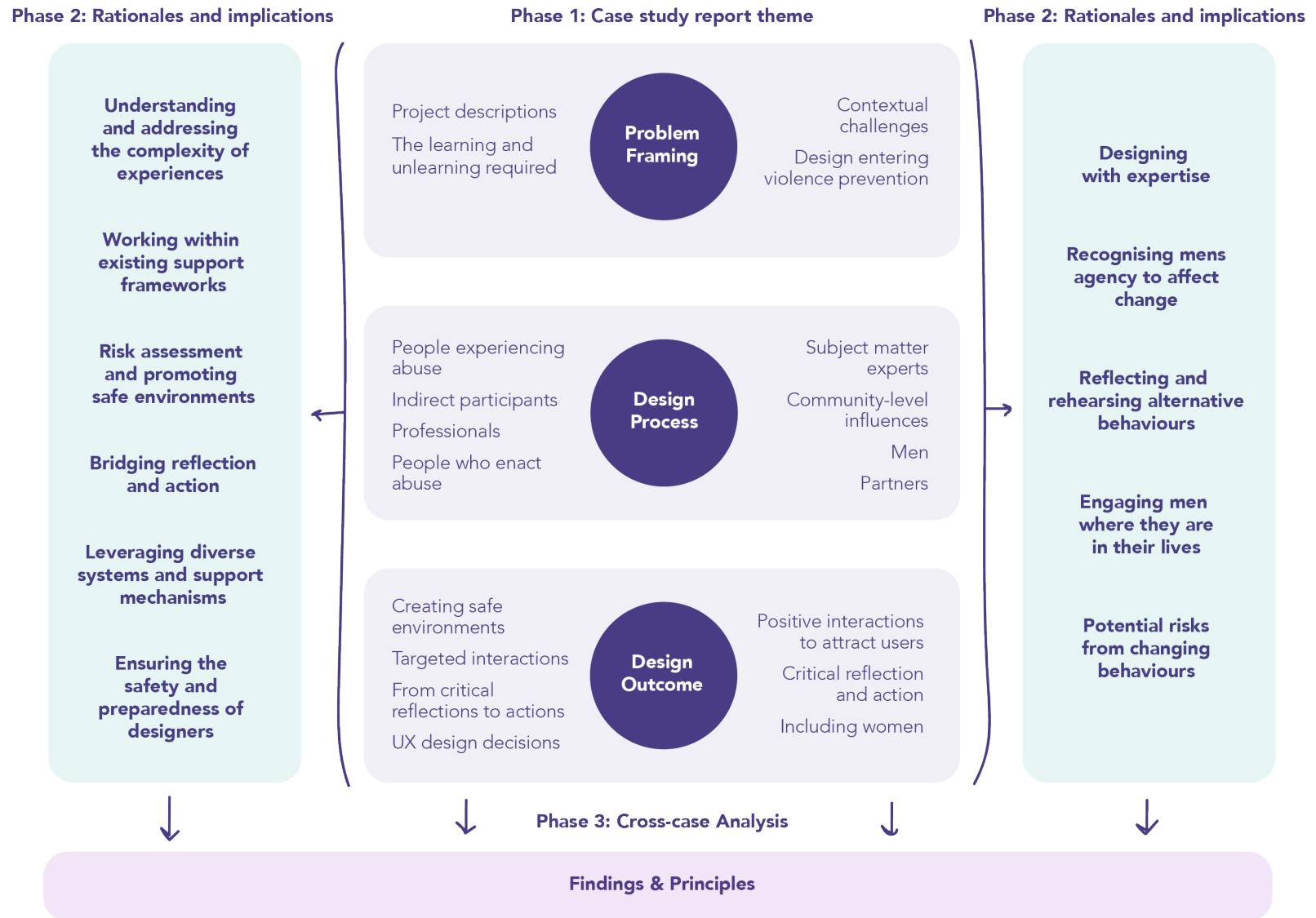


Figure 4.6- Data analysis phases

The data analysis of stage two began with separating the relevant data into two categories for informing (1) the cross-case analysis and (2) exploration into space. Data for (1) was placed into relevant pre-defined categories from the previous cross-analysis stage for validation and deepening understandings. (2) data was analysed through a thematic process where key themes relevant to conceptualising a space were revealed. Figure 4.7, illustrates the process.

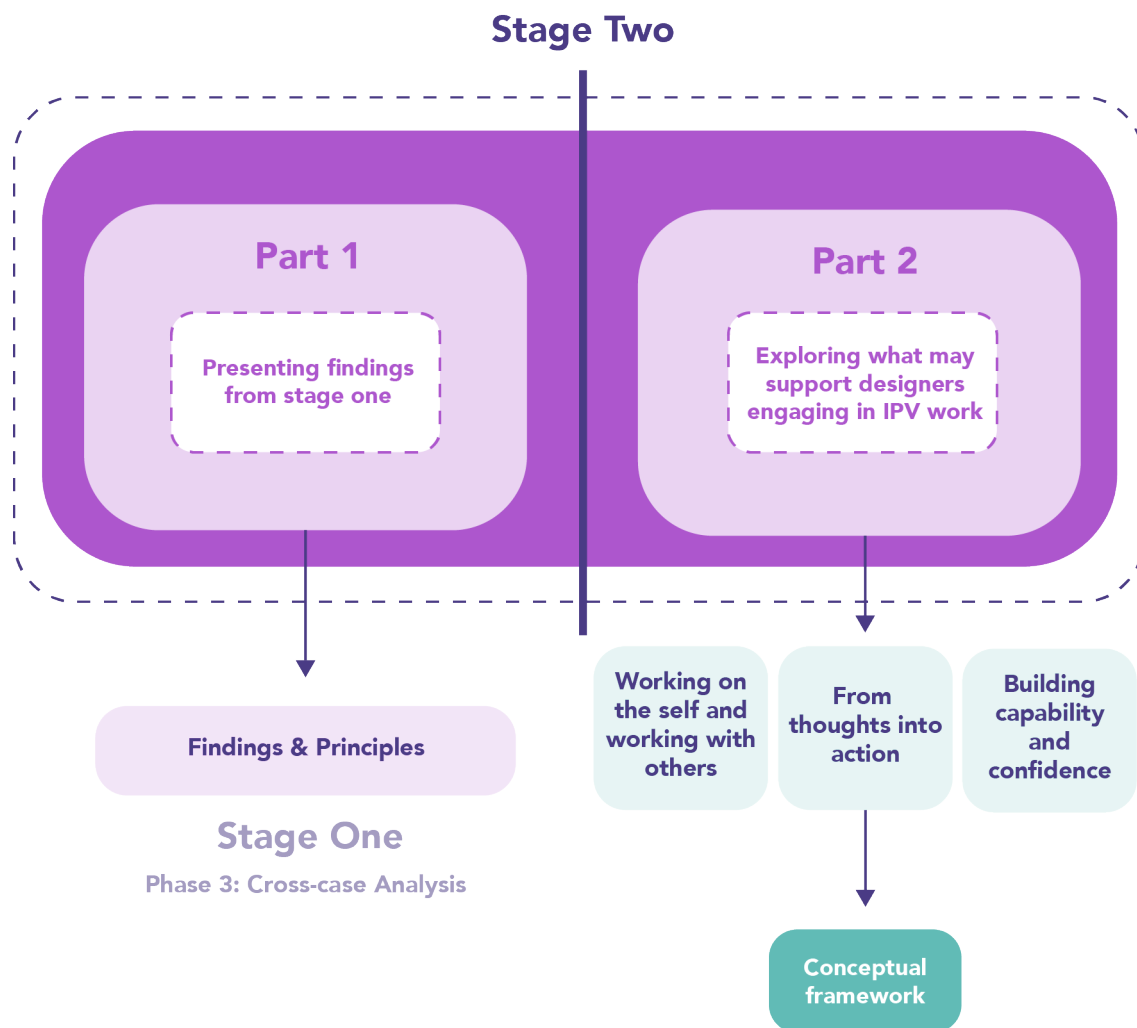


Figure 4.7- Stage two data analysis procedure

Like any research method, this approach has its limitations. One issue was the diversity of approaches among the projects, leading to some codes being more relevant to some participants than others. For instance, the co-optation of the design process was primarily of concern to a designer who worked directly with those who may cause abuse. Although one designer raised this

concern, it was essential to include it, as it captured the essence of designing in IPV situations. Another limitation involved developing codes spanning multiple stages of the design process; for instance, safety was crucial both during the design process and when developing the interventions. This reality can be seen as the intrinsic causality within the design practice. Consequently, during the writing phase, priority was given to thoroughly discussing these codes within their respective themes.

## **4.6 Summary of the methodological approach**

This chapter has outlined the methodological underpinnings of this thesis and how a feminist theory, political commitments, and an emergence mindset inform it. Specifically, the chapter explains how this approach is supported by feminist standpoint epistemology, which focuses on designers' experiences. Building on this, it describes the methodical choices taken to complement this – case studies (Chapters 5-7), workshops, and interviews (Chapter 8). The chapter concludes by describing the ethical concerns associated with the methodical and procedural choices while also acknowledging the well-being of the researcher. The FEM approach aims to produce knowledge for social change by exploring new framings and possibilities.

# Chapter 5. Case one: response and recovery

## Chapter overview

This chapter examines the first case study on design interventions that support crisis response and abuse recovery. The chapter opens with a background literature review on users' situational conditions in abusive relationships, highlighting the various stages involved in changing their circumstances. To complement this, based on the interventions discussed in this case, the review then focuses on information sharing as a leverage point to support people in these circumstances. The chapter will then briefly describe the case interventions and provide an anonymised overview of each contextual condition. Overall, these sections offer theoretical and contextual grounding for the interpretation of data and findings.

The chapter then outlines the case study data and identifies the respective themes. It starts with framing the problem, where identified gaps in the field are covered. This section then explores the design process where designers worked with varied participants to reach research goals, from people with lived experiences to professionals. It ends with the design outcome, which holistically explores how the interventions addressed IPV and how they sought to reach users and implement safety strategies to deter abusive partners' harm.

To conclude, this chapter explores six rationales based on insights from the first case. These include understanding and addressing the complexity of experiences, working within existing support frameworks, risk assessment and promoting safe environments, bridging reflection and action, leveraging diverse systems, and ensuring the safety and preparedness of designers. It outlines that in these circumstances, there is a balance between fostering safety and prompting actions across the system towards change.



## 5.1 Background literature

The background literature provides a brief overview of the situational conditions a designer might encounter. This review aims to support the interpretation and analysis of the data by highlighting various situations that people may be experiencing when interacting with the products and exploring the existing options available. It should be noted that many literature reviews in this section reflect a UK perspective and do not adequately represent the conditions of all interventions mentioned in this case. Nevertheless, all except one intervention was based in the Global North, whose conditions may be similar to those in the UK. To address the limitation in this review, section 5.2 will provide an anonymised overview of the contextual conditions of each intervention.

Responsive to the interventions discussed in this chapter, this review splits into two: exploring response and recovery with people experiencing abuse and recovery with those who enact abuse. As most interventions for people experiencing abuse focus on providing digital resources, this review examines information for support.

### 5.1.1 People experiencing abuse to recovering from abuse

Many scholars (Bermea et al., 2020; Think Tech Social et al., 2019; Murray et al., 2015; Westbrook, 2008; Frasier et al., 2001) have sought to explain the process of changing an abusive situation. Generally, studies argue that changing an abusive situation is a non-linear process that occurs over different stages and, thus, is experienced differently from person to person. In this process, different factors can influence people's decisions and their ability to move along different stages. Murray et al. (2015) discuss factors across the socio-ecological model that may influence behaviours and decisions. They identify individual factors, such as lack of resources; interpersonal factors, where controlling behaviours may limit people's options; and societal factors, where religious beliefs and cultural norms influence decisions and support networks (expanded in section 2.3). Therefore, this process of changing an abusive situation may occur many times and in

different ways, leading to, hopefully, a situation where they are safe once again – this includes being in the abusive relationship or leaving it.

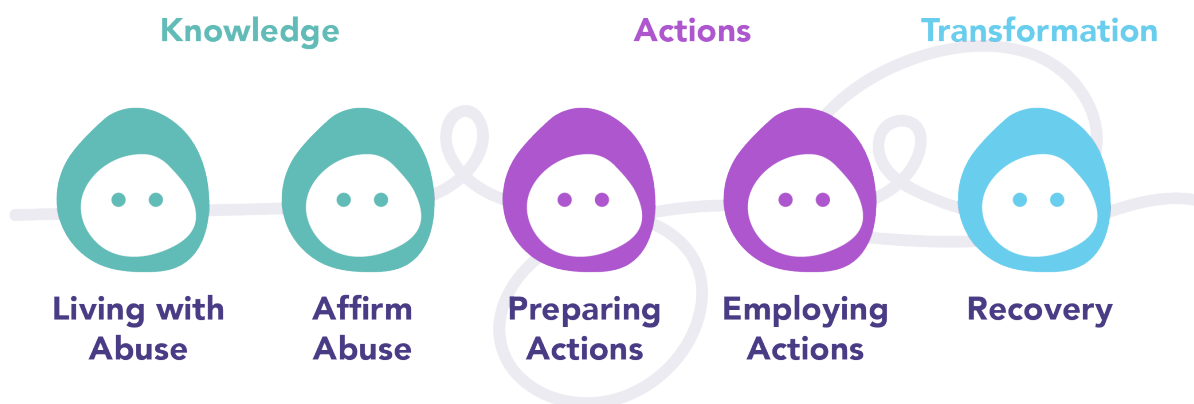


Figure 5.1- Stages of changing abusive situations

Although the names of these stages vary across studies, they can be organised into the following patterns, illustrated in Figure 5.1. Firstly, some models begin with a person not recognising that they are in an abusive situation (Frasier et al., 2001; Think Tech Social et al., 2019) – **living with abuse**<sup>36</sup>. Then, they may be prompted by an event or realisation that gradually or suddenly influences a change. For instance, Murray et al. (2015) indicate that this may include recognising the toll abuse has taken on their lives, learning about the dynamics of abuse, supporting them in labelling their experiences<sup>37</sup>. Here, people may begin implementing strategies to counteract abuse, such as altering their behaviours in order not to escalate abuse (Murray et al., 2015). Thus, Westbrook (2008) argues that in these circumstances, they may seek information that **affirms** their **experiences**, where people are open to outsiders' commentary, begin to verbalise their experiences and redefine abuse as personally relevant (Westbrook, 2008). Westbrook (2008) highlights that, in this stage, people may experience shame and guilt but also hope. However,

<sup>36</sup> The thesis categorises this as living with abuse rather than unaware, as unawareness may inadvertently place responsibility on the person experiencing abuse to educate themselves. Living with abuse recognises that even though people might not have named their experiences as abusive they may already be developing safety strategies and resisting the abuse in their lives, and are thus, never passive and helpless.

<sup>37</sup> Other turning points include: facing the threat of severe violence (i.e. attempted murder); experiencing an intervention from external sources (i.e. family or friends discussing situations or social services intervening); realising the impact of violence on children; the abusive partner ending the relationship; or for some there is no turning point (Murray et al., 2015)

people at this stage might not be ready to begin to make effective change (e.g., leaving a relationship) (Frasier et al., 2001) but may be gradually moving towards it (Murray et al., 2015).

From recognising abuse in relationships, individuals might begin to explore options or commit to taking actions – **preparing actions** (Frasier et al., 2001). Bermea et al. (2020) found that mothers in IPV situations not only begin implementing various action-oriented strategies, for instance, calling the police, talking with friends and family, reaching out to a helpline for information, developing safety plans (e.g. safety exit plans) and resource gathering (saving money) but also exercised mental preparation of imagining possibilities and futures.

Subsequently, people may begin to **employ** prepared **actions**. They may seek out support from a local IPV charity or apply for court orders such as a non-molestation or occupation order (in the UK), which will prevent the abuser from communicating with them or keep them from entering their home. These injunctions may prompt abusers to engage in a (court-ordered) programme (see section 5.1.1.1). For some, they may ultimately leave the abusive relationship by, for example, seeking a refuge - a safe and temporary accommodation for people escaping IPV situations with integrated support. However, the point of leaving an abusive relationship is an especially dangerous time. Ending the relationship will not necessarily end the abuse and may often escalate it (Mosher, 2015). Therefore, leaving is not always an option, and people may use other strategies to resist IPV in their relationships (Bermea et al., 2020). Consequently, many people may return to abusive situations where it can take, on average, seven to eight attempts to leave a relationship (Frasier et al., 2001).

Up to this point, the interventions designed to support individuals are categorised as responses. They support people to move across the stages (Figure 5.1) by providing short-term strategies to address the risks of abuse, aiming to prevent further escalation (section 2.3.4). Nevertheless, people may go through various stages without contacting interventions or support services. This behaviour may also be because the services they feel they need do not exist, such as specialist support for LGBTQIA+ (Think Social Tech et al., 2019).

Looking at intervening in the more long-term consequences of abuse is recovery. Recovery is not just psychologically healing from abuse but also implementing longer-term strategies such as organising governmental financial support, moving on from refuge accommodation (Think Social Tech et al., 2019), and in some contexts, addressing substance misuse.

Overall, across the stages, individuals develop a range of techniques and strategies to adjust or end their relationships safely (Westbrook, 2008), which further supports a view of people not as helpless victims but active agents (Bermea et al., 2020) (see section 3.4.2). When users reach an intervention, designers must recognise that they are already active agents developing their own strategies to keep themselves safe.

#### 5.1.1.1 Supporting people experiencing abuse through information

The common thread among all the interventions discussed in this thesis is their emphasis on providing information through digital tools. This review now turns to literature, specifically Westbrook (2008) and Tech vs Abuse reports by Think Social Tech, Snook, and SafeLives (2019) and Snook, Chayn, and SafeLives (2017) to provide an overview of the context.



After Tom strangled Maria, she might find herself at a general practitioner for symptoms of non-fatal strangulation, which are identified by the GP (or not, becoming a missed opportunity) and referred to support services. In fear for her life, she seeks to understand her situation and searches the web for information about her experiences and options. She may come across various websites or forums, such as Reddit, containing different information types. She feels scared, isolated, and worried about disrupting her children's lives.

Box 5.1- How Maria might access support

Box 5.1 illustrates what might lead Maria to access information online. From accessing this information, she may decide a refuge is the safest option and/or reach out to social services for support with the children. With each choice and situational condition<sup>38</sup> comes a new system with a

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<sup>38</sup> For instance, if someone is experiencing financial abuse, while recovering from abuse, they may need support with recovering from debt, applying for grants, and seeking out work.

different perspective on her situation to navigate on top of the abuse she is experiencing.

Westbrook (2008) describes this as a new complex world individuals must learn to navigate:

“The context in which personal crises play out is kaleidoscopic in nature. Consider, for example, the personal crisis of being attacked repeatedly by an intimate partner—a spouse or lover. View that crisis through the lens of law enforcement, and issues of judgment, evidence, and legal boundaries predominate. View it through the lens of shelter staff, and issues of safety, empowerment, and independence come to the fore. View it through the lens of Child Protective Services, public housing, or emergency room staff, and different issues predominate. For the survivor, however, each click of the kaleidoscope produces a new, complex, and fragmented world. Tracking, integrating, and managing the information required to function effectively in all of those different worlds demands well-developed information skills. As if that were not enough to demand of an individual in crisis, intimate partner violence (IPV) survivors must also ensure that their abusers cannot use that information activity to track them.” (Westbrook, 2008, p.238)

Thus, clear language and actionable information that addresses individuals' fears and concerns (Think Social Tech et al., 2019) are critical to supporting them in navigating this.

Think Social Tech et al. (2019) explored priorities for using technology to deliver support for people experiencing abuse more effectively. They identified four design challenges that could make the most immediate difference to victims and survivors of domestic abuse:

1. Realising that it is abuse (awareness);
2. finding the right information at the right time (information);
3. receiving effective real-time support (accessing support);
4. and recovery.

The first three encompass response interventions. For Think Social Tech et al. (2019), awareness is about:

- educating bystanders - professionals, friends and family - to recognise abuse;

- supporting perpetrators to recognise that they are causing abuse;
- to support people experiencing abuse to recognise that they are experiencing abuse and to prompt them to think about what to do next.

These sit between the stages of living with abuse and affirming abuse. Think Tech Social et al. (2019) offer the example of a chatbot that encourages young people to reflect on their relationship dynamics. This intervention supports people to explore their relationships and, in the process, reframe dominant ideologies of what a “normal” relationship is – i.e. with abusive behaviours – to one of a healthy relationship.

When accessing information, Snook et al. (2017) found that people experiencing abuse have a ‘15-minute window’, often less, to find the information they need and to develop a safety plan (preparing actions to employ actions). “It took me 15 clicks to find the information on a local refuge. If you only have 5 minutes alone, that’s at least 10 clicks too many.” (Workshop participant in: Snook et al., 2017, p.32). These 15 minutes are often a small window of opportunity where they can cover their tracks or are being supported by a bystander. A lack of dedicated websites with information can lead people down unhelpful ‘rabbit holes’ with information duplicated across many sites. Consequently, Snook et al. (2017) argue that digital approaches should consider this window of opportunity and offer simple, accessible, diverse information that reflects the various experiences of abuse.

Finally, in recovery support, Think Social Tech et al. (2019) observed that funding and support for IPV tend to focus on crisis response. They consider recovery an area with the potential for digital tools to provide additional support.

### 5.1.2 Recovery for people enacting abuse

Finally, this review will provide a quick overview of the situational context of people enacting abuse and how they might encounter an intervention focused on changing their behaviours.

Programmes designed for people who enact abuse in the UK are known as Domestic Violence Perpetrator Programmes (DVPP). According to Sheehan et al. (2012), the turning points to joining a programme can include specific events such as realising how their actions affect their families or imprisonment. During programmes, changing abusive behaviours requires recognising one's role in enacting abuse and taking responsibility for past actions. This change is supported by developing new skills, such as improving communication and emotional management (Sheehan et al. 2012).

## 5.2 Case one project descriptions

The projects covered in this case all leverage digital tools such as websites and apps. Primarily based in the Global North, except for one of the participants who oversaw innovation in humanitarian crises, they worked in areas with established support provisions. Each section below briefly overviews the projects and their cultural contexts. Table 5.1 (see below) presents these and the corresponding ID codes this chapter will reference.

Project Identification Description	ID Code <sup>39</sup>
Reaching_Support	RS(1)
Reaching_Support	RS(2)
LGBTQIA+_support	QS
Abuse-Recovery	AR
Abusive-behaviours_recovery	ABR
Humanitarian_crisis	CS

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<sup>39</sup> To recall, in some cases there were multiple participants from the same case study. (1) and (2) have been added to identify them.

### 5.2.1 Reaching support (RS):

RS is a website and app aimed at supporting people in earlier stages of abusive situations – living with abuse, affirming abuse, and preparing actions. They offer resources, activities, and services to help people understand the dynamics of abuse and what support is available. A GBV specialist organisation developed the intervention in a Global North country where support is offered through specialised IPV services or state provisions. The project was funded by a private partnership and was adapted for other countries. This intervention originated from a proof of concept designed in another Global North country, which the organisation adapted to its context. Two participants from this project participated in this study: an innovator manager (RS(1)) and a content designer (RS(2)).

### 5.2.2 LGBTQIA+ support (QS):

QS is a website and app that provides people experiencing abuse and primary care providers<sup>40</sup> with information about experiencing abuse through an LGBTQIA+ lens and offers information about available support services. The project was developed by an academic institution in partnership with a sexual health support service and a non-profit focused on women's health and wellbeing and funded by a state-led healthcare funding body.

Abuse in LGBTQIA+ relationships can, besides common forms of abuse, include identity abuse, where the partner will use their gender or sexuality to cause harm and abuse (see sections 2.1 and 2.3.1). According to Calton et al. (2016), LGBTQIA+ individuals face specific barriers when seeking help. One significant barrier is stigma; attitudes that are homophobic, transphobic or heterosexist can lead potential helpers to treat LGBTQIA+ people differently or ignore them altogether. Additionally, systemic inequalities can make it more challenging for LGBTQIA+ people to achieve justice compared to cisgender heterosexual individuals, where their experiences are

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<sup>40</sup> in the UK, this may include GPs (general practitioners), dentists, and pharmacists



treated less severely. In their region, they note that over 50% of LGBTQIA+ people have experienced a form of IPV, and out of these, only 2% have sought support.

### **5.2.3 Abuse recovery (AR):**

AR provides a variety of digital resources for people who have experienced abuse, supporting their recovery in various countries. These resources are part of a charity that addresses GBV and receives funding from private, public and state bodies. Within this project, two participants from the organisation participated: a product development lead and a design researcher - who only participated in stage two (Chapters 7 and 8). Specifically, this organisation is located in a country where mental health services specialised in IPV have long waiting lists, bridging a gap for needed support.

### **5.2.4 Abusive behaviours recovery (ABR):**

ABR developed an intervention that people who have caused abuse to manage their emotions through reflection and exercises. Located within a Global North country, typically, individuals join programmes through court orders.

When it came to discussing design outcomes with ABR, the conversation focused on wider explorations of designers' roles rather than how they designed an intervention for people who enact abuse. Key pieces of information are gathered here; however, further research in this context is required.

### **5.2.5 Humanitarian crisis (HC):**

HC oversaw an innovation project focused on GBV, mostly IPV, in humanitarian contexts. IPV is exacerbated during humanitarian crises due to, among other things, the increased availability of weapons, perceived threats to masculinities, extreme poverty, and loss of legal and protective mechanisms (Spangaro et al., 2021). These conditions make providing support particularly challenging.

In this case, each project targets different groups and support needs, leading to varied approaches that address IPV. However, as the data report will demonstrate, the rationales behind each project are similar.

## **5.3 Case one data report**

The following section outlines the qualitative narrative of case one, presented in the identified areas in which designerly knowledge is contained (section 3.1) – frames, design process, and outcome. It explores the projects in their contexts to provide a nuanced understanding of the adaptation of design practices and rationales when confronted with different situational and contextual conditions. This approach follows what Kimbell (2011) argued: the need to relate designers' practice to the contexts and actions from where they emerge (see section 3.1).

Following this, section 5.4 will synthesise case findings and identify rationales guiding designers' practice.

### **5.3.1 Framing the problem**

This section concerns what Schön (1983) argues is the process in which designers frame the problem (context) in which they will be working. In line with Suchman's (2002) argument that the same problem can pose many different frames, this section demonstrates that while all designers are looking essentially at the same problem – people experiencing IPV, each project starting point, the identified gap, is different and often shaped by either personal experiences or the organisation's structures. This section provides an overview of each project, outlining data that explains the frames used. Overall, all identified a particular gap within existing support services.

Starting with projects focused on reaching users before abuse escalations – living with abuse to preparing for actions (section 5.1.1), RS and QS's project developed digital interventions to support users to (1) understand the dynamics of abuse and (2) what support options exist. RS's project was born from an identified gap by their organisation's frontline workers, where they

noticed that service users needed support with understanding what actions may change their situations:

“There have been so many missed opportunities where you know that person could have been offered support along the way. They just didn’t know how to find a safe route to support or understand what they were experiencing until it was a potential risk to their life.”(RS(1))

From this identified gap, RS’s organisation wanted to reach users before escalations of abuse – between living with abuse to preparing for actions stages (see section 5.1.1). To support this, they identified a potential leverage point as bystanders—family, friends, colleagues, neighbours, and professionals – who could be able to have supportive conversations with individuals they believe are experiencing abuse and/or have asked for help. In response, they aimed to design a digital tool with educational resources and a directory of existing support services for bystanders and people experiencing abuse.

RS(1) recognised that while most of their users are women, all experiences must be considered and aimed to develop content specific to those:

“We know the majority of users of our product are women, but it’s not necessarily positioned for women. One of the things we’ve been talking about is content for people in same-sex relationships, or trans and non-binary people, or even men. We know there are particular barriers around knowing which services will be for them. And one of the things that we offer in the directory is some really good routes to support for the range of people who might need it” (RS(1))

While RS’s product aimed to provide a tool for all experiences, QS’s identified a gap in their system for resources focused on LGBTQIA+ experiences in a specific region. They identified the need to strengthen the resource materials for primary care providers to understand the community’s particular needs and perspectives. Based on exploratory engagements with LGBTQIA+ communities and care providers, education and awareness raising through printed media and a website were identified as a key area where people experiencing IPV need support. Furthermore,

they identified that through the project, both in its frame, process, and outcome, norms and attitudes surrounding queer relationships in their context had to be actively challenged:

“Something we spoke a lot about in the design workshops and consultations is not contributing to negative perceptions of queer relationships (...) our participants were speaking to the idea that – we’re in [country] where marriage equality has passed and there is this perception where everything is ok. Everyone looks at queerness like everything is happy, pride! All those things are amazing and obviously do exist, but in relationships there can be struggles and experiences of IPV. Part of the barriers to developing this support was not to contribute to these negative perceptions, making sure that in our research and projects we weren’t contributing to the negative stigma around queer relationships.” (QS)

In recovery approaches, AR’s product, besides supporting people to understand the dynamics of abuse, also focused more specifically on supporting people on their path to recovery. AR’s organisation identified that due to norms surrounding IPV, people may avoid disclosing abuse to others and instead seek online resources to explore their experiences. However, these resources are either siloed or repetitive across different websites. They, therefore, aimed to provide an information support hub for people recovering from abuse. Although their organisation does not identify their user as a particular gender, their products and materials illustrate women and non-binary people.

When supporting people who enact abuse, ABR worked alongside IPV organisations to develop digital tools to support continuous reflection and skill-building during and outside of programmes. They identified that most digital interventions focus on those who experience abuse, and more work should focus on those who enact it—“if you leave them out, you are constantly dealing with the symptom but not the cause of the issue” (ABR).

Overall, all interventions either enhanced the support of existing support services or filled in a gap that existing services did not provide. In humanitarian contexts, this was equally true; however, HC believed that such frames overlook other areas that people experiencing abuse might find

essential. HC gave an example of looking at needs that sit outside of direct support but are vital to accessing it, like transport –

“Innovative transportation, now I think it's possible but it needs a change in mindset - we have this preconceived idea of what needs to be improved, from our perspective, but when you speak to those that are affected by crisis it's often really different and what do you do when I work in GBV innovation, however, what they need is something that's relatively outside connected but religiously outside my area” (HC)

All interventions discussed are framed at the intersection of IPV and support services. As identified by HC, there is a further need for framings that expand beyond these.

#### 5.3.1.1 The learning and unlearning required

During discussions with designers, a recurring topic was the transition of entering the IPV field, which involved acquiring new knowledge, skills, and mindsets supported by unlearning harmful assumptions and practices from sectors they transferred from. "You've got to learn so much as somebody from a commercial background to a non-profit setting." (AR). For instance, designers (RS(1), RS(2), AR) described that when moving across sectors they found that they had to unlearn traditional user experience mindsets of directing the user through predetermined pathways, as people with experiences of abuses journeys are varied and complex:

“There was definitely some unlearning, I guess, I had to do around ... always trying to find a route through for someone.” (RS(1))

“And I think in terms of professional development, it helped me understand that you can never really know how someone is feeling” (RS(2))

Consequently, designers RS(2), QS and ABR shared that they aimed to immerse themselves in the context during this shift. These included conducting desktop research, reading accounts of activists and first-hand narratives, attending conferences, taking online courses, and volunteering. Through this process, designers argued that this supported them in identifying contested language (RS(2)), understanding what their role could be in effecting social change (ABR), and identifying structural barriers to providing care and accessing support (QS).

Designers displayed a general sense of duty and responsibility regarding their work in IPV contexts –

“I believe that we should be as impactful as possible with the resources we have been entrusted with.” (AR)

“Designers having an honest conversation with themselves, how can they guarantee that you can be useful in other ways? Go beyond what the role might require. There is a need to be in there for the long haul” (ABR)

However, ABR critically noted that this learning and unlearning must equally come from the IPV field, too, where harmful assumptions about designers must be challenged, and cohesion between both fields must be found:

“In relation to the nexus between IPV services and people, the narrative is shifting around what we mean by design but people still have stereotypes over who designers are and how practical designers are going to be (...) finding a shared language, breaking down those barriers of the stereotypes and translating design to something kind of practical, usable, feasible” (ABR)

Thus, as noted by Dorst (2015), design entering IPV contexts must also emerge from cultural and practical changes within IPV to enable the intersection of both fields.

### 5.3.2 Design process

During the design process, how and with whom designers worked varied depending on their research goals and organisational structure, which were influenced by access to participants and the risks surrounding engaging people with traumatic experiences. The following participants emerged and presented in order of subsection discussions:

- People with lived experiences of abuse – RS(1), AR, QS, and HC;
- Indirect participants (e.g. public data and online forums) – RS(2), QS, and ABR;
- Professionals – RS (1), AR, QS and HC;

- People who enact abuse – ABR.

The following sections outline design decisions shaping user engagements and their execution. They aim to understand not only support needs but also perceptions of abuse and how they communicate it. This section ends with designers' reflections on their own experiences during engagements.

### 5.3.2.1 People experiencing abuse: designers integrate safety strategies into research design

Regardless of whether designers directly engaged with people with lived experiences of abuse, there was a consensus regarding the risks and potential for research harm in IPV contexts, consistent with findings in sections 3.2.3.1, 3.3.1, and 3.3.2, which shaped how they designed their research. Designers took time to ensure that the research design considered the circumstances of the context. While participants shared different safety strategies during recruitment and engagement, these involved assessing research design risk and adopting caring behaviours during the interviews.

Firstly, there was a direct correlation between designers who engaged people with lived experiences of abuse and having communities of lived experiences integrated into their organisation. This was the case of RS(1) and AR, who consistently centred and collaborated with them throughout the research and product development:

“We've got to put this out there to people who haven't been working in this and see if it's accessible.” (AR)

“We've got a co-production forum that has to people with lived experience. So we brought people together to map out what product journey is and what the core needs are. Then we used that as a basis for what content to create”.  
(RS(1))

For both, these engagements formed the foundation for the resources they developed, ensuring they were relevant to them. Like RS(1) and AR, QS conducted co-design to ensure resources met their needs. Before this, they used surveys to understand people's perceptions and experiences of

abuse, awareness of services, and whether they had preferences for their types. Following this, they conducted focus groups to understand difficulties in recognising abuse, how to encourage help-seeking, and the challenges of seeking support in cisgender and heteronormative systems<sup>41</sup>.

ABR took a similar approach and recruited people who enact abuse through their partner IPV organisations (section 5.3.2.3). Therefore, recruitment was an identifiable area of tension for designers who were not directly affiliated with organisations with lived experience groups. For them, they instead used indirect participation (section 5.3.2.2) or worked with professionals (section 5.3.2.4).

HC highlighted the challenge of recruiting participants, particularly in humanitarian contexts:

“Especially in humanitarian innovation, the main challenges is going to be infrastructure. Do they have referral pathways in place that you can even safely use to start working in this area.” (HC)

Here, people might be displaced, complicating follow-ups for support. HC suggests this challenge leads to projects depending on working through established GBV services. This approach ensures that the infrastructure is in place for recruitment and support of individuals who require support - “You cannot go around and say, okay, who is a survivor? We have a project for you. That just won't happen” (HC). Even asking this question could put people at risk of partner abuse.

Designers who worked directly with people with lived experiences of abuse outlined a wide array of safety strategies depending on the research design. For instance, HC ensures that referral pathways are in place if there is a disclosure of abuse. QS held multiple engagements with the communities, firstly a survey (section 5.3.2.2), then focus groups, and finally co-design. They shared that before research activities, they consulted with subject matter experts and community members to highlight potential risks and make adequate use of language to frame survey questions:

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<sup>41</sup> According to QS's report



“We held these consultations prior to doing any of the research activities where we invited providers and community members. And that really informed things like how we designed the survey, the types of questions that we asked and the safety considerations. For example having a **quick exit button in the survey** and the expression of interest forms and making sure that we were **providing multiple ways to engage with us**. Whether it be phone numbers or emails in case partners were being technical savvy to avoid that they could be technologically abused.” (QS)

AR shared how they set up their sessions through trauma-informed practices that aimed to both reduce the risk of research harm and support them in sharing difficult accounts of abuse:

“We make sure that we ask people if there's any trigger words that they want us to avoid, being really clear about how we'll use all of their data, and how long we store it for and the purposes. But also kind of in the structure of just ensuring that we leave time and space for people to tell their story if that's what they want to do” (AR)

These safety practices were present in both the research design choices and the designers' behaviours, actively challenging traditional design practices:

“Sometimes those trauma-informed principles go directly against what is understood in the tech world to be best practice. (...) so it's much more having a chat, and how you make sure they think that you're a friend. While also ensuring expectations around that are managed.” (AR)

This could be read as manipulation, as researchers ultimately benefit from the interactions. However, it exemplifies the vital importance of integrating care into often rigid research practices with strict procedures.

While people with lived experiences are vital to fully grasping the needs and contexts, RS(1) reflected that they are always reflecting on experiences of abuse rather than consistently experiencing them like other users in other social issues, such as living with disabilities. This indicates they cannot fully grasp the impact of their situations when accessing information, for example, cognitive load during distress.

“They're obviously not in that place right now, so they can reflect an experience but it's not really the same.” (RS(1))

Therefore, designers sought indirect data collection methods to capture these experiences more closely.

### 5.3.2.2 Indirect participants

From discussions, two ways were identified in which designers indirectly engaged with participants and/or collected data: through indirect recruitment or using existing data sources.

As mentioned in the previous section, QS designed an online survey distributed through specialist organisations, media, and social networks. They aimed to recruit adults who identified as LGBTQIA+ and lived in the region – participants did not have to have experienced IPV to participate. The survey results<sup>42</sup>, however, found that while half reported they had experienced abuse, this increased to two-thirds when asked if they had experienced abusive behaviour. By keeping the participant intake open, they were able to capture participants who were not self-aware of their abusive experiences. Thus getting closer to potential users living with abuse. QS had foreseen this possibility and integrated the safety strategies (exit button) mentioned in the previous section. This strategy demonstrates that there can be indirect mechanisms for engaging with people experiencing abuse.

The other form of using indirect participants was through existing data sources. RS(2) was responsible for developing the content for their online resources. Therefore, it had to speak to people who might be in earlier stages of changing their situations – from living with abuse to affirming abuse. As RS(1) suggested, collaborating with individuals who have lived experiences would not yield such data as they have recovered from abuse. Instead, they looked at language research using online spaces like forums where people supported each other – ‘in the moment’. Through this, they aimed to understand people's mental models and how they communicated and processed their experiences –

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<sup>42</sup> According to a published report

“The term domestic abuse is incredibly strong and powerful and it brings up a lot of strong conversations but it's not something that you would necessarily recognise as owning to yourself, or to someone around you, but the language that you might hear instead is toxic relationship or I feel like I'm walking on eggshells all the time.” (RS(2))

This reframing recognises how content has to be designed for how people interpret their experiences rather than dominant terms like IPV. Backing the use of existing data, ABR questioned whether “participation is used to alleviate the designer's sense of responsibility?”. They questioned the designer's constant need to continuously engage with people to retrieve new data when, in fact, designers and academics have now come to a point where there is much knowledge and expertise that can speak across multiple experiences. ABR believes designers/researchers must generally move towards a model of working within existing data sets.

#### 5.3.2.3 When user engagement mirrors abusive behaviours

Although ABR was the only participant to work with people who enact abuse, it is essential to communicate as it highlights a perspective on the nuances of IPV work. ABR explained that discussing violent behaviours with perpetrators rather than people with lived experiences of abuse can help alleviate the sometimes burden of being a participant. It is an often emotionally laborious task that can in itself bring up trauma. However, as mentioned in section 3.3.3, working with these participants presents methodological challenges that must be considered –

“These are people who are stigmatised and can be marginalised as well. Because most of the time they can't speak inherently about their behaviour and very deeply ashamed about what they've done. But they also use systems to cause harm to other people and you have to be effectively very careful when you involve them in design, that they don't they don't **co-opt** that process.” (ABR)

Co-opt, is important here, as people who enact abuse are skilled at coercing people and can do it during the design process too. ABR highlighted that approaching research with the necessary critical awareness and a suitable infrastructure can help gain honest anecdotes “about how and why they choose to behave abusively” (ABR).

#### 5.3.2.4 User participants are not always the same as the end-user: working with professionals

All participants discussed the importance of engaging with professionals, such as IPV service providers, public bodies, academics specialised in IPV, and therapists. They possess a critical understanding of abusive experiences from their longstanding background and can facilitate user engagement. Furthermore, they might also be users of the products.

RS(1), for instance, engaged front-line workers<sup>43</sup> and police officers. The aim was two-fold: to understand tech safety principles and how to "design with safety always in mind" and to understand that these professionals might also be users of the design to help talk people experiencing abuse through their options. For instance, a police officer might use digital tools to facilitate conversations. Equally, QS engaged primary care providers as they aimed to improve their confidence in supporting LGBTQIA+ individuals, thus seeking to understand from their perspective what resources are needed to overcome barriers.

Designers working with professionals help to identify salient gaps in services and potential needs. In these circumstances, as HC noted, the voices and perceptions of those who provide services are amplified, which might be different from people in abusive situations, as their problems and needs are framed from their positions, one needing to provide support, the other needing support.

Front-line service providers are likely the gatekeepers to participants and can support designers to ensure they work safely. However, as ABR critiqued, this leads to designers not taking responsibility for adapting their practices.

"It often means a lot more work for organisations and when they are already completely overloaded. And then someone comes in and says, 'I'm going to do participatory action research with you'. And what that normally means is, I'm (front line service) going to have to do that quite a lot of work, so you can put the label of participatory on it." (ABR)

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<sup>43</sup> Front-line workers are those who interact directly with individuals using their services.

Thus, collaborating with professionals must be accompanied by an adapted practice.

#### 5.3.2.5 Considering designers experiences and safety

Given the prevalence of IPV, leading to 1 in 3 women globally experiencing abuse, it is very likely that a designer has their own experiences or knows someone who has. RS(1) shared they had this realisation while working in the field –

“I knew domestic abuse is a huge issue, but like learning more about different types of it and, like as anyone does, you start to recognise things from friends and lived experiences” (RS(1))

Among teams, it was common for there to be varied compositions of people with lived experiences or not. As shared by QS-

“I’m queer and so are a few other members on the research team, and some also have lived experience of IPV. So we had it from our perspective of sort of wearing multiple hats” (QS)

This perspective, however, can lead to people speaking through their own experiences rather than consulting the community (AR). For AR, their team was composed of members from varied backgrounds: psychologists, GBV sector and lived experiences of abuse. AR noted that this may unconsciously lead to a predominant focus on the researcher's perspective -

“Most of the team have lived experiences, and feel as though they could have, or might be users of the product. It is easy to get into a space where we think I know because I am one of these people.” (AR).

Interestingly, ensuring the safety of designers was not directly discussed; however, the researcher did not prompt this.

### 5.3.3 Design outcome

The design outcome is where IPV is addressed, but in some instances can create more harm than change, as identified in section 3.4.2.1. All designers demonstrated a sense of awareness and responsibility to mitigate this. As mentioned in 5.1.1, people experiencing abuse may only have a

15-minute window to engage with interventions. Therefore, every design choice is crucial to ensure the person promptly reaches the information they need. RS(1) emphasised that if design features are not given proper attention, it can lead to significant issues: someone could (1) leave without recognising their situation and (2) be put at further risk.

“Design is extremely important as we make assumptions that exacerbate those harms of IPV. And this goes for everything to do with IPV services, when they can’t get to the right service, where you can fall through the cracks of services, which all are challenges to do with design” (ABR)

“You must know who your audience is and what their needs are. It’s particularly dangerous in this space not to” (RS(1))

Thus, designers actively aimed to create safe environments by implementing measures and choices that restricted abusive partners’ access. Further complementing this, designers created various intervention formats, incorporating different content types and physical and digital options. Once the user is engaged, the aim is to support individuals in changing their situations. Rather than outlining specific actions, the focus is on prompting internal reflections to help them determine suitable actions for themselves. Ultimately, this is supported by specific UX choices that make these interventions welcoming for users and not likely to retrigger trauma. The following sections expand on each of these points in detail.

#### 5.3.3.1 Creating safe environments to exclude certain harmful users

During discussions, all designers showed concern over “the intimate threat of a partner” (ABR) who may use their designs to cause further harm - “people perpetrating abuse are always going to be sadly often a step ahead in terms of understanding what their partners might be doing” (RS(1)). However, this did not deter them from developing interventions, as these are still necessary for supporting people. Instead, they paid particular attention to how they may exclude intimate partners (indirect users) from becoming users. In line with the critical understanding of safety shared in section 3.2.4, they did not intend to protect users by limiting their interactions. Instead, they designed measures that reduced the likelihood of harm and created environments focused

on users defining their own safety. They recognised that people experiencing abuse are already implementing safety strategies in their lives:

“They are doing everything they can to keep safe and by offering any kind of additional risk could be really dangerous but I don't think that's a reason not to do anything. It just means that safety is even more important.” (RS(1))

Thus, designers implemented safety measures by considering the situational conditions users might be in. ABR shared how they used adversarial thinking to – think like an abuser – and understand how someone might misuse their technology for harm. A common safety measure discussed with all designers developing digital tools for people with experiences of abuse (RS(1), AR, and QS) was the ‘exit this page’ buttons (see section 3.4.4), which users could click to leave the site and remove any digital trace quickly. However, this was not common knowledge across designers. QS only discovered this through research:

“We only really figured that out by having those conversations with the community, but also exploring other websites.” (QS)

Thus, they shared that a more open exchange of design knowledge would help them reach that point faster. Furthermore, while designers implemented this feature, the functionality of the button on their websites was never explained to the user. Would users understand that this would delete their trace? How would they know why that's important? A user might not have considered how their abusive partner might use their technology for harm.

A strategy that may mitigate this was implemented by RS(1). They shared that they would instantly prompt users to explore and understand their online safety - building users' capabilities to protect themselves. Upon initial interaction, the product would instantly remind users of the potential risks of using the intervention with a message stating, 'download this if it's safe for you to do so' and offering quick strategies they can implement to mitigate this. RS's product also provided further resources to explore this if users wished – which was their most visited content. However, this was not standardised across all design interventions.

Another strategy shared by designers (RS(1), AR(1), and QS) was obscuring the point of call interface through, for instance, designing the app landing page to mimic another platform like the news. Thus, when the abusive partner (who might control the user's devices) clicks on the app, they are confronted with what may seem to be a different app and would need to know the secret access feature to get to the 'real' app. Both RS(1) and AR(1) shared how they provided users with the option to define their preferences over what this interface obscuration would look like to better fit within their lifestyle – thus more believable.

#### 5.3.3.2 Designers create targeted interactions to engage specific users

Discussions with designers indicated that the method of interventions was crucial for reaching specific users who were experiencing or recovering from abuse. In all, they provided multiple formats and pathways for users to engage with their interventions – recognising that no one size fits all on interactions - creating a network of products and pathways. This approach was particularly of concern for designers (RS(1)(2) and QS) who were targeting people at earlier stages of changing their abusive situations – living with abuse to preparing actions. Here, people might be less likely to be actively seeking content and at higher risk of abuse. Subsequently, they developed two forms of initial contact with users through incidental and direct mechanisms, which are explored in this section. Recognising that some methods may work better for some situations but not others.

“For some people an app is not going to feel like the right thing, there might even be some safety concerns about using a digital tool for something like this, but for some people in some scenarios where they’re not living with the abuser or something like that then, it’s the kind of thing that with a bit of support and some good advice it could be used” (RS(1))

Designers shared the different types of artefacts that make up their interventions. All included a website (RS, QS, and AR). RS’s website was also available as an app; however, RS(1) recognised that given the situational conditions of living with abusive partners, as noted above, downloading an app is not possible for all. Besides this, RS(1) aimed to create incidental interactions through leveraging bystanders, as mentioned in 5.3.1, and professionals such as frontline service providers



(e.g. health and social services) who could have the resources ready. Another strategy was having the product available at prominent high street stores (e.g. banks) or public spaces (e.g. libraries) and their websites. For instance, someone might be browsing a website, and an icon may pop up that provides more information on abuse—creating an infrastructure of possibilities within the community where people could incidentally interact with the product and inform themselves.

“A friend that they've disclosed abuse to might have it on their phones and they get asked to have a look at it. And the [a service where people can access support through other organisations that aren't IPV related] is also linked to a kind of physical spaces schemes, you can go into a [store] or a bank or something and ask for a safe space and there they will have [product name] on their devices. So it's providing lots of ways into the design. But we've seen a much larger reach with the [online network of organisations support], with this as its more incidental so you don't need to seek out a domestic abuse resource to access it.” (RS(1))

Similarly to RS(1), QS also developed posters and leaflets that could be easily distributed and found in physical spaces such as primary care provider centres—an incidental interaction.

For AR's product, rather than having different artefactual formats (i.e., physical and digital), it provided multiple methods for engagement depending on people's recovery journey and preferences, including a mixture of exercises, text, videos, and one-to-one interactions. This recognised that how people engage with information varies widely and thus made it more accessible.

These insights highlight that only offering one format may create digital gatekeepers of access to support -

“It's good to give them more choices, because people when they are safety planning, are going to be in the best place to understand what's safe and appropriate for them. (...) Having someone to talk to about using the interventions safely, is definitely the best thing.” (RS(1))

Thus, critical in designing these interventions is not only in what format they are offered, i.e. physical or digital, but how these afford certain types of interactions and access. Thus, marketing

– how these interventions get to people's hands – was also of particular concern. This factor is especially crucial when receiving media coverage; designers must be cautious of advertising safety strategies that prevent abusive partner access (RS(1)) (see section 5.3.3.2). RS(1) noted a current gap in centring this when designing interventions:

“Lots of organisations like ours will end up putting more resources into the product. Often there is limited resources to actually getting it into people's hands or understanding what messages are going to be most resonant or how people find these intervention. There needs to be a larger focus on, messaging and how best to reach people.” (RS(1))

Finally, not only did designers create a network of products within their interventions, but when interacting with RS, QS, and AR's artefacts, these also would signpost users onto other websites or services for further support. This strategy recognised the limitations within their interventions but also centred a responsibility to move people along their journey.

### 5.3.3.3 Designs aimed to prompt internal dialogues that move people from critical reflections to actions

This thesis has prompted the question of how design addresses IPV. In this case study, no intervention claimed to solve IPV; instead, they confronted it. All interventions focused on prompting critical reflections and supporting users in developing action-oriented strategies to change their situations. Overall, they focused on helping users understand the dynamics of abuse and thus recognise their experiences (critical reflection) and develop strategies to support them (actions). To do this, the way content was designed was crucial as it needed to be supportive and disruptive of dominant ideologies.

Where people might be at the stage of living with abuse to affirming abuse, there is an emphasis on reframing their experiences as abusive, and that through power and control, abusive partners create conditions that aim to normalise their situations. Equally, societal norms may perpetuate normalisation, too. While each intervention had a different strategy to achieve this, they aimed to build users' consciousness of the situation people are in and develop a personal action-oriented strategy that can help them move forward and soon become advocates of healing trauma.

“Your content should always be doing one of three things or all three: **reflect, rebut or re-educate**. Reflect where they are understanding that they are not alone. Rebut because they have essentially built up a mental model that has normalised their situation, the abusive behaviour that they are experiencing. You need to stop that dead in its tracks. Then re-educate them, that actually, these are all the things that you can do instead or this is actually what's happening to you, supporting them to make sense of the situation” (RS(2))

“Being able to kind of recognise what they're experiencing then being able to from that understand what safe routes to support might be. And if there is more of a crisis situation that's really clear to them.” (RS(1))

“There's four steps. One is about like **recognition**, and being able to recognize yourself as a survivor and recognize the impact that's having on you. The next step is about being able to **identify** triggers or areas where you are going to struggle or likely to struggle more. Then the third one is about kind of coming up with the **coping mechanisms** for those triggers and those kind of experiences. And the fourth step is paying it forward and feeling in a position where you could **share that knowledge** or share the tool with other survivors. We don't have a kind of ladder, because again, everyone's healing journey is different”(AR)

Yet, while both RS(1) and AR developed steps for users to go through, they recognised that people experiencing or recovering from abuse might only use the service once or twice. The important thing is that they gained something from the experience and are hopefully on a path to recognise that they are experiencing abuse or seeking support otherwise:

"Sort of recognise something and now I'm kind of interested in seeking support and that's quite a big change which honestly, most people aren't going to do in like one session, but people might return to sort of do that” (RS(1)).

A crucial factor in helping individuals recognise their abuse is to pay close attention to the language used. RS(2) emphasised how certain words can carry heavy meanings and evoke particular ideologies, especially concerning IPV, where people may feel these terms do not fully represent their experiences. For both QS and RS(2), rather than solely providing text explaining IPV, they developed a quiz for people to assess if their relationship is healthy. These quizzes

included reflective questions focused on behaviours - “They put me down about my appearance” - or on debunking norms - “Having repetitive arguments in a relationship is normal”<sup>44</sup>. This approach personalises the engagement and fosters an internal dialogue. ABR equally shared that the term ‘perpetrator’ can similarly be unrelatable and may be labelled in a way that hinders their recovery process.

Considering this, RS(2) would develop content based on how people are made to feel in their abusive relationships without telling them how they feel. Instead, they would try to direct people to what they could do about how they were feeling, making it action-oriented:

“It’s about balancing recognizing and reflecting where they are, and moving them along that journey, so one of the main lines, I wrote was ‘domestic abuse is never your fault, you are not alone’ like you’re not alone is actually a really kind of powerful statement someone who is in a very isolated situation.” (RS(2))

#### 5.3.3.4 Contextually and situationally informed UX design decisions

In addition to the UX strategies shared in section 5.3.3.1 to create safe environments for users, further UX decisions were necessary to achieve this. These choices comprised soft colour palettes, positive and inclusive images, and clear, actionable content, aligning with trauma-informed design strategies (see section 3.2.3.1).

During artefact analysis, a significant pattern emerged regarding designers' images that conveyed positive and supportive emotions instead of the distressing feelings associated with IPV. For instance, AR's product used uplifting depictions of people supporting each other and celebrating. RS's product used calming images such as nature, and recently, in a redesign, they began using a combination of illustrations of women supporting each other and women surrounded by plants. QS's product also had images of people happy and helping one another. However, some photos of

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<sup>44</sup> Insight derived from interacting with their products

people in distress were identified, potentially reflecting a focus on those living with abuse. During discussions, QS reflected on their use of imagery in their product:

“There are negative perceptions of queer relationships so it was hard to strike the balance between using photos in the website that weren't serious and depressing to make it come across like that. But then also not just focusing on happiness - everyone's having a great time in a relationship - when it's not the case. That's something that we had to be really mindful of, and I don't know if we necessarily found that balance. But that was definitely a consideration as we developed the resources”(QS)

Additionally, in the product the portrayals feature individuals from various ethnicities, all genders, and people with disabilities. This positivity was also reflected in the language used to encourage people across the products to seek help for IPV, for instance, ‘guiding you’, ‘there are services for you’, and ‘it is not your fault’ – these already begin to support people in validating their experience. Furthermore, QS’s product included personal stories throughout their content to build nuanced understandings of LGBTQIA+ experiences. These messages were all balanced with serious tones that indicated that IPV needs to be addressed. – i.e. are you safe?

Finally, more general accessibility considerations described by RS(2), however prevalent in QS and AR’s product, included using clear language, avoiding technical jargon, and creating easily actionable tasks that can be implemented immediately. AR noted that they avoid white backgrounds and plain text because these designs are similar to those typically found in government and hospital UX, which can be triggering for individuals with past trauma.

## 5.4 Case one implications



One day, Josh visited his local primary care clinic after a recent abusive incident involving Ben, who hurt his arm. While there, he noticed a flyer detailing stories of LGBTQIA+ people who had experienced abuse. Reading these accounts helped Josh realise that what he was experiencing with Ben was abuse. Initially, he thought that Ben's behaviour stemmed from jealousy. To understand this further, Josh completed a healthy relationship quiz. This exercise helped him identify his experiences as both emotional and physical abuse. After processing this information, he felt more confident about exploring his options and taking action.

Josh considered reporting the abuse to the police, which could lead to Ben receiving a court referral to a DVPP. Alternatively, after reflecting on his actions, Ben might self-refer to such a program. In either case, during the programme, Ben receives a digital tool to help manage his emotions in relationships; he now feels like he can choose healthier strategies instead of resorting to violence.

A few months later, although the abuse has decreased, Josh continued to feel the long-term effects. He often experiences low mood and began resorting to alcohol. Recognising the need for support, he once again searches for support.

Box 5.2- How Josh and Ben might interact with the interventions



Maria and the children left Tom a few months ago and have found temporary accommodation. While she feels physically safer now, Maria constantly experiences anxiety and guilt for leaving. Her self-esteem is low, and she struggles to complete daily tasks. During her online search for support, she discovered a website dedicated to helping individuals heal from abuse. After completing an online course, she begins to recognise the inner strength she possesses.

Box 5.3- How Maria might interact with the interventions

The case report has provided practical examples and reflections on implementing design practice in response to and recovering from IPV. While social design has always focused on contextual implications, the specific conditions of IPV serve as central reasons for designers to adapt their work. These implications include prioritising user safety and moving people from critical reflection

to action. These underlying priorities guide decisions regarding the appropriateness of methods and intervention designs.

This section aims to synthesise and emphasise the key insights from the data report. After conducting a second round of analysis, common rationales guiding the methodological and practical implications were examined. This section is divided into the six identified rationales, as illustrated in Figure 5.2. While each designer employed different strategies and approaches, these rationales represent the underlying reasons and justifications for the choices made throughout the process (Bijl-Brouwer & Malcolm, 2020). Therefore, each of these rationales cannot act alone to address IPV but work in conjunction with one another and must be contextualised depending on their working conditions.

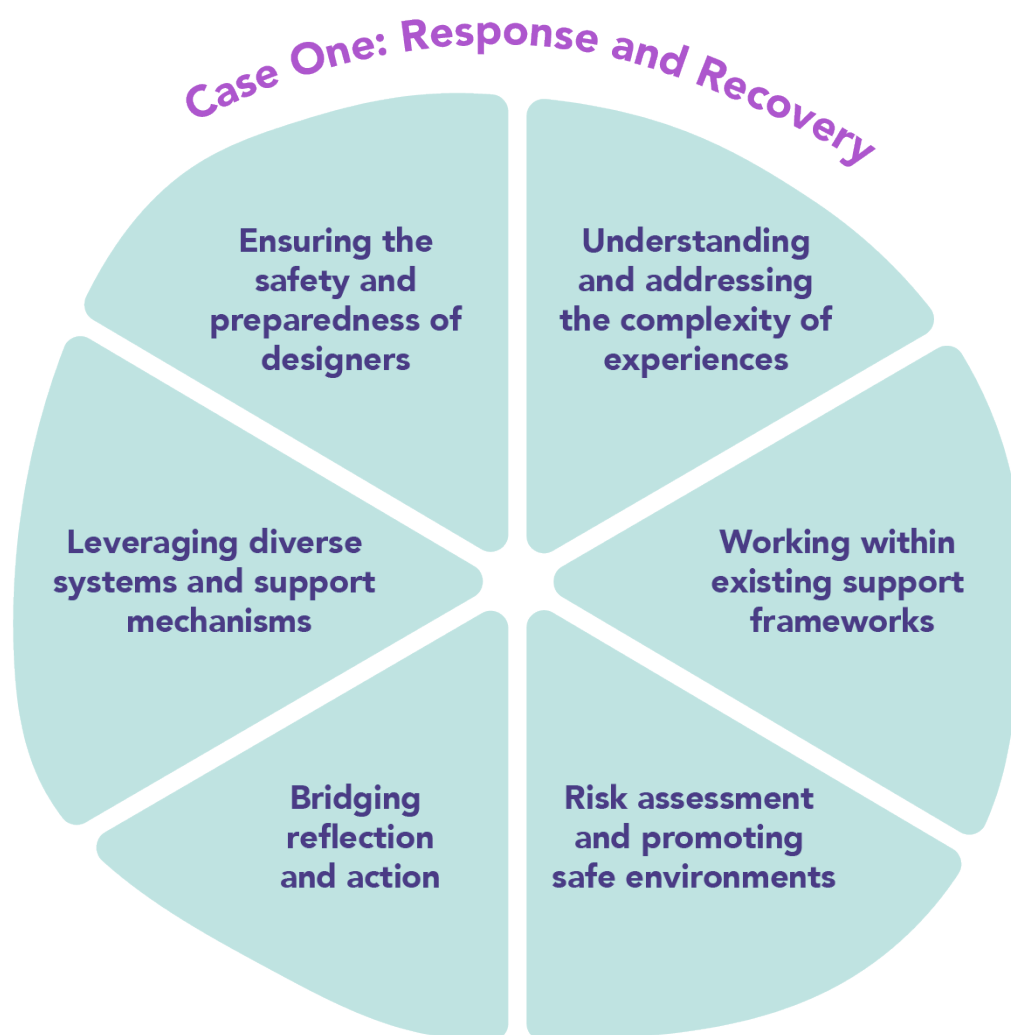


Figure 5.2- Rationales derived from case one

### 5.4.1 Understanding and addressing the complexity of experiences and stages present in abusive situations

This rationale aligns with the theories presented in section 5.1.1, which outlined the stages of changing abuse. These stages illustrate a non-linear process individuals people might be experiencing when engaging with design process' or interventions. Reflected in these stages is a temporality of experiences, where someone moves between living without abuse, to abusive behaviours emerging, to a potentially high-risk situation, to abuse being addressed, and then recovering from it. Each of these represents a different situational condition to work with. Consequently, understanding and addressing the complexity of people's experiences justifies adopting methodologies and practical choices that acknowledge and accommodate the multifaceted nature of people's experiences of abuse.

#### 5.4.1.1 Methodological implications

Understanding the complexity of people's experiences was a key focus during the design process. Designers aimed to explore individuals' perceptions of abuse, including how they communicate about it, the barriers they face when seeking help, and their informational needs. This approach acknowledged how broader systems and dynamics shape each person's experience of abuse and their access to support. Methods were employed in various ways to achieve this.

As discussed in section 3.3, user engagement has become a fundamental aspect of social design work (Salvo, 2001); however, participatory practices such as co-designing, interviewing, and conducting focus groups in IPV contexts carry significant risks to individuals with lived experiences of abuse. The data outlined how and when a person can engage directly with research reflects their current situational context. For example, those who have lived through abuse and have since recovered are often the ones most likely to participate. However, in this stage, their reflections involve recalling past experiences<sup>45</sup>, which contrasts with other design

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<sup>45</sup> Furthermore, there may be a further time element here, where they may be reflecting on abuse that has occurred 5 years ago for example, and ever since, abuse may have moved on with for example new digital advances.



fields where designers frequently work with individuals still experiencing challenges, such as people with disabilities or those shopping online.

This particular condition means people with lived experiences can never fully reflect on the cognitive impacts of abuse when engaging in usability testing (Weschler, 2024). Additionally, traumatic experiences can lead to memory issues that complicate the recall of events (Weschler, 2024). Therefore, designers were mindful of this challenge and considered, when appropriate to research objectives, adapting their methods to capture experiences at earlier stages —with indirect participants. Indirect participants can be recruited by keeping the participant pool open to all - in order to include those who have experienced abuse but may not recognise it. Additionally, designers may seek out spaces where individuals are already communicating with each other, such as forums. Bellini et al. (2023) classify the latter approach as a low-risk method.

Finally, when it comes to people who enact abuse, understanding the complexity of experiences and addressing it during engagements was vital, as due to the nature of their behaviours, they are, as noted by ABR, likely to attempt to co-opt the design process.

#### 5.4.1.2 Practical implications

In practice, addressing the complexity of experiences required a greater focus on the language used and offering easily accessible content for different stages of the journey. In section 3.4.1, it was discussed how dominant and internalised notions in societies can become centred in design and expanded without critical engagement. This concern was translated into this work by having a greater awareness of the effect of using the term IPV; instead, they used 'walking on eggshells' or 'healthy relationship'. Capturing abuse as a feeling or condition rather than as a category people must fit into more effectively reflected experiences. Practically, this required designers to design their content in line with more exploratory and preliminary questioning than conclusive to support people to recognise themselves as experiencing abuse. This reframing aimed to support people in moving along the stages. For instance, recognising that a relationship is not healthy may move someone from living with abuse to affirming abuse.

Additionally, design choices were guided by the understanding that a person may visit their page at any moment in their journey. Therefore, they provided easily accessible content and redirected users to websites designed to support them at their current stage – e.g. if at crisis point.

## 5.4.2 Working within existing support frameworks

Supporting people experiencing abuse is already an identified commitment around the world; the challenge, however, is that an individual must navigate multiple complex systems that aim to intervene in it (Westbrook, 2008). Most of these interventions were located in the Global North with state and support services such as police and courts, emergency shelters, helplines, advocacy, and therapy. However, these forms of support require infrastructure, public funding, and highly skilled staff; currently, most are overrun or, in specific locations, non-existent (Bellini, 2021). Therefore, there is a need for interventions that assist individuals in navigating the complex system and enhancing support through digital means that require less infrastructure.

Each intervention's problem frame reflected the existing support framework in its region, aiming to provide clear information on abuse, support options, and recovery strategies. For the projects directly linked to IPV organisations or state provisions (e.g. primary care), designs were responsive to front-line workers' experiences. For others, it came from identifying a lack of digital recovery support.

### 5.4.2.1 Methodological implications

The data identified that there was a direct correlation between designers' organisational structure and partnerships with having access to participants with lived experiences of abuse (section 5.3.2.1). However, internal participants may come with biases due to their involvement in the organisation. While this infrastructure supports lower-risk engagements, it was argued that designers must be cautious of depending on organisations to do the heavy lifting and must adapt their practices nonetheless. For others outside of these infrastructures, indirect participation offered an opportunity to gain access to participants (see section 5.4.1.1) through other means.

Thus, recruitment in these spaces also depends on designers' project formats, where working within already established infrastructures supports user research. However, in humanitarian spaces, lack of existing support services make participation even more limited. WHO (2016) suggests that in these circumstances, research organisations must be able to provide support in-house—would a design consultancy be able to do this? This rationale must then be complemented with the following two rationales: risk assessment (section 5.4.3) and designer preparedness (section 5.4.6).

Finally, designers also had to be aware of the landscape of existing support systems in order to understand what is already available, how reaching support can be facilitated, and its barriers.

#### 5.4.2.2 Practical implications

Contrary to existing support that requires robust infrastructures, referral pathways, and support workers, interventions were based on developing low engagements, allowing individuals to participate as and when possible. Thus, they, mostly in response interventions, focused on helping individuals understand dynamics of abuse, what support is available, find support services, and understand their rights. These never replaced the existing support systems but instead enhanced them. While designed outside of these formalised services, they were still interlinked with them, providing a centralised hub in a complex information infrastructure (RS and QS) and decentralised emotional support (AR).

When this is taken into account with the structural reality of overrun organisations, it raises questions about whether interventions are referring people to support services without capacity and potentially creating false expectations of the existing available services.

### 5.4.3 Risk assessment and promoting safe environments

Similar to TID practices, designers discussed centring users' safety in all approaches. While participants recognised trauma as a significant aspect of working in IPV, only one participant mentioned that they practised TID within their organisation. Nevertheless, this rationale sits

closely to those implemented in TID. Designers identified risk as an outcome of research and interactions with interventions or directly from their partner. In response, designers built an environment that reduced risk by informing users of potential risk and providing measures for users to use when they felt at risk of harm or were already experiencing harm – i.e. emergency numbers easily accessible.

#### 5.4.3.1 Methodological implications

The potential risk of 'research harm' influenced designers' decision-making by encouraging the implementation of specific safety strategies. These included referral pathways, survey exit buttons, and asking for trigger words. However, none of these strategies changed the methods or tools used per se; they were measures to support their implementation. Safety, therefore, was not a product delivered by a new research tool but rather sustained through negotiation between designers and participants throughout the process. Essentially, it encouraged people to participate safely rather than protect them.

Considering the risks involved, ABR questioned the necessity of user engagement due to the significant knowledge already acquired. However, as raised in section 3.3.2.1, this must be approached cautiously, as protection mindsets may easily lead to exclusion. Nevertheless, given that design research is more concerned with designing an intervention rather than collecting the prevalence of abuse and its variations, ABR is making an important case for questioning the limits of participatory research and data collection and whether this can and should be shared safely across designers.

#### 5.4.3.2 Practical implications

Research and outcomes pose different forms of risk. In research, the designer can be in one-to-one contact, actively making choices and adjusting the circumstances of the engagement as new information comes to light. Once developed, interventions often take shape on their own through interactions, away from the constant presence of the designer.

A crucial risk to consider when designing interventions in these circumstances is the potential for these designs to be misused by current or former partners. While this could lead to apprehensions over whether designers should enter this area, the potential benefits of someone engaging with a design and making informed decisions to build safety back into their lives may outweigh the risks. Designers, therefore, acknowledged that while they cannot eradicate all potential harms (Strohmayer et al., 2022) in their designs, choices must be made with care.

In response, strategies aimed to obscure information or provide controlled ways to exit the website. These aimed to influence user behaviours by deterring unwanted users away or supporting users to navigate safely. Thus, two different experiences are designed simultaneously, one experiencing a fake website and the other receiving support. Part of this rationale, therefore, is considering how to actively exclude certain people (abusers) from engagement—which is uncommon in other harmful contexts except for considering potential hackers in digital spaces.

Nevertheless, these strategies were implemented with the understanding that users would know the safest strategies for them. Designers were not protecting and limiting interactions on their behalf but instead supporting them to reflect on their situation and choose the most appropriate actions – fostering a safe environment with resources and processes available to make those decisions. Often, in abusive relationships, individuals' agency has been repeatedly abused and dismissed; offering choice, therefore, reiterates their agency and avoids reproducing traumatic experiences.

#### **5.4.4 Bridging reflection and action**

Figure 5.1, in section 5.1, presented the different stages of changing an abusive situation. These are categorised into three core elements: knowledge (reflection), action, and transformation. Responsive to the different stages, designers aimed to move people along from reflection to action towards long-term transformation through their intervention. Action, here, is not a single act but rather a continuous process.

This rationale is, therefore, more heavily influencing the practical outcomes of the interventions rather than research design. It demonstrates how a mixture of designing dialogues happens alongside carefully crafted content and images to address IPV.

#### 5.4.4.1 Methodological implications

The following strategies, in practical implications, were possible because they were grounded in the knowledge developed through rationale 5.4.1, which sought to understand the complexity of experiences by exploring perceptions, services, and barriers to support. For some designers, content was proposed through lived experience networks involvement to ensure it met existing needs.

#### 5.4.4.2 Practical implications

All designers adopted a similar approach that encouraged users to reflect critically before selecting and implementing suitable actions, creating dialogical, process-oriented engagements rather than procedural journeys from a predefined state A to state B. Firstly, designers prompted users to process their experiences to recognise that they are in an abusive situation or that they have experienced abuse and the impact that is having on their lives. Through re-education or developing coping mechanisms, designers prompted users to problem-solve safe ways to change their situations. For instance, creating a safety plan, choosing a support service to contact or developing coping mechanisms for triggers. These actions ignited critical thinking, whereby critically observing, assessing, and responding to their situations leads them to regain control of their lives. In all these journeys, no 'state A to state B' is the same, but rather, they personalise what actions are most suitable for their circumstances. Here, **design facilitates the user's journey but does not define it.**

At the centre of these engagements were fostering internal dialogues, gradually enhancing awareness of individuals' circumstances and designing the most effective responses. Moving people from thought to action is a critical aspect of transformation. By reflecting on the world around them, people can recognise that they have the power to take action and transform it (Noel,

2023; Van Amstel et al., 2023). Designers, therefore, did not view users as passive and vulnerable individuals but as agentic individuals (see section 3.4) who were already resisting and implementing strategies; thus, they were supported to realise their potential.

Complementing this were carefully designed messages and images encouraging new possibilities, depicting hope and change rather than just distress. Which also prevents re-traumatisation. It demonstrates how the images themselves can reproduce paternalistic practices of displaying images of vulnerability rather than resisting and surviving (see section 3.4.2.1). These rationales sit in line with Tuck's (2009) and Leitão's (2020) desire-based frames (section 3.4.3), which offer an alternative model of life while still accounting for both distress and hope.

This process, however, happens within a 15-minute window (in the UK) (Snook et al., 2017) that people have to interact with the content when experiencing abuse. A whole transformation, therefore, cannot be expected. Within these frameworks, designers acknowledged that people might not go through the whole journey from thought to action. The aim is that an initial dialogue is created and, hopefully, will trigger an initial shift for future exploration. Thus, change does not need to be completely confined to the designed interactions; it can extend into people's lives by allowing them to customise and select actions they wish to employ.

### **5.4.5 Leveraging diverse systems and support mechanisms**

Due to situational conditions people may be living in, reaching the interventions can be more challenging. For instance, individuals who are experiencing coercive control have their behaviours more closely monitored. Recognising that abuse does not happen in a vacuum and interacts with many moments in people's lives; designers sought to tailor methodological and practical outcomes to enhance accessible entry points into the interventions by leveraging diverse systems and support mechanisms. This rationale, although similar to section 5.4.2 – working within existing support – is focused on how to reach diverse groups of people rather than understanding existing gaps and how to support individuals.

#### 5.4.5.1 Methodological implications

Methodologically, this rationale focused on expanding designers' understanding of the user to indirect users and spaces where their products could be used, for instance, with police forces. Thus, designers engaged professionals during research to explore how they might use the intervention. Additionally, due to their unique background in overseeing support, they provided insights into patterns of abuse and help-seeking behaviours.

This rationale intersects with section 5.4.1, which aims to leverage indirect methods to engage with users. This approach recognises that people are already using systems to support themselves, which may inform research on people's behaviours and communications. In this case, a designer used forums. Other approaches could include community networks, social media, news, and public records (Bellini et al., 2023).

#### 5.4.5.2 Practical implications

This rationale outlines that designing the entry point into the intervention is just as vital as the design itself, developing strategies that target users safely and find opportunities for subtle interactions. To reach people, designers explored leveraging existing infrastructures such as high-street stores, primary care clinics, or other digital products. Which created incidental moments for people to access information<sup>46</sup> without leaving a trace that the abuser could then leverage. Image 5.1 is an example of a leaflet from Women's Aid that individuals can find in community spaces.

Besides locations, bystanders were leveraged to reach users. This strategy recognises that while frequently visited physical and digital spaces can offer accessible points of contact; social relationships provide more sensitive and contextual opportunities to reach someone and have a productive dialogue. As mentioned, this perspective reframes users to include their networks—those who might interact with the user but are not directly involved in the abuse situation. Thus, as noted by RS(1), it has the potential to reach people before violence escalates and equips

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<sup>46</sup> I often notice flyers and posters in general practice offices, spaces commonly frequented like pubs, or in tubes. Appendix G shows pictures I collected throughout my PhD, demonstrating the various leverage points in the London underground, pubs, universities, and libraries.



bystanders with the knowledge and responsibility to support people experiencing abuse. This insight indicates that such an approach, in the long run, has the potential to foster empathy and shared responsibility across the community to address abuse.



# Come Together To End Domestic Abuse

**Coming together** across society and  
communities to **end domestic abuse**

## Does your partner:

- isolate you from friends and family?
- deprive you of food or heating?
- monitor your time?
- check up on what you do online?
- take control over aspects of your everyday life, telling you where you can go, who you can see, what you can wear and when you can sleep?
- stop you from getting medical help or support?
- repeatedly put you down, such as saying you're worthless?
- humiliate or degrade you?
- control your money and access to your home?
- make threats or intimidate you?

**You are not alone.**

“

It can be easy to miss the signs of a coercive, abusive relationship. I didn't know the signs, but I want to make sure that other women do. Please know there is help if you need it.

**Mel B, patron of  
Women's Aid**

Support is available at:  
**[www.womensaid.org.uk](http://www.womensaid.org.uk)**

**#EndAbuseTogether**

**women's aid**  
until women & children are safe

Image 5.1- Come together to end domestic abuse poster (Women's Aid, n.d.)

### 5.4.6 Ensuring the safety and preparedness of designers engaged in IPV

The final rationale, in line with section 3.3.4, recognises the impact IPV may have on designers themselves and how designers adapted their practices in response. Underpinning this was an ethical commitment that ensures they prioritise the well-being and social change of the individuals they serve and themselves. Coupled with a sense of responsibility, care, and duty. Thus, designers were critical of their role in generating effective social change.

Designers shared that when first engaging with this work, they required comprehensive knowledge and understanding of the context and, to a certain extent, to unlearn fundamental principles of design—for instance, moving away from linear user journeys and fostering slower research engagements. Additionally, designers observed that they or their colleagues frequently had personal connections to abusive situations, which could introduce bias by prioritising their own experiences. Further research should explore this. However, there was less discussion about the work's impact on the designers – this may result from the lack of prioritisation of designers' well-being in the discipline (Winfield, 2024).

## 5.5 Chapter summary

The first case study was presented in this chapter, examining design interventions to respond to and recover from IPV. It described how designers framed their interventions, what strategies they implemented in their research, and the reasonings behind their intervention approaches. These outlined different methodological and practical implications that arise in response to IPV's situational and contextual conditions. High-risks of harm are prevalent in this context, thus a significant focus in interventions. Besides directly supporting people in these situations, insights also indicated that designers also aimed to leverage different support systems, emphasising how structurally informed interventions can address a structural issue. These findings, alongside Chapter 6's, will be revisited in Chapter 7 to explore the similarities and differences across cases and what principles emerge from the identified rationales. These findings contribute to the thesis

with different rationales that have emerged in response to the context of responding to and recovering from IPV.

# Chapter 6. Case two: prevention

## Chapter overview

This chapter is presented similarly to Chapter 5, outlining the second case focused on violence prevention interventions through engaging men. The chapter begins with background literature that explores masculinities and the field of engaging men. It argues that central to this work is the focus on shifting men's attitudes and behaviours and the environments that influence them.

Following this, it provides a brief description of each designer's intervention examined, complemented by an anonymised overview of the contextual conditions. These sections outline theoretical and contextual insights that may support the interpretation of the findings.

Based on this, the chapter presents the case study data, identifying common themes under framing the problem, design process, and outcome. The first presents how designers approached the problem with a healthy degree of scepticism to men's accounts of violence. Following this, it elaborates on designers' reflections regarding the circumstances that created opportunities for the design field to engage men. Additionally, it emphasises that adaptations in design must accompany this opportunity. In the design process, the sections outline the participants involved and the rationale behind their inclusion from subject matter experts to men. It then concludes with an overview of how designers designed interventions to promote alternative behaviours in men, highlighting communication design as a central focus.

To conclude, the chapter identifies five rationales: designing with expertise, recognising men's agency to affect change, reflecting and rehearsing alternative behaviours, engaging men where they are in their lives, and potential risks from changing behaviours. It outlines how various relations are centred, making change a mutual process.

## 6.1 Background literature

In this section, the literature review will examine IPV prevention from the perspective of engaging men. This review will present existing theories related to engaging men and outline the current knowledge on interventions in this field. Since the focus is on men, who have a role in addressing IPV, the review begins by examining the concept of masculinities and how wider social norms shape these. It then outlines existing theories on engaging men by exploring prevention goals, barriers to their involvement, and strategies to overcome these challenges.

### 6.1.1 Men and masculinities

Recognising that men are responsible for most violence in relationships, which is often more frequent, severe, and likely to cause injury (Flood et al., 2022), many have sought to develop interventions aimed at preventing this violence by engaging men. Understanding gender as a social structure emphasises how norms and cultural expectations associated with masculinities vary significantly depending on the context (see section 2.3). Flood (2019) examines the factors that increase the likelihood of men perpetrating violence against women. He emphasises that, at the individual level, a man's acceptance of patriarchal attitudes can predict the possibility of him using violence in relationships. Broader social norms that reinforce these attitudes portray violent behaviours as a 'normal' part of relationships, perpetuated through peer influences and organisational cultures. Within the relationship, male-dominated gendered roles and relations - such as those related to economic control and decision-making - are also likely to predict IPV.



In Joseph's communities, men are traditionally seen as the breadwinners. Until now, his relationship with Grace has mirrored these dominant gender roles. However, after losing his job, Grace stepped into this role. As a result, Joseph feels that he has lost control over economic decision-making.

Box 6.1- Constructions of masculinities that influence Joseph's attitudes

Masculinities, thus, are shaped by societal expectations of what it means to be a man in a given context, the organisation of roles within relationships, and the societal attitudes they align with. While not all expressions of masculinity are harmful, it is recognised as a shared social ideal (Jewkes et al., 2015). Nonetheless, healthy and sustainable forms exist and are essential for preventing violence. Thus, violence prevention aims to address constructions of masculinities, as it plays an important role in shaping the social practices of violence (Kerr-Wilson et al., 2020).

Alan Greig (2020) argued that transforming patriarchal masculinities requires a deep engagement with the social norms that shape them:

"This work needs to seek to destabilize stereotypical male gender roles and hegemonic expressions of manhood, and support manifestations of non-violent, equitable and inclusive notions of manhood, by changing social norms that shape boys' and men's behavior." (p.122-123)

Burrell et al. (2019) define social norms as the implicit and informal rules shared by a group or society that shape choices and behaviours. They illustrate that norms are learnt behaviours by (1) observing what others do in specific situations and (2) how others react to those actions. Norms, then, are produced and reproduced through social interactions – which can maintain and legitimise gender inequalities. Therefore, "Violence prevention interventions must be based on a sound understanding of both the problem – the workings and causes of violence – and of how it can be changed" (Flood, 2019, p.75). Flood (2019) argues that the field has produced ample evidence that can assist practitioners in addressing these issues.

Jewkes et al. (2015) argue that changing social norms on gender relations is essential for addressing VAWG through individual behaviour changes; however, in the long run, these must be supported by community-level shifts -

"behaviour is significantly influenced by the physical and sociocultural environments in which we're embedded – and research shows that these contextual factors can override individual attitudes, intentions, or beliefs. (For example, a man can feel that gender equality is important, but still laugh at a sexist joke when he's with his friends.)" (Dozois & Wells, 2020, p.55).

Finally, engaging men is not only about stopping interpersonal violence but also about recognising that men are in positions of authority in political, economic, and social environments where they can promote change (Kedia & Verma, 2019). Engaging men insist on men's role as stakeholders and co-beneficiaries in advancing gender justice (Greig, 2020), taking the onus off those who experience IPV to enact change solely.

### 6.1.2 Strategies to engage men

Engaging men is a field with ample expertise and evidence, dating back to the 1980s (Flood (Guest) in Burrell & Ruxton, 2023). Essentially, it is a diverse field of programming that focuses on men's roles and responsibilities to achieve gender justice (Greig, 2020):

“What unites this disparate body of work and its diverse components as a “field” is the fundamental goal of dismantling patriarchal systems by working with men and boys to transform patriarchal masculinities, operating at individual, institutional and ideological levels.” (Greig, 2020, p.21)

Given its focus on patriarchal systems, engaging men aims to address not only IPV but also other interlocking systems of oppression. Subsequently, interventions that fall under this field are diverse, targeting different demographics, settings, and desired changes - either targeting only men or both men and women (Jewkes et al., 2015).

The most common strategy involves face-to-face educational engagements (Flood, 2019), which typically last several weeks and are implemented by a facilitator. It aims to promote men's critical reflections on gendered behaviours and norms. These activities often occur in workshops or institutional settings such as schools or workplaces (Jewkes et al., 2015). Others include couples' programmes that, for instance, work with parents to build their communication skills towards reducing child abuse (Doyle et al., 2018). At the community level, interventions may seek to mobilise communities to enact change. The *SASA!* intervention is a well-known example of this; the organisation provides local activists with a systemic framework that supports them to initiate community mobilisation and explore their approach to engagement. This framework includes



guidance, such as practical recommendations and tips, as well as activities, such as group discussions and games (Michau & Namy, 2021).

However, Flood (2013) argues that there is a fine line between 'educating men' and 'engaging men'. The former focuses on teaching them knowledge and skills related to gender issues, which will create attitudinal shifts but will not necessarily change their behaviour. Kedia and Verma (2019) argue that the focus in this field should shift from gender sensitisation to gender transformation that promotes changes in behaviours. Focusing on behaviour pushes men to consider their relations with others, where men and boys actively challenge gender norms in their interpersonal and community relations (Kedia & Verma, 2019).

One intervention alone will not prevent violence. Jewkes et al. (2015) suggest that practitioners adopt an ecological approach when developing interventions. This approach involves examining the various factors that uphold social norms, as illustrated in Figure 6.1, and combining these to address multiple influences simultaneously. Thus, different intervention methods will generate different kinds of change. However, they caution against one-size-fits-all programmes. Instead, they should be based on the specific context.

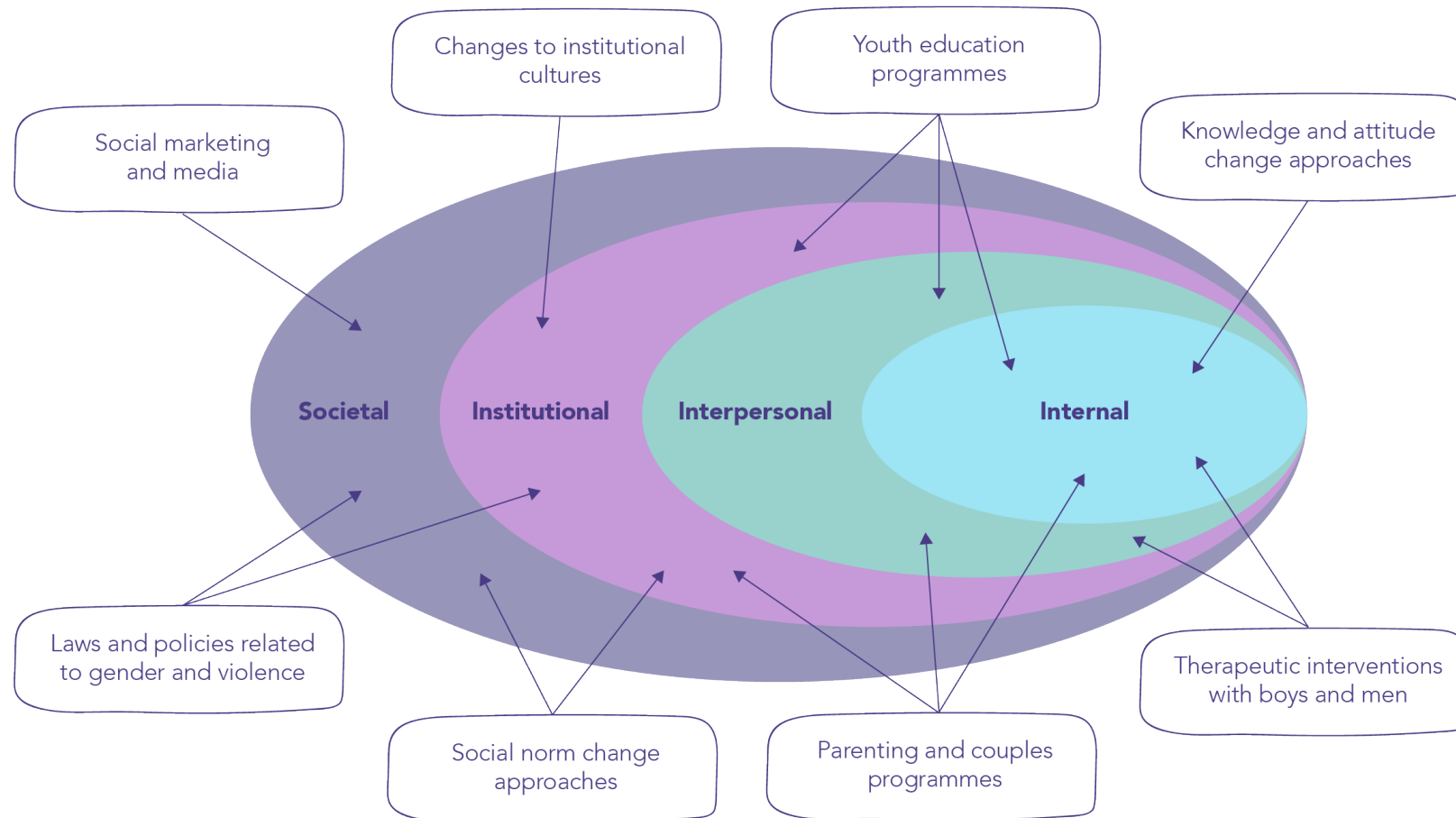


Figure 6.1- Transformation of masculinities through combined changes across the social ecology (Jewkes et al., 2015)

### 6.1.2.1 Overcoming men's resistance to change

In order to engage men, scholars (Wells et al., 2024; Dozois & Wells, 2020; Flood et al., 2021; Carlson et al., 2015; Flood, 2019) emphasise the importance of recruitment and engagement strategies that generate men's interest to participate and ensure their sustained involvement. Without this, men will resist and push back against violence prevention efforts (Flood et al., 2020) as "they are more likely to blame the victim, more likely to excuse the perpetrator" (09:50) (Flood (Guest) in Burrell & Ruxton, 2023). Some of the barriers, identified by Flood (2018), include:

- Personal stake in maintaining the current conditions;
- Seeing VAW as a women's issue;
- Fears of others reactions to participating;
- Fear of not being welcomed, or prioritised.



Recognising that his relationship with Grace is becoming strained, he looks for ways to repair it. He notices workshops being held in the town hall; however, these are all focused on women's well-being.

Box 6.2- Barriers when Joseph is looking for support

To overcome barriers to men's involvement strategies include personalising calls for action to women's experiences (i.e. connecting to a particular woman in their lives) (Flood, 2019), providing accessible entry points in pre-existing spaces or networks – meeting men where they are (Dozois & Wells, 2020; Flood, 2019; Carlson et al., 2015), building communities of support (Flood, 2019), and positive-led approaches that build on men's strengths, their existing commitments and involvements, thus portraying men as allies. Thus, they should build a respectful space rather than see them as perpetrators (Wells et al., 2024; Flood, 2018; Carlson et al., 2015).

Men-led interventions, however, have been controversial as "women bear the brunt of experience of VAWG, a 'nothing about us without us' position problematises the notion of VAWG interventions that do not benefit women as victim/survivors" (Kerr-Wilson et al., 2020, p.44).

According to Kerr-Wilson et al. (2020), there is conflicting evidence on the effectiveness of interventions working exclusively with men and boys. Gender is relational – men and women cannot act in a vacuum of gendered experiences. They state that interventions that work solely with men and boys must be part of a broader multi-component approach that works with women and girls. This relational approach of achieving women's and girls' outcomes and focusing on relationship dynamics and community norms constitutes a gender transformative approach (Pereira et al., 2023). Engaging with both fosters more sustainable changes towards violence-free relationships (Michau & Namy, 2021).

## 6.2 Case study project descriptions

This case looked at three projects designed to prevent violence through engaging men. These projects included working with men individually, offering couples programmes, and mobilising communities. The projects were located in the Global South and emerged from various organisations and collaborations between innovation consultancies and social development, humanitarian, or government bodies. Each section below briefly overviews the projects and their cultural contexts. Table 6.1 presents these and the corresponding ID codes this chapter will reference.

Project Identification Description	ID Code
Faith-based_Prevention (Rachel Lehrer)	FP
Messaging_Prevention	MP(1)
Messaging_Prevention	MP(2)
Collectivity_prevention	CP

## 6.2.1 Faith-based prevention (FP)

FP is Rachel Lehrer<sup>47</sup>, who at the time was Associate Director of Design and Innovation at the Airbel Impact Lab, a research and innovation lab at the International Rescue Committee. She discussed a project she designed called Becoming One in Uganda, a faith-based counselling programme to strengthen relationships and reduce IPV. The programme trains religious leaders and provides guides that include alternative interpretations of scripture passages and a smartphone with preparatory video lessons. During the programme, four to seven couples receive weekly sessions for 12 weeks in 90-minute sessions. Following the sessions, couples are incentivised to use a guide to complete exercises together in their own time and then report back during the next session. Content includes learning good communication skills, shared decision-making and emotional regulation (Boyer et al., 2022). The project has been implemented and evidenced to reduce IPV and shift power within relationships by 12% (Innovations for Poverty Action, 2022).

In Uganda, 56% of married women and 44% of married men experience IPV (Gubi & Wandera, 2022). According to the Census 2014 (the programme was implemented three years later), religion is closely related to the cultural reality of Uganda:

“Catholics are the largest religious denomination constituting close to 40% of the population followed by Anglicans with 32% and Moslems with about 14%. Together these denominations account for more than 80% of the total population.” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2014).

Religion has a complex relationship with IPV, where religious sermons and interpretations of scripture, especially around marriage and divorce, can define norms and behaviours which uphold traditional patriarchal structures. At the same time, they are a space where people can resort to religious counsellors for advice and support, most prominently in this context through premarital and marital counselling (Boyer et al., 2022; Istratii & Ali, 2023). Religious spaces, as such, can both

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<sup>47</sup> Rachel Lehrer during stage two interviews asked to be de-anonymised to allow the research to more deeply explore the cultural context her work was situated in (see section 4.3).

influence and support people experiencing IPV, thus becoming both vital to intervene in and leverage.

### 6.2.2 Messaging prevention (MP)

MP is a programme aimed at heterosexual men aged from 18 to 64 who are in long-term relationships (for over one year) or living with their partners. The program targets men who struggle with emotional management and supports them in regulating this. To do this, they designed a messaging group where a facilitator promotes content and prompts conversations for men to have (1) at home with their partners and (2) with other men in the group. These focused on common relationship issues such as finances or family planning. As the project was designed during COVID-19, when in-person programmes were no longer possible, it offered an opportunity to move into digital versions.

The programme, adapted from another country's model, was developed in collaboration with various non-profit organisations (NGOs) and a government department. When interviewed, the intervention was at the piloting stage. Since then, the evaluation has shown positive effects on how men communicate and regulate their emotions, while the impact on women was lower. Overall, substantive changes were observed.

When examining the factors contributing to its prevalence, a study conducted in the country where the project is based found that violence is more common in families with more members and among those who have been married for a longer duration. The study also revealed that, due to cultural beliefs in the country, women are more likely to tolerate abuse to keep the family together.

### 6.2.3 Collectivity prevention (CP)

CP was a designer in a design agency who, for this project, was partnering with an NGO to co-create programmatic concepts for a displaced community fleeing conflict in a neighbouring

country. The aim wasn't to exclusively address IPV but rather acknowledge that GBV and harmful masculinities were prevalent in the community. In situations of forced displacement, men often experience changes in their social status, leading to mental health issues. Due to limited reliance on previous assets and sources of income, they may be motivated to maintain traditional social structures. Altogether, this creates more significant risks for their partners. Delkhosh et al. (2017) highlight that conflict-affected, refugee, and internally displaced women experience higher levels of IPV.

Subsequently, the CP developed a curriculum to engage men in discussions about sensitive topics concerning their relationships with women. This curriculum included: (1) contextualising what different words meant for the community (e.g. consent and respect) into a dictionary for engagement; (2) dramatic groups/role-playing where they played out gendered scenarios; (3) men's group exercises, e.g. fetching water, to be implemented in the community. It is not known if they have been implemented since the discussions.

## **6.3 Case study data**

The following section outlines the qualitative narrative of case two, categorised into – frames, design process, and outcome (see section 3.1). It examines the projects within their specific contexts to offer a detailed understanding of how design practices and rationales adapt to varying situational and contextual conditions. In the end, this chapter will turn to section 6.4, where the thesis will identify rationales guiding designers' practice.

### **6.3.1 Framing the problem**

Section 6.1 emphasised the importance of understanding the causes of violence and effective changes. Designers reflected this understanding, stating that these contexts are deeply normative, where violent behaviours have become ingrained and, thus, normalised for many. They described the challenge of discussing the topic in communities as violence is full of taboos (MP(1)) and laden with shame (FP).

During engagements, designers noticed that some men did not self-identify as violent; others underrepresented the violence in their lives or put the onus on women. Accordingly, men did not see the personal relevance or responsibility to change and improve their relationships. Designers highlighted that this was (re)enforced by the fact that these behaviours are *"acceptable in a lot of cultures"* (MP(2) and FP). Consequently, men continue to reproduce violent behaviours, fearing that altering them might lead to exclusion and being seen as "weak" (CP). However, designers noted that this did not mean that all men wanted to preserve these behaviours. CP called this a 'dual ignorance' in men:

"Most people don't agree with having that behaviour. But because everyone else does them and no one is taking the first step to change, they keep doing so." (CP).

"But when I support my partner the other men around will judge me, will beat me, or will exclude me from the community." - the same men that are harming them also want to be supporting their partners" (CP)

Accordingly, designers grounded their work on exploring norms and how they shape violent practices specific to each context. For instance, MP's organisation sought to adapt a project from another country in the Global South, where they initially "copied and pasted" the framework. However, due to the vast cultural differences between these contexts, the intervention was not effective. In response, the designers redesigned the intervention to better align with the contextual conditions they were working in:

"A lot of it wasn't working, especially the recording and the reaching out to men, because there's a lot of cultural differences between them" (MP(2))

"We had to design something applicable to very different contexts and motivations. And so that job was probably one of the most important aspects of it. The realisation that you really have to understand men because, ultimately, culture is not copy pasted anywhere" (MP(1))

Thus, designers framed the problem by focusing on understanding gendered expectations (section 6.3.2.3), community influences on behaviours (section 6.3.2.2), and the environments that can support change (section 6.3.2.1). Environments designers identified included working with



religious leaders in already existing marital counselling (FP), collectivising men to work together to implement gender-positive behaviours (CP), and creating online space for men to explore their relationships and learn new skills (MP(1)(2)). FP's intervention focused on using existing spaces, while CP's and MP's developed new environments for men to live and connect. As noted by MP(1), there are prevalent taboos surrounding psychologists in their country, highlighting the need for accessible spaces:

“We were very clicked on because men don't have like any other resources and are scared to go to psychologists. There's a bunch of taboos around psychology it's expensive and this program is free. I think there was a lot of thirst, because of the lack of any other options” (MP(1))

#### 6.3.1.1 When design met violence prevention, both adapted and evolved

Reflecting on the relatively new field of engaging men, designers noted that existing interventions often focused on developing long-term curriculum-based training sessions which focused on changing mindsets but not behaviours. They saw this as an approach that aimed to generate impact quickly and, thus, did not align with men's desires. Consequently, these interventions were not cost-effective and often implemented by NGOs rather than the community. Finally, designers noted how existing interventions predominantly focused on women's needs and support without considering men's roles and desires. Subsequently, designers identified that it could lead to frustration and resistance among men towards interventions, where men may restore control through violent behaviours (CP). Thus, there was a need for approaches that could generate impact and centred on men's experiences. A combination of these factors led to an opening for design - "When you look at this general field, there is so much work to be done" (FP). Therefore, design emerged from cultural and practical challenges in engaging men, where its skills could support effective programme development.

Designers shared that they saw their role as facilitators of the design process, bringing together different voices from the community to subject matter experts,

“Design is an amazing tool in that sense, because it says: actually we don't know any of those things, we just need to listen to people and understand

what is compelling to them and find the people in the community who are aligned with what our goals are and try to leverage them.” (FP)

where they would turn insights into a tangible form:

“If there was a question or any assumption they had we could get it tested and have answers, like a week (...) it makes the project much more tangible because we went out and we proved something” (MP(2))

Design, therefore, offers a different perspective to the field:

“I think the lens of the designer is important because we’ll approach IPV in a completely different lens. And hopefully we are not the victims so we can approach it with some distance.” (CP)

While designers were highlighting the value of designs role being leveraged in the IPV field, they emphasised that design practice equally needed to adapt:

“It’s an interesting process working in this particular field because you realise design as a whole is completely ill-equipped to handle this. Design in terms of ethics, justice, safeguarding, and as a general practice does none of these things. And these are like central to doing this type of work.” (FP)

She explained that few designers have worked in this field historically, partly because it is such a vulnerable and high-risk population, and there is a lack of designers’ knowledge and skills in these areas. She explained that violence prevention experts avoid working with non-experts as it requires them to do most of the labour to understand how to do the design process safely and ethically.

Thus, designers highlighted that they needed to adapt their approaches to suitably do this work.

Focusing on introducing care, criticality, and collaboration:

“Because we’re used to working quickly and putting things out in the world and just learning from it. But in this context, we have to be really careful about what we put out and smart about what we were observing, what we were elevating and getting feedback on.” (MP(1))

“There are so many moments where you have to be careful about how you say things, how you drop things, just checking your own biases constantly” (MP(2))

“There’s a lot of knowing how to work with other professionals and different ways of working which are very different from the design world” (MP(1)).

Thus, designers shared that working in IPV was a learning process every day —consistently questioning and adapting design. CP shared that before entering the field, they immersed themselves in the topic through online courses and desktop research. However, they identified a need for design-led theoretical and practical grounding, as well as knowledge sharing across designers:

“I think it's very necessary to try to improve as designers through listening to different perspectives, and exposing ourselves to different processes. We are always learning, but sometimes there is a lack of foundation or theory that can help us so that were not just learning through doing.” (...) “probably a good database of information would help. We spend a lot of time trying to look for the right evidence-based information. What happened? What worked? What didn’t work? What can we learn from each other?” (CP).

### 6.3.2 Design research

During discussions, designers engaged with men, the community, and subject matter experts, each contributing a different perspective on the context. Men's involvement helped them explore their perspectives and desires, thus countering potential resistance. Designers involved the community to identify broader attitudes and behaviours that might hinder interventions and need to be changed. Finally, various subject matter experts contributed their knowledge and skills to address the multifaceted issue of intimate harm. Furthermore, their perspectives were vital as some were equally users of the interventions.

Split into the three sections reflecting the participants involved, the following section starts with subject matter experts.

### 6.3.2.1 Aligning efforts with subject matter experts

A recurring topic, across discussions with designers, was the need to engage with a variety of subject matter experts in order to effectively address this multifaceted issue. Furthermore, as these interventions were going to be implemented by people rather than stand-alone websites – some potential implementors (e.g. facilitators) were engaged too.

Designers recognised that, as mentioned in section 6.1.1, other disciplines, such as economists and GBV experts, have generated ample work in IPV. Thus, to do this work appropriately, it is essential to seek out existing knowledge on how to do it appropriately and replicate and adapt existing processes. For instance, FP included sex experts, religious leaders, and economists in the design process, who each brought different knowledge skills necessary to develop an intervention, such as understanding justice, ethics, behavioural change, and analysis<sup>48</sup>. On the other hand, design supported projects by offering branding and marketing knowledge, including men in the design process, and developing cost-effective experiences:

“So it was really design as a facilitator of this multidisciplinary group and bringing in all these additional skill sets that aren't generally in humanitarian aid and development” (FP)

“You don't just need designers you need everyone else, all this other expertise. A balance mix where design isn't just a nice to have but leading the process”(MP(1))

This reinforces what was mentioned in 6.3.1.1, that it is important to bring together varied expertise that work to address IPV.

In particular, MP(1)(2) identified that GBV experts were vital to contextualising men's experiences to wider structures. Thus, they picked up on overlooked stereotypes and caught nuances designers dismissed.

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<sup>48</sup> Other designers, MP(1)(2), shared that working with therapists, in particular, helped them understand what issues men were experiencing in their context.

“Sometimes as a designer you're like, ‘okay I’m talking to users, I’m seeing this I know’. But then you have someone from GBV who has like 20 years working in the sector of gender and they have a more macro vision” (MP(1))

Besides providing expertise on insights, GBV experts also supported MP(1)(2) by creating an infrastructure where they could be accountable and design safely. Subject matter experts ensured the intervention's development and design were grounded in best practices and contextually relevant.

Besides subject matter experts designers also engaged with those who would be responsible for implementing the interventions. This was vital to ensure they were feasible and could be integrated into existing systems. CP argued that when developing or redesigning an intervention, designers must consider those who currently (or will) implement it. Often, employees in organisations implementing interventions come from the very communities they aim to influence, and risk bringing similar attitudes and behaviours.

“In this specific project (that was failing) we understood that it was the local team (of an international NGO) that themselves practiced GBV. But then they’d be advocating for change, so they just see this as work, as a job. They don’t see this as like the passion that ‘I have to really create a change so that it has a huge impact’.” (CP)

“The Bible is responsible for a lot of harmful patriarchal norms and we need to get those religious leaders on board with changing how that biblical interpretation happens, what people believe and then how they act in their home, because someone's going to listen to their faith leader. They are not going to listen to an NGO. So making sure that these programs are done by the right people” (FP)

Thus, some designers (FP and CP) shared that it was critical to look at the existing processes in communities that reproduce harmful norms and change them. Part of this process was finding infrastructures where trust and relationships are already built and where people would be more willing to engage. For instance, CP explored where men spent their time in the community, like community centres or social groups, to more inclusively involve men and use these places to bring their attention to specific topics, thus, overcoming resistance (see section 6.1.2).

Finally, CP also highlighted that by taking this stance, designers and their organisations must also look back at themselves and how they might be reproducing harmful attitudes and behaviours, making their engagement less effective – to walk the talk:

“I’ve done this exercise in the studio here where I bring up how we are going to the field to saying that men can cook. But how then how many of you here actually do that? Do you think that they don’t know that? They see people going there saying that men can cook. If they see a white person, it’s like, oh, here you are with your Western ideas. But when they see locals doing the same, they’re like - who are you to say that? So the change needs to come together, and that’s why these ideas also are a transformative way for us as well, seeing how can we adopt this into our lives to make sure that it’s feasible, or it’s sustainable for the projects too.” (CP)

#### 6.3.2.2 Exploring community-level influences

Although when designing for prevention, the aim is to intervene before violence occurs, during research, violence will still be an ongoing practice in society - and thus a risk when conducting any research. Designers indicated that understanding IPV does not require collecting data from individuals experiencing it. Instead, they needed to understand the community's perceptions and influences - the norms that uphold attitudes and behaviours of abuse:

“We don't need to know how much a woman was abused the past week. We need to know the community's perception of abuse. And so recognising when the details matter. (...) And you can ask the neighbour about that. You can ask the religious leader, you can ask the school teacher about it. So in that sense you're potentially creating less harm because you're asking bystanders.” (FP)

“Our work in GBV is related to social behaviour change and understanding all the social and cultural norms, and trying to understand from the community perspective, what they think that their actions can cause in one and other.” (CP)

Therefore, the objective behind involving the community was two-fold and depended on the designer's IPV expertise and project context – e.g. MP's organisation was adapting a previous project. Either designers were conducting an exploration into how to address IPV in the

communities, or they were exploring how to adapt a project in a new context and, therefore, testing what needs to change.

“My teams and I have been doing this for long enough that we have working hypothesis. (...) Five years ago, I was having open-ended conversations saying ‘how do you solve this in your community?’. Asking community and faith leaders this. And now it’s like ‘let me show you something and you tell me what you don’t like about it’. So it feels like a different kind of conversation” (FP)

Engaging with the community informs designers about the specific contextual norms that must be considered and adjusted when developing interventions. This approach is particularly important when the design team come from another region or country. For CP, they shared that setting the language between the community and team was vital as they might use words to communicate GBV concepts that do not reflect community perspectives or don’t exist:

“There is a miscommunication between what NGOs are trying to say and how they (men) actually perceive it (...) We’re always like: ‘You need to respect women. You need to respect yourself.’ When we asked few of the men, to draw what they think respect is, they draw a women serving them. Or a women seated on the floor, serving them, while they’re seated at the table. And I ask so this is respect? Of course, they respond, like my women needs to feed me and serve me the food. And this is the ultimate respect that I’m **expecting** from her. So if she doesn’t do this, **there’s a reason for punishment.**” (CP)

The focus here is not on the act of serving food but rather the expectation that this is women’s role and that violence will be used as a method to exert power and control. Asking men about language, e.g. consent and trust, in itself, unearths cultural norms, their meanings, men’s perceptions of key GBV and SRH topics and how they might accept some better than others. CP states that this must be considered at the onset of any intervention, becoming the basis of their conversations with men. FP shared that in their context, concepts might not even exist in local languages, where designers must apply other terms or approaches:

“We did research in Northern Uganda and women wanted to have better sex, but it was actually illegal to say the word clitoris. And so we needed to find ways to help people share what felt good. So they could create understanding without actually talking about it and saying the word. So we used naked pictures” (FP)

Alongside communities, designers worked through these topics related to gender justice and reconstructed them in a contextual and gender-transformative way. Co-developing these means the community can understand and apply such concepts to their personal lives.

#### 6.3.2.3 What it means to be a man

All designers involved men in research to explore the cultural meanings of being a man. This supported understanding what men **desired** out of a programme to ensure they would be motivated to participate—countering resistance. After this, as remarked by FP, ensure that they will continuously attend. Thus, considering users' needs but, most importantly, their 'values'—the conscious choice to act in a certain manner in order to meet their needs, thus guiding their decisions.

MP(1)(2) and CP shared that during engagements, they discussed men's daily lives, personal issues, and attitudes towards others' behaviours. For instance, during interviews, MP(1)(2) explored what men associate with masculine needs and what they talk to other men about – relationships, sex, or feelings:

“So we were having these conversations with men to actually understand [country] men and what they're struggling with” (MP(1))

CP used participatory methods such as role-playing and drawing to explore gendered constructions through their embodied experiences. These methods prompted men to actively play out these roles and critically reflect on their actions and attitudes. CP stated that the choice of methods was vital when discussing these topics to ensure it is contextualised to what men like to do. Thus, listening without judgement and actively cooperating with them.

“We ask them to role play what happens if you are the one washing dishes. And normally we get a lot of insights from the way that the group of people



watching comment on him, or judge each other. And then we ask them how did this make you feel? When they realise “oh, this is actually not good. Why, do I need to judge if I'm a man trying to help my wife fetching water?” (...) We always try to go direct to the point. So we go to different tools trying to address the topic, and **normally it's a shift that they do by themselves through the activity.**” (CP)

Both CP and MP(1)(2) said they began seeing men shift their attitudes – where change can start in the design process and pilot testing.

“Just through talking to men and looking at their conversations we’re already changing things. We’re already making things happen and we can see it.” (MP(1))

When involving men, FP and CP discussed designer-participant dynamics that may emerge. As both worked in humanitarian contexts, they noted that several GBV programmes may be implemented simultaneously. Consequently, participants may recount what other programmes have taught them, even if their behaviours have not changed:

“Nowadays there's a lot of awareness created by NGOs - posters and programs - and it comes mainly through women empowerment programs. So when we go and try to address these topics, it's not new for them. We need to take that into consideration”. (CP)

Furthermore, CP and FP noted that due to dynamics around designers ethnicity and professional affiliation to an NGO, participants will tell designers what they think they want to hear – underrepresenting the violence in their lives. CP shared that to overcome this, they worked with local research assistants and used multiple methods to collect data, and through this triangulation, they were able to get closer to what the community thought. As such, meaningful research engagement, as shared by FP, creates a space that can overcome normative dynamics where people are not compelled to give an answer and can be open.

#### 6.3.2.4 In tandem with partners

While the aim is not to directly work with women, the reality is that men are relational to them – and thus must be considered. In particular, when trying to understand how women are

experiencing the programmes and how women experience their partners using them – those who experience violence can see their abuser's actions more clearly. Although not many designers spoke about working with women who experience abuse, FP shared that when this occurs, strategies must be in place. At the same time, she stated that designers must consider that sometimes people do not want to talk about their experiences, which is okay. They highlighted both protecting the user but also the designer involved:

“One of my colleagues were trying to recruit a woman and she said she was burned by her husband last night. I told them when you interview her, you need a GBV expert in the interview. You guys need to be prepped for the interview. You need counselling after the interview, you know, and they said, the woman didn't want to be interviewed, which is a relief, but it's true. Yeah, this is like deeply traumatic, terrible stuff. And so you not only need to like care for the person in the interview, but you also need to care for yourself and the whole team” (FP)

This highlights that, although designing in circumstances before violence occurs, FP was still considering and implementing safety strategies. But also, their use of the world relief illustrates her sensitivity to the emotional well-being of both participant and designers, not wanting them to go through a potentially distressing interview. There is a tension between their professional obligation to collect insights but also the contextual realities of this work.

### 6.3.3 Designing the intervention

Key considerations in designing the outcome was ensuring behavioural change, men's involvement, and potential risk and harm.

#### 6.3.3.1 Designers craft positive interactions to attract users

Designers recognised the importance of outreach, discussing that communications should not patronise or ostracise men, stating – “this is wrong” or “you should not do this” (CP). As mentioned in section 6.3.1, men will not self-identify as violent and thus wouldn't engage with material that states otherwise.

“Men don't consider it their responsibility to change and improve relationships. And so they are going to invest a very minimal amount of time in this” (FP)

Instead, designers highlighted that these communications and the overall programme framings must be personalised to the cultural context and focus on the "positive implications" (FP) of what men will gain from participating. For instance, in FP's context, religion plays an important role in the community. CP noted how, in their context, men value having their family by their side forever. In couples programmes (FP and MP), this included messages such as: *"this will improve your relationship; this will make your home more peaceful; this will benefit your kids in the following ways" (FP) or "healing a relationship in only 30 days"* (MP(2)). Image 6.1 is an example of FP's recruitment flyer – it communicates the positive message of a "successful relationship" and shows a couple happy and connected.

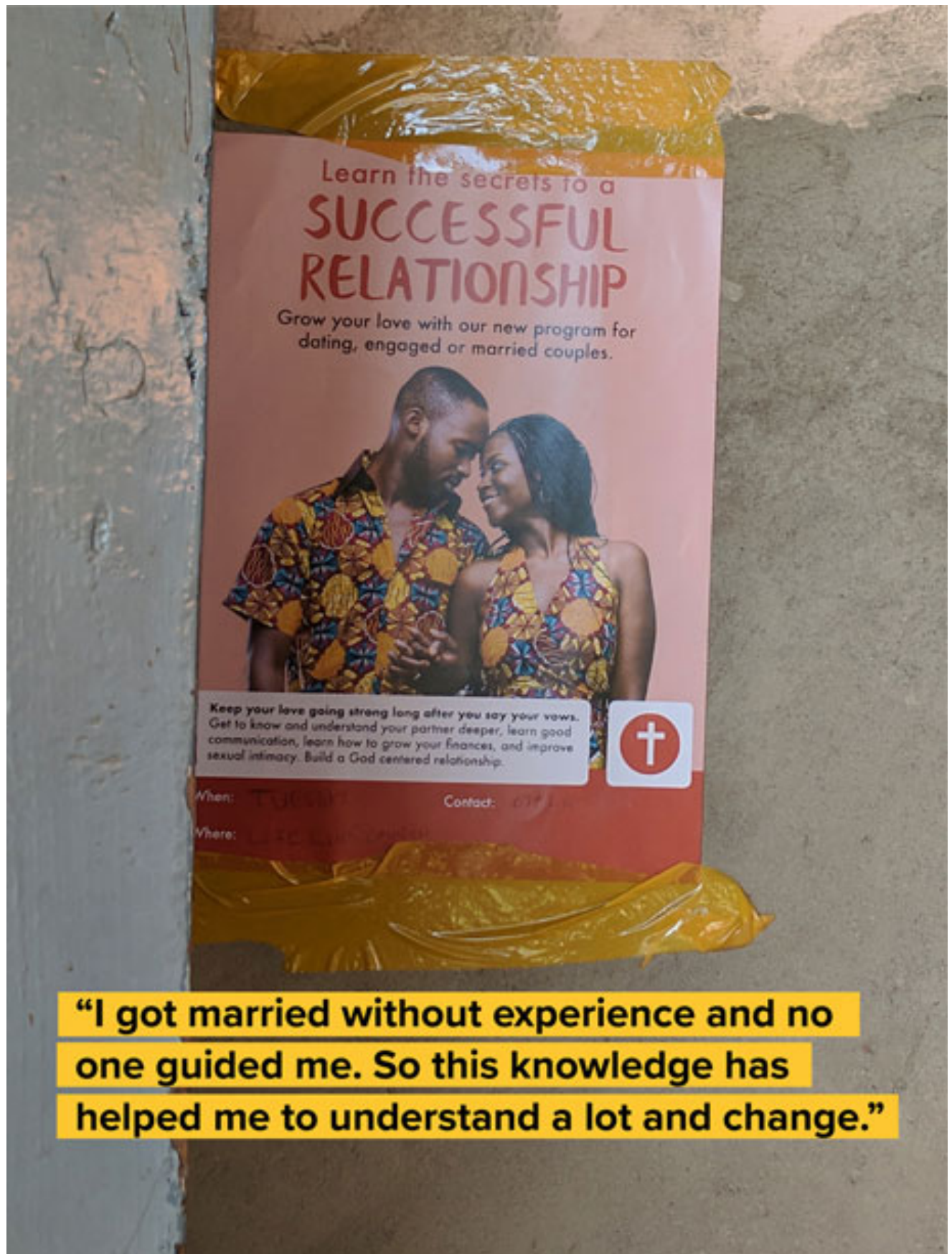


Image 6.1- FP recruitment flyer (Airbel Impact Lab, 2019)

Communication, therefore, did not reflect cultural assumptions of violence. Similarly, designers mentioned avoiding images of ‘couples fighting’ in their communications. For instance, MP’s programme used images of men smiling and connecting with other men, couples happy and connected (see FP’s example of this in Image 6.1), and pop culture imagery with, for example, sports references. In doing this, designers were paying close attention to the ideologies they wanted to communicate to their users (men) and appealing to their values. Designers shared that while these positive messages were being conveyed to men, the underlying fundamentals of their interventions were to prevent violence:

“So essentially our value proposition towards men is a program where they can acquire the tools and the skills to improve their relationships. The underlining objective is to change the behaviours that usually trigger violence in a relationship.” (MP(1)).

However, this came with its balance, and CP cautioned that these messages should not diminish the importance of addressing violence, and that they must continue to create awareness in the community about its prevalence: “there are certain behaviours that you shouldn’t have, without really saying that this is completely wrong.” (CP). Nevertheless, the success of implementing relatable messaging was evident in MP(1)’s account of the influx of people who joined their pilot:

“We found in our experiments that we got either men that are trying to save their relationships and really want to hold onto it because they’re going to lose it or men that are more preventive and they want to acquire the skills and learn from other men and other experiences to just to prevent fractures in their relationships.” (MP(1))

Besides designing tailored communications, designers also focused on how they could leverage existing spaces and networks to reach men:

- FP’s programme focused on working with religious leaders as couples might be more willing to engage in spaces they already are in;
- MP’s programme leveraged existing messaging tools, as this was a tool that men were likely to have already on hand, and accustomed to, making it more convenient;

- CP's programme aimed to mobilise communities to work together, where men would recruit their friends and colleagues into the programme.

Each needed to be designed with the specific context in mind. For instance, MP's programme initially took a similar approach to CP, where men would recruit others; however, this was unsuccessful:

“It didn't work because men don't talk to other men about their issues.  
There's not one man who can name 10 other men.” (MP(1))

By creating interventions that are aligned with men's availability, location, and interests, their willingness to participate may increase. However, this might mean those recruited were already willing to change:

“They're all relatively aware and it's opt in, so no-one's forced to be in the program. So you get men that are genuinely interested and are aware of the need to work on their relationship” (MP(1))

Thus, other strategies might be necessary for men who strongly align with patriarchal systems.

#### 6.3.3.2 Design created collective dialogues through critical reflection and action

When it came to prompting behavioural change, all designers aimed to foster collective dialogues. Men would do exercises either with partners or other men and/or reflect and discuss content related to addressing IPV together. This created a cycle of critical reflection and implementing alternative behaviours. This section will now expand on each of the projects' interactions to illustrate how these played out.

MP's intervention focused on hosting a messaging group with a professional facilitator. They focused on factors that contribute to retaining men's interest, such as offering a variety of engagement levels and allowing men to choose the time that suited them best. It aimed to invite men to practice alternative behaviours by conducting, for example, daily verbal exercises with their partners. Additionally, the facilitator would share content to encourage discussions among participants about what they learned from exercises and other relevant topics. Designers

(MP(1)(2)) shared that the combination of activities enabled men to question social behaviours and collectively deconstruct social norms. For example:

“We’re finding men are saying: Every time I want to have sex and my partner rejects me I actually feel really insecure and I think she’s cheating on me and now, after seeing this content in the program I actually know that that’s not the case, she’s rejecting me because she’s had a bad day at work.” (MP(1))

To complement this, they explored what dynamics would enable discussions between men.

During the piloting, they tested different approaches to explore what dynamic would stimulate discussions and learning, such as a small group of friends or 80 anonymous men. From here, they understood that 50 men who didn’t know each other was the perfect dynamic.

When piloting the programme, MP(1)(2) noticed that men valued the opportunity to build connections with one another and discuss personal issues:

“We offer them the option to use a pseudonym or being confidential and they (men) didn’t take it... They actually wanted to get to know other men, they want to be heard (...) the one thing that always comes up is that they want more closeness and more proximity out of the program” (MP(2)).

Yet, they highlighted that this comes with limitations: having a scalable model means this proximity to other men may be complicated to deliver. Equally, designers highlighted that there was a balance “between creating a space where men can be vulnerable but also setting boundaries within the group” (MP(1)). However, the designers observed that when men crossed boundaries and made sexist remarks, other men would challenge them, showing that the space could nurture peer mentorship.



Like the previous project, FP's programme is also implemented by a facilitator, in this case by a faith leader, to help guide the couples through exercises and content. To begin with, faith leaders would receive a physical guide and a tablet with videos on conducting sessions. This approach aimed to reduce training time and costs so that they could learn on their own accord. In the sessions, couples with their own guide (Image 6.2) would be taken through lessons to learn how to improve their communication skills with each other and practice alternative behaviours, from cooking to sexual pleasure at home.



Image 6.2- FP's guidebook (Airbel Impact Lab, 2019)

“The couples guide is an exemplary tool that helps couples remember what they learned and captures the couple’s growth through activities such as writing vows together and organizing actions that make each other feel loved.” (FP)

“The guide book and other materials showcase aspirational couple identities through vivid illustrations of Ugandan couples.” (Boyer et al., 2022).

FP discussed that the physical guide (the designed product) also aimed to shift the dynamics in the relationship and tap into people's embodied experience:

“Women traditionally sit on the floor and men sit in chairs, they rarely sit together. And we only gave one couple's guide, and that immediately meant that women needed to sit at the same level as their husband. So it's not just a



product, it was also changing the physical dynamics and experience of equality in the actual space, on a daily basis. What we heard from couples is this changed, “not just in how I behave, but the way I move. All of a sudden, I was moving with my partner. We were sitting at the same level.” (FP)

Comparatively, CP’s programme provided a curriculum-based programme for men to explore cultural norms and constructions of masculinity<sup>49</sup>. Unlike the other two projects, the focus was on mobilising men to make changes in their community. It aimed to address community influences that prevent men from implementing positive behaviours through exercises, role-playing and developing a dictionary. The aim was for men to consider what tasks they believed would be easy to implement and to do it as a group. Over time, once they felt confident in defending their behaviour, they could continue to do this on their own.

“What if, instead of you doing this alone, you do it in groups with your friends, and then the other men can’t say anything. So the group itself feels much stronger to protect or to defend why they are doing that (positive behaviours) than if they are doing alone.” (CP)

### 6.3.3.3 It requires including women too

While all designers mainly focused on changing men’s behaviours, the underlying goal was addressing women’s safety. Thus, engaging both men and women is vital to foster transformative change<sup>50</sup>. Moreover, while programmes are intended for relationships before abusive behaviours begin to emerge, risks and harm may still arise or be present.

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<sup>49</sup> According to internal reports

<sup>50</sup> Although the following account from offers a slight tangent in the discussions, it provides an interesting perspective on the effects of a programme that focused on separating partners, it outlines how when women’s intrinsic relationality to men is not considered, further harm may be experienced:

“one women was once telling us: ‘I don’t like what any of these NGO projects come to try to do here. My husband has been in jail for the past year and a half, and I miss him so much, I would prefer him to stay here with me. What’s purpose of him going to jail? Because the neighbours were judging him? He used to beat me a lot, but I miss that because it was the only way that I could get attention from him. So I really prefer him to be around, and sometimes being beaten. And I think it’s my fault. I prefer this then having him away from me. And I can’t work because he never allowed me, even when he was fired. So I don’t have money to eat. I need to take care of my children. My children are growing up without seeing the father.’ So the perspective

“And what we’ve been finding out is, you always need to engage both men and women, and they can’t only engage the person that suffers for it” (CP)

MP(1) reflected that initially, not considering women’s perspectives in the design increased the dropout rate. For the intervention to be successful, partners must collaborate and participate in it, too. However, MP(1) found that either women were reluctant or men joined the programme when their relationship was already fractured and their partners did not want to restore it.

“It’s mostly men that go in with the false expectations that they can still make the relationship work when ultimately it doesn’t” (MP(1))

Both FP and MP(1)(2), however, emphasised that there is also a need to be cautious about how the programmes are used in men’s relationships. They noted that they can be used to try and salvage a relationship or to bring a partner back into the relationship, falsely giving hope of change. MP(2) noted that while their intervention was not targeted at abusive relationships, it is still a reality for some who participated:

“We’re trying to learn how to manage like helping them fix a relationship when it should be fixed, but then also learning that some men are also at a point where they can’t save a relationship” (MP(2))

“You realise your program is being used as harmful bait.” (FP)

Therefore, thinking about risk and harm in prevention intervention is still central. FP remarked that:

“It’s not, *if* violence occurs during your program, it’s *when* violence occurs during your program and what resources you can provide women to mitigate it as much as possible.” (FP).

*When* not *if*- is a vital mental shift needed for this work. When piloting the project, MP’s organisation ensured that this was done in a controlled manner with GBV experts on board to help

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was always. I prefer having them around, no matter what. Having seen the consequences of referrals and it wasn’t even her referral it was from the neighbours.” (CP).

In this circumstance, the woman needs economic and emotional support to accompany any referrals and programme to support the person that enacts abuse.

support and establish a safety pathways protocol. This protocol ensured that men's and women's safety was centred. For example, if a man wrote harmful comments in the group chat, with the support of the GBV experts, they could send a correct response to invite them to reflect upon their behaviour, be vulnerable, and change their perspective without deterring them. Furthermore, during MP's pilot, they noticed men approaching the facilitators with mental health or past experiences of violence, and thus, their safety needed to be considered equally.

"A lot of men that participate have real tough issues. We've had men direct message the facilitators saying 'hey I'm having suicidal thoughts'." (MP(1)).

Centring the design on the relationships rather than solely on individuals can ensure that risk is foreseen and reduced, safe environments are fostered, and interventions are effective and respond to the relationship's needs. MP(1)(2) reflected that they needed to include women into the process better and understand from their perspective what they would like to get out of the intervention:

"What's the parallel stream for the women - what should we be talking to them about, what should they be discussing as women. As they go through this process." (MP(1))

"We will start speaking to women partners as well to get their perspectives because men usually say there's been like a positive impact on the relationships. And we learned that is maybe not the case, or maybe the case for some, but not the referral rate" (MP(2))

"The people that we actually want to protect and safeguard, which are women." (MP(2))

## 6.4 Case two implications



Joseph has been anxious about his relationship and wishes for things to improve, but he's unsure how to make changes. While searching for strategies online, he saw an advert stating that it could help him improve his relationship in 30 days. He joined a group of other men experiencing similar challenges. Through exercises with Grace, he has noticed that their communication has improved, leading to fewer arguments.

Box 6.3- Joseph joining a programme

The case report included anecdotes from designers about their experiences and processes in implementing design practices to prevent violence. As identified in the literature reviews in Chapters 2 and 3, focusing on those responsible for harm is understudied. Through this focus, instead of solving a problem, interventions aim to **prevent** the problem from occurring, providing a unique perspective of social design's application.

This section aims to present insights from a second round of analysis (see section 4.5) that identified common rationales guiding the methodological and practical implications presented in the case report. Here, five rationales were identified and illustrated in Figure 6.2. They represent common underlying reasons for the choices made in response to the circumstances of preventing IPV. Many of these rationales are deeply recognised in engaging men, particularly recognising men's agency to affect change and meeting men where they are (Dozois & Wells, 2020; Flood, 2019). This synergy across fields demonstrates how design adopts principles from other fields through engaging with these contexts (Dorst, 2015).



Figure 6.2- Rationales in case two

### 6.4.1 Designing with expertise

When engaging with men, designers adopted frameworks and combined principles from other fields (Eggleston & Noel, 2024) to design ethically and effectively (Lima, 2023). However, design principles that centre users' experiences still remained critical in IPV to develop engaging and cost-effective programmes. Designers did not change disciplines, leaving design knowledge and skills behind, but instead adapted and sought other disciplines and knowledge. Thus, by working with expertise they ensured a multifaceted approach to complex issues.

Expertise is built through continuous practice; thus, designers eventually developed their expertise in designing to prevent IPV (see section 6.4.1.2). This development was noticeable in discussions where designers who had worked longer in the field argued more confidently about the rights and wrongs of practice. In contrast, newer designers mentioned mistakes, learnings and stereotypes that were unearthed when working in IPV.

#### 6.4.1.1 Methodological implications

Designers discussed the importance of building on existing work in the field, acknowledging that design is not equipped to explore the prevalence of IPV but rather understand how to engage people in changing their situations. To do this, they worked with subject matter experts ranging from those who theorise about IPV - GBV experts - to people who work directly with couples – psychologists. These experts provided structural perspectives of the risks and experiences of men. Thus, designers did not enter these contexts with a beginner mindset (see section 3.1.3) but instead with a team that supported them to work safely and accountably (ethically).

Designers shared that their role during the design process was to facilitate the collaboration of multiple voices not only across disciplines but also with the communities. From here, they would contribute with a perspective on how to make effective changes that are contextual and desirable for the communities, turning these insights into a tangible form.

#### 6.4.1.2 Practical implications

Designers acknowledged the expertise they held from continuous practice to begin adapting programmes from region to region. This approach is quite top-down. However, designers still worked from the ground up, making them culturally specific, identifying values, norms, and characteristics, as well as community infrastructures and seeking input and leadership from the community. Previous knowledge from programmes became a framework to be adapted to the situational and contextual conditions.

The following rationales are examples of design expertise that contributes to engaging men, from re-centring men's experiences to developing low-engagement interventions.

### 6.4.2 Recognising men's agency to affect change

To design interventions, designers explored and accounted for how gender was constructed (section 6.4.2), performed (section 6.4.3), and reinforced (section 6.4.4). The following three rationales are deeply interrelated but presented separately to emphasise particular elements in

this work, from recognising men's agency to practising alternative behaviours to meeting men where they are.

Designers noted that men's perspectives have been widely dismissed in the field and worked to re-centre them. Here, in line with scholars (Wells et al., 2024; Dozois & Wells, 2020; Flood, 2018; Carlton et al., 2015), they recognised men's role and agency to affect change – recognising that all have the potential to change (see section 6.1.2). This rationale focuses on disrupting judgmental or patronising perspectives of men. Instead, designers should foster open and agentic attitudes, in line with desire-based framings (see section 3.4.3), and spaces for meaningful conversations with men. It recognises that men have a lot to gain from preventing violence; however, if their perspective is not taken into account, programmes can trigger shame and resistance.

#### 6.4.2.1 Methodological implications

Involving men in research aimed to explore the constructions of gender in their given context, as well as their behaviours and attitudes. Designers explored men's values, daily lives, and attitudes towards relationships. By cooperating with men, men reflected on the norms they were shaped by and surfaced what it means to be a man. Yet, designers still held what Bellini (2021) called a healthy degree of scepticism in their work, acknowledging that men tend to underrepresent violence in their lives. Designers critically examined men's behaviours as social enactments of norms, prompting men to reflect and reconstruct them. Thus, their constructions of events were subject to temporal change during research involvement (Bellini, 2021).

All designers recognised how the design process can positively impact men and started to shift their attitudes. In line with Flood (2013), designers, through their research engagements, are already starting the conversation and prompting men to reflect on their involvement in harmful structures—thus making personal changes. Hence, there is potential for change at every moment.

#### 6.4.2.2 Practical implications

Communication and outreach were vital when recruiting men or couples to the programmes. Instead of criminalising men as perpetrators, which illustrates men as violent, designers focused on the benefits men will gain from participating, for instance, reconnecting with their partners. Equally, through the messages and images designers developed and used, they communicated a visionary perspective of ending violence through healthy relationships between men and women (their partners) while still accounting for the structural elements of this work, speaking to where men (and women) want to go.

#### 6.4.3 Reflecting and rehearsing alternative behaviours

Designers recognised that programmes were predominantly curriculum-based, required long-term input from men, and thus were not cost-effective, focusing on mindset changes rather than behavioural changes. Instead, designers developed low-engagement-based interventions, which are short-term programmes in existing spaces, separate from NGOs, and focus on behavioural changes. Norms are performed and learnt through interactions between men and women and the broader communities; thus, designers prompted men to reflect on their behaviours and rehearse alternatives. In these circumstances, men are giving up their privilege and former conditions for new behaviours and ways of being. Thus, they may be resistant to changes

##### 6.4.3.1 Methodological implications

While this rationale more closely refers to the practical elements of changing behaviours through interventions, it is still important to consider during the design process as involving women is often under-recognised. Essentially, the fundamental goal of an intervention is to ensure their safety. Designers reflected the need for women to still be centred in the process as, as partners, they will be affected by it. Further work must examine their involvement, especially in interventions focused on men rather than couples. For instance, this may include working alongside feminist IPV organisations to align priorities.



#### 6.4.3.2 Practical implications

Each intervention focused on creating a dialectical space where men could rethink their attitudes and implement positive behaviours through engaging with their partners, other men and/or content. Designers nurtured a space for exploring, listening, reflecting, disputing, and rehearsing other ways of being that could support non-violent relations between men and women. In these design approaches, the interactions took place within the designed space and, for some, in their personal lives, where men would conduct exercises at home. Thus, change aimed to happen through a daily habits. Combined with the previous rationale, designers did not define how 'change' would play out in relationships but allowed users to explore what 'change' could be for themselves. Healthy masculinities are not a fixed phenomenon to achieve but rather an ongoing negotiation with the circumstances.

These designed spaces of engagement have a dual purpose; while engaging men in practising positive behaviours in their relationships, they also provide a space to connect and talk with other men going through similar issues. Masculinities operate through relations with others. Thus, focusing on interpersonal and community levels makes change a mutual process rather than solely enacted by an individual.

#### 6.4.4 Engaging men where they are in their lives

Interested in how harmful norms are reinforced and influenced, designers examined communities and institutions. In line with Jewkes et al. (2015), an ecological approach explores the factors that uphold social norms in various environments and, where applicable, the institutions and infrastructures that can support change. Thus, designers focused not only on changing individuals' behaviours but also on shifting their environments alongside them, which can play a significant role in enabling change. Institutions and infrastructures also serve as spaces where men interact naturally. This focus allowed for interventions to be managed and sustained by the community (Dozois & Wells, 2020), reaching large groups of men and embedded into their daily lives, thus potentially overcoming resistance.

#### 6.4.4.1 Methodological implications

Rather than focusing on exploring experiences of abuse, designers were concerned with understanding the community's perceptions of abuse and GBV concepts. They explored what meaning was attributed to the topic and if men's communities had existing terms or language to describe GBV related concepts like consent or respect.

Besides this, in order to reach men, considering who would implement the interventions was critical to understand how programmes could be facilitated and whether those who would implement the programmes also had to undergo shifts in attitudes and behaviours. Thus, working with leaders and facilitators as collaborators and key relationship-builders was a focus for designers. Furthermore, considering changes to attitudes and behaviours also extended to the designers themselves, to critically reflect on their assumptions and biases and whether they are willing to implement the transformative behaviours they call for.

#### 6.4.4.2 Practical implications

It is possible to see that underlying all interventions were similar goals of reducing risk factors for violence - understanding each other's pleasures, learning to communicate, and navigating their emotions. Yet, how each programme got there completely varied, being contextually situated in a way that made it personal to men but also culturally relevant. Designers mobilised religious institutions and the community to collectivise and fostered communities in messaging apps. Other spaces could include workplaces, sports clubs, and online sites where men engage, such as Reddit or gaming. By leveraging these existing systems, designers met **men where they are in their lives rather than where they wanted them to be.**

Although these programmes focused on interpersonal behaviour, with minimal behavioural impact, they had scalable potential to reach a wide range of people. They aimed to foster environments and conditions where change could happen through activities and conversations. Men, thus, were not obliged to participate in these programmes, but targeting issues men were

already concerned with (see section 6.4.2) and hosting these in supportive or existing spaces reduced barriers and created desirable and low-effort spaces.

### 6.4.5 Potential risks from changing behaviours

Regardless of the approach being taken, harm may always be a reality in communities. Besides focusing on women's safety, designers also considered potential risks to men when changing their behaviours. This can include mental health, rejection and violence.

#### 6.4.5.1 Methodological implications

During research, designers centred the potential risk to women who have experienced abuse. They implemented strategies such as having experts on call and counselling or choosing low-risk methods such as engaging the community while still addressing their research objectives. Many of which are in line with TID strategies in section 3.3.2. What stood out, however, was that in these conversations, TID was not mentioned. This omission could be due to the fact they are working before violence occurs; however, as recognised by designers, men had their own experiences of violence, and thus, adopting TID practices may be beneficial. Yet, the designer still approached the context with sensitivity and support from experts, ensuring safety protocols were in place, in keeping with TID practices.

#### 6.4.5.2 Practical implications

Risks of harm emerged during interventions when men participated in programmes while their relationships were already fractured. Other situations included using the intervention as a harmful bait to rebuild relationships. However, designers did not discuss strategies to mitigate this, and further research should explore this.

Another potential risk prevalent in these interventions was related to changes in men's behaviours. While also not directly discussed with designers, the data illustrates that rehearsing behavioural change together in the community, starting with small-scale domesticated changes, means that they can explore community reactions in small doses. For instance, MP noted how

men would challenge sexist remarks in group sessions. Through changing behaviours alongside other men, designers were also supporting larger groups or communities to change alongside them.

## **6.5 Chapter summary**

This chapter focused on interventions aimed at preventing IPV by engaging men. It outlined how rooted in this work is dismantling masculinities that align with patriarchal structures. By focusing on social interactions that enact and reinforce harmful norms, gender relations and behaviours may change. However, this does not come without challenges, as men must give up their positions of privilege. The data outlines how designers responded to these circumstances. They noted how design process' focused on surfacing social norms and their interventions shifted norms through collective practices. These insights outline a social design that works before the problem occurs, but it also acknowledges that violence is still an ongoing societal practice. The chapter concluded with five rationales that capture design practices that engage men. The rationales argue that while designers are adapting and working with expertise, they are building design expertise in IPV in the process. Chapter 7 will now compare the findings across Chapters 5 and 6. It will synthesise and compare themes across both and discuss how this may respond to gaps identified in the literature.

# Chapter 7. A design to address IPV

## Chapter overview

Chapters 5 and 6 examined two case studies focused on (1) response and recovery and (2) prevention. These case studies presented an in-depth exploration of varied projects, their processes, and designers' reflections. Each concludes with rationales underpinning design practice. As this thesis focuses on studying design practice and its common patterns across different contexts rather than focusing on isolated events, this chapter will begin by conducting a cross-case analysis. Separated into framing the problem, design process, and outcome, it identifies similarities and differences across both cases, consolidating a practice in IPV contexts. Thus, this section will begin to clarify design's role in addressing IPV.

From the analysis, the thesis identifies that designing within IPV contexts did not require new methodologies to be created, but rather, designers adapted methodologies to contextual priorities. It argues that central to this is a shift in designers' mindsets, challenging their perspectives and responsibilities and building expertise. These insights indicate that each moment in the design process is influential.

The findings across chapters in this thesis indicate a gap in research that influences design decisions toward priorities central to IPV circumstances. Principles are knowledge explanations that can articulate design knowledge and communicate practice, thus becoming an adequate research outcome to contribute to the design field. The thesis concludes by presenting six principles that capture a design addressing IPV. These include **critical awareness, supportive care, relational focus, dialogical engagement, encouragement, and making visible**.

## 7.1 Cross-case analysis procedure overview

The cross-case analysis aimed to analyse patterns in design practice. It reviews the findings from the two case studies, comparing their similarities and differences, and explore common themes and gaps across both while conversing with the literature insights. As noted by Eisenhardt (1989), tying the findings back to existing literature enhances its generalisability. Thus, section 7.2 revisits the frames, processes, and outcomes in each case studies and the findings and gaps identified in the literature reviews (Chapter 2 and 3). Combined, these insights indicated that part of this adaptation is not adopting new methods or tools from other disciplines or developed in response to the combination of design and IPV, but rather shifting designers' mindsets. Thus, the designers themselves and their experiences are more closely explored in section 7.3. To capture this shift in mindset into an output that may be applicable to designers practice, principles are offered as an orienting mindset to guide designers through this shift (section 7.4).

The initial findings from the cross-case analysis were then presented back to the participants (and new recruitments) for validation and exploration. The second stage of the research study (see section 4.2.2), consisted of a workshop and several interviews, where data was collected on their reactions and thoughts to the initial principles presented (Appendix D.1), Figure 7.1. The insights and anecdotes derived from these activities are incorporated into sections 7.2 and 7.3 and led to the principles being revisited and presented in 7.4. Table 7.1 lists the participants involved in stage two and their corresponding ID codes, which this chapter will reference.

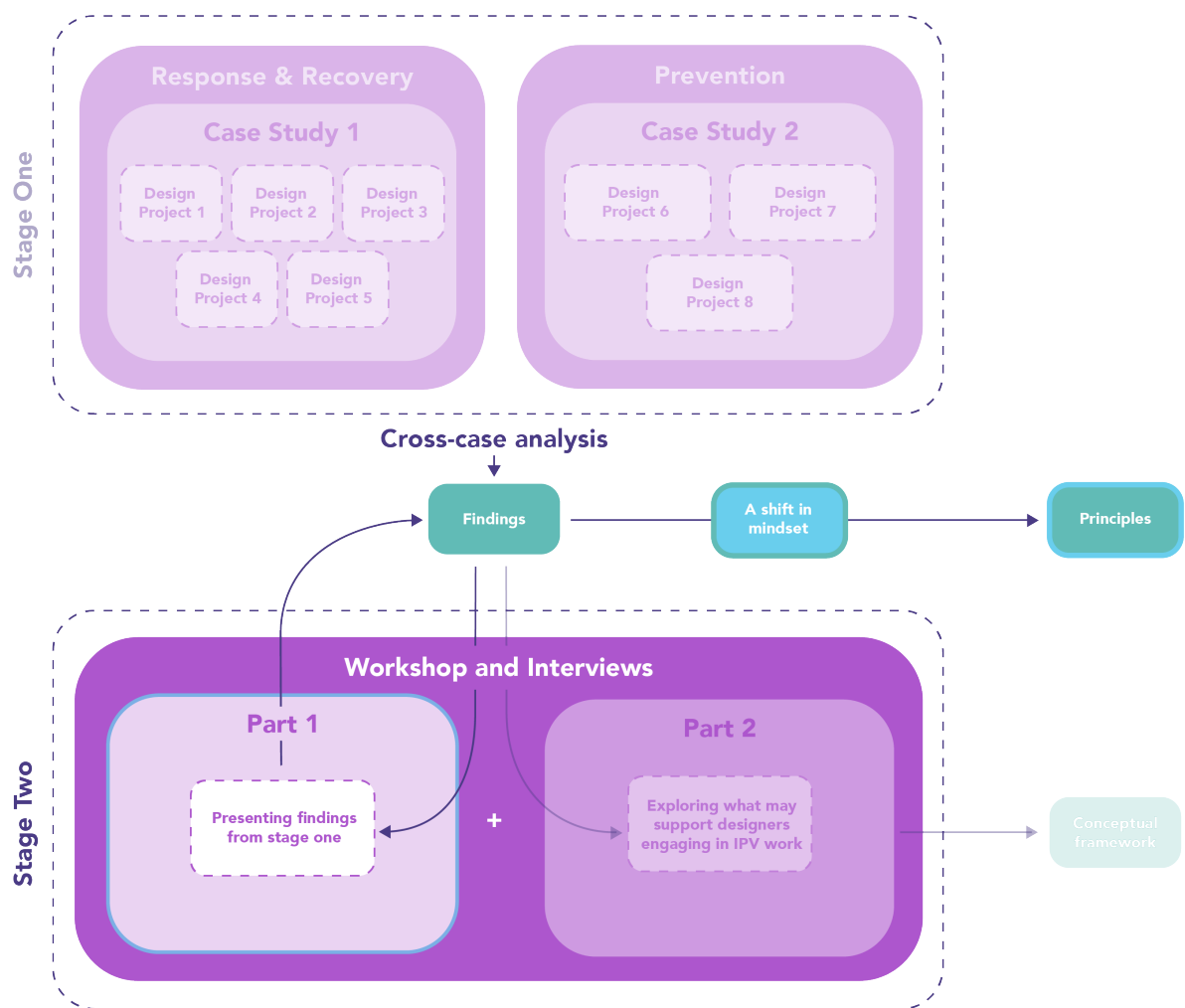


Figure 7.1- Stage two procedure

Table 7.1- Stage two participant ID codes

Project Identification Description	ID Code	Case Study Allocation
Messaging_Prevention	MP(2)	Case Study 2: Prevention
Faith-based_Prevention (Rachel Lehrer)	FP	Case Study 2: Prevention
Abuse-Recovery	AR(1)	Case Study 1: Response and Recovery
Collectivity_prevention	CP	Case Study 2: Prevention

Prevention_designer	PD	-
GBV_design_researcher	GDR	-
LGBTQIA+_support	QS	Case Study 1: Response and Recovery
Abuse-Recovery	AR(2)	-

## 7.2 Two cases, one vision

Chapter 3 highlighted a gap in understanding the rationale behind the design process to address IPV (see section 3.3). While the findings across Chapters 5 and 6 begin to address this gap – Figure 7.2 – section 2.5.2 noted how current understandings of design roles remain fragmented into specific contexts. Studying design applications to address IPV as part of a continuum of interventions where one impacts the next<sup>51</sup> may instead reveal common practices and how priorities may differ.

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<sup>51</sup> For instance, working with men aims to reduce abuse and thus less pressure on crisis response interventions.



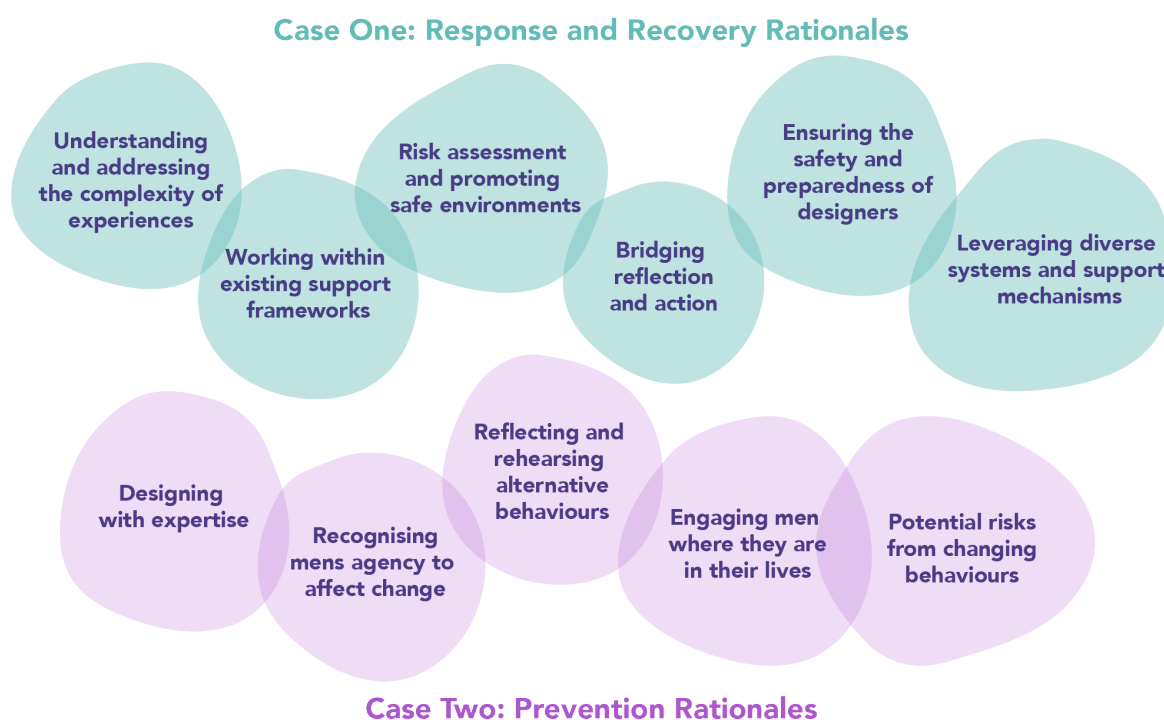


Figure 7.2- Case one and two rationales

## 7.2.1 Frames

Across the case studies, frames underpinning each project varied based on their approach and cultural contexts. While each of these projects had different users in mind - including professionals, bystanders, women experiencing abuse, LGBTQIA+ individuals, people enacting abuse, and men – all focused on creating conditions where people who are most at risk of experiencing abuse can live safely and thrive.

All interventions were responding to identified gaps in IPV provisions. Response and recovery interventions targeted gaps in existing support routes and aimed to provide accessible information on IPV dynamics. Prevention approaches focused on developing interventions tailored for men due to a lack of contextually relevant and desirable options. Both approaches target locations people frequently visit, such as places of worship and high-street stores. Additionally, response interventions are more aligned with existing infrastructures that address the impacts of IPV, such as healthcare clinics.

Finally, what stood out when comparing the case study projects was their global distribution, with response and recovery interventions mainly in the Global North, while prevention efforts were in the Global South. Bacchus et al. (2024) highlighted that low- and medium-income countries have fewer specialised healthcare providers and face stigma around mental illnesses. Ana Flavia d’Olivera (in UNICEF Innocenti, 2024) argued that high-income countries resist changing their gender and social norms, whereas low-income countries lack financial resources to support victims. These frame illustrates how design interacts with the external environments (Julier & Kimbell, 2019), shaping its role in IPV.

Overall, what this illustrates is a need for more knowledge sharing across interventions, where Global North projects take inspiration from the Global South—which Flood (in Burrell & Ruxton, 2023) notes is where the best work in engaging men is happening. This is further explored in Chapter 8.

## 7.2.2 Design research

Research is critical to inform contextually led interventions when designing to address IPV. In Chapter 3, two knowledge gaps were identified: (1) how intimate harm affects design research and (2) rationales behind the design process that inform designers on how they might address IPV. This section will begin to address these gaps. A combination of both leads to a third critical question aligned with Ellsberg and Heise (2002) and Bellini et al. (2023): research should be treated as an intervention.

### 7.2.2.1 Intimate harm in research

Across the cases all designers acknowledged and considered the potential harm caused by their research; in line with discussions on research harm (Bellini et al., 2023) in Chapter 3. Specifically, the harm that may arise from abusive partners or experiences of trauma. Across both cases, designers emphasised that designers should not rely on IPV organisations to adapt research methodologies in these contexts.

When considering potential implications in research activities, designers considered three forms of intimate harm: the harm from partners, personal experiences, and the closely acquainted community. While engaging men's approaches specifically mentioned community influences, it applies to other cases where community norms surrounding relationships and support may prevent people from reaching support. Thus, intimate harm is not static but shaped by the cultural context. This conceptualisation is especially true in contexts where experiences of abuse overlap with other forms of harm. FP highlighted that users can interpret intimate harm and its significance differently worldwide:

“a lot of what we call trauma, is just people’s daily experience. And so we go into a situation and we’re like “oh you must be so traumatised” and people are like “oh that’s not even violence” you know, “I don’t call that violence, that’s just my situation (...) our perspective is not the perspective of a lot of our clients and people we design for. There was a programme where afterwards the rates of violence went up. Because people were like oh that is violence, oh that is part of my experience. No one wants to be self-identified as a survivor, or a victim, or trauma person in these contexts. It’s just another layer to add to this that it is important for us to understand that but understand that in a lot of situations it’s not their identity.” (FP)

To foster participant safety, a combination of what Bellini et al. (2023) noted as high-risk and low-risk methods was used, with the vast majority focusing on low-risk methods. High-risk methods directly engage those experiencing abuse; however, in this case, due to the lack of safety consideration in design, this research also considers lived experiences of abuse. Designers who adopted these methods had integrated lived experience forums into their organisation. As well as, MP when evaluating their pilot.

Conversely, low-risk methods are potentially safer, where alternative methods are explored to answer the research goals (Bellini et al., 2023) (see section 7.2.2.2). Designers implemented these by involving proxies – individuals with relations to those with lived experiences. These included working with communities and professionals. Otherwise, some designers used indirect methods (forums) or indirect recruitment by maintaining open recruitment catchments to attract a broader range of participants (including those who do not self-identify with experiences of abuse).

Regardless of the selected risk level of methods, designers still implemented measures to support individuals in self-managing their risks. Interestingly, only two designers from the same project, AR, mentioned TID<sup>52</sup>. This lack of adoption may be due to it being a relatively new practice or as designers were implementing approaches before violence occurs. However, the strategies outlined in these case studies, such as implementing exit buttons on surveys, acknowledging the boundaries of their practices and working in partnership with professionals, are similar to those of TID (see section 3.2.3.1). Thus, there is a direct correlation between designing in IPV and TID practices. However, it extends beyond ensuring participant safety to understanding the structural experiences of violence and their impacts, i.e. how that affects how they interpret their experiences – more closely related to TVIC<sup>53</sup> (Wathen & Varcoe) (explored further in section 7.2.2.2).

#### 7.2.2.2 Research goals to understand how to address IPV

Cross-analysing the cases reveals common research objectives. These projects aimed to understand the mechanisms and factors that affect experiences of IPV rather than assessing its prevalence or enactment. Additionally, they sought to use this understanding to inform the adaptation of interventions. Based on the findings, it was evident that designers were aiming to explore the interplay between individual experiences and behaviours and the broader social structures that influence them: (1) perceptions of abuse, (2) behaviours (reaching support or social practices) and how they are constrained and influenced by social structures, e.g. norms; (3) understanding who will implement interventions. Using 'thinking structurally' (see section 2.3), it is evident that designers are surfacing the structures.

Thus, they were interested in understanding factors that influence abuse and individuals' capabilities and agency to change their situations. For instance, what are their motivations for participating in a violence prevention programme, or what information can support people in questioning their experiences? Designers involved individuals and community members to

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<sup>52</sup> Trauma-informed design (TID)

<sup>53</sup> Trauma and violence- informed care (TVIC)

understand situational factors, as well as subject matter experts to provide structural insights into these factors. This approach indicates designers adopted what Bellini (2021) called a healthy degree of scepticism—informing the individuals' experiences with macro understandings.

Across both cases, language and the exchange of perceptions were unpacked. Language served as a tangible and visual material to support designers in visualising the context. How is abuse communicated – walking on eggshells – how is respect understood – a gendered expectation of service? Especially when working with men, it was essential to visualise social norms and understand people's daily experiences, which were not of concern in recovery and response efforts, possibly due to the focus on masculinities as a daily social practice.

Finally, another goal mainly discussed in prevention and by RS<sup>54</sup> was using research to understand how to adapt a design to another context. This in itself changes the forms of conversations people have, but exploring the aforementioned factors, such as perceptions and constructions of experiences, was still critical.

#### 7.2.2.3 Research as an intervention

The design processes analysis has indicated that shaping research design is a mindset of balancing recognising the potential impact of their activities and the necessary route to achieve research goals. Ellsberg and Heise (2002) and Bellini et al. (2023) argued that 'research should be treated as an intervention' – that it can have positive and negative impact on participants. These authors framed this statement from the perspective of potential risks of re-traumatisation to participants or researchers experiencing vicarious trauma during research. These were equally true for designers. However, this took on a different meaning in case two, where designers noted how through men conversations and activities with men they'd prompt them to reflect on their involvement in harmful structures (Flood, 2013), thus beginning to make personal changes.

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<sup>54</sup> Intervention in response

### 7.2.3 Design outcome:

Chapter 3 identified a gap in understanding what considerations, beyond user safety, are critical to addressing IPV; therefore, understanding common practices are necessary. The review also identified a need for design frames that move beyond deficit-based ones, especially in IPV. From these gaps in knowledge, the following sections explore intimate harm in the context of outcomes, interventions as processes, and how they support communication and envision alternative futures. Although each intervention was distinct, they all shared notable similarities.

#### 7.2.3.1 Intimate harm in outcomes

In Chapter 3, intimate harm was described as the result of artefact interactions that enable harm from a partner. This concern was prevalent across all interventions, and they acknowledged that while risk must be mitigated, a design will not eradicate all harm. Thus, as stated by FP, it is not **if** violence happens but **when** having the resources and processes ready.

In discussing the ‘exit this page’ button (section 3.4.4), the thesis argued that research should explore common characteristics of IPV designs. Each intervention demonstrated how designers approached safety differently depending on who became the user and their situation. In response and recovery, it was a combination of obscuring the interface, offering resources to understand online safety, and implementing processes to leave no trace. While prevention designers acknowledged safety, these weren’t discussed even though designers might have developed mitigations.

However, as mentioned in section 7.2.2.1, intimate harm also included aspects of harm from the community. It was visible, especially in prevention, that designers considered this by including the community in the intervention as users where they would together rehearse and, in some cases, collectivise. Similarly, response and recovery included those who may enact harm as potential users of the designs. However, in this case, designers aimed to actively implement measures that reduced their likelihood of interacting with designs. This strategy was less of a concern in prevention, as partners were often actively involved in most cases.

### 7.2.3.2 Interventions as process'

Across the interventions, it was possible to see how, like Kaba and Ritchie's (2022) conceptualisation of safety, designers focused on developing processes that built relationships and resources. These designs did not victimise or criminalise people but acknowledged them as agents who can make choices and applicable changes to their lives. Designers recognised the stages individuals may be in, either in abusive situations (see section 5.1.1) or in their lives (e.g., just married).

All interventions focused on building dialogues between people and/or within themselves – in line with shifts noted in the literature review of design and violence work (Gamman & Bailey, 2022; Mazzarella & Schuster, 2022) (see section 3.4.4). Interventions focusing on designing for people experiencing/recovering from abuse were concerned with individual dialogues, cognitively engaging people to reflect critically, and, through this, create action-oriented strategies. Interventions looking at prevention with men developed collective dialogues with other men and/or their partners, incentivising men to critically reflect, rethink, and implement alternative behaviours through exercises and content. While case one primarily focused on individual dialogues and case two on collective dialogues, a response intervention (RS) also aimed to build collective dialogues by supporting professionals and bystanders to have the confidence to discuss abuse dynamics with people they might think are experiencing it.

These dialogues also extended beyond the interventions into users' personal and (potentially) community lives. By focusing on supporting users to build action-oriented strategies, the intervention has no time limit, where continuous engagements soon sediment into new relations. Whether with themselves, their past experiences, or their current and previous partners. Overall, these interventions did not dictate how the behaviour change would occur. They did not solve problems by nudging people's behaviours. Instead, designers developed conditions, a rehearsal space, where the user could explore what change could look like for them, adapting it to their circumstances and contexts. This perspective particularly resonated with AR(2) when sharing the preliminary findings:

“I love this idea that it's about creating the conditions, or the knowledge, or the confidence, or whatever it is for the person to change things on their own, rather than like steaming in and being like “you need our thing””

(AR(2))

Change is and will always be contained within those who interact with the designs themselves.

This aspect of creating conditions is particularly visible through FP's choice of providing one guide to disrupt gendered power imbalances. Online and physical spaces are highly gendered, thus reimagining these environments may further influence gendered norms that shaped IPV.

### 7.2.3.3 Communicating futures

The interventions did not confine people to their past; instead, they supported them in implementing the necessary processes to reach their desired futures. In a way, all interventions modelled other relations and made visible a world where healthy relationships occur, and abusive situations can be changed.

A noticeable pattern across the cases was the attention to communication and outreach. For response and recovery, designers considered getting the product into users' hands without promoting it to perpetrators, i.e., by leveraging incidental interactions. Another consideration was to design communications that encouraged users to recognise they were on the correct landing page and prompt them to continue seeking support, using positive and inclusive language like 'domestic abuse is not your fault' and 'start your healing journey'. In prevention, it focused on the positive benefits men will gain by participating in interventions. For instance, designers would focus on reaching men in frequently accessed spaces and speaking to the issues they were experiencing – i.e. relationships.

Furthermore, across interventions, visual media was critically used. IPV visuals may often depict people with bruises, someone screaming at their partner or a person in emotional distress.

However, many of the images people used did not reflect that. Instead, it was often images of joy or serenity – communicating where people wanted to go rather than where they were. In



contrast, 'LGBTQIA+' had both images of joy and distress. These can be considered visions of other ways of being and communicating that possibilities for change are possible.

The cross-case analysis findings indicate that the implications did not require the creation of new methodologies to support designers in their work in these areas. Designers still applied similar methodologies to social design, such as journey mapping, focus groups, interviews, and designed websites and areas to gather. Instead, designers approached these with a different mindset, which was accompanied by particular rationales, some of which reflected the IPV field.

### **7.3 A shift in designers' mindset**

This section focuses on the critical reflections of participating designers (see section 7.1), detailing 'who is doing what to whom' (Suchman, 2002). As noted above there was a demonstrated shift in the implementations of methods and tools, which was guided by different priorities, beliefs, and process' - designers mindset. AR(2) noted how this was equally true for TID practices, too, applying the same methods and tools but changing them to fit the contexts:

“one of the things I really appreciate about trauma-informed ways of working is that it doesn't require us as designers to learn whole new methodologies. It just requires us to change the methodologies that we use, so that they're more caring and more careful. If we weren't allowed to use interviews anymore or surveys, we'd be in a very different position. So I think that's a really nicely articulated insight”

Designing in IPV contexts is a balance between introspectively thinking about how the practice will play out in context and being intentional and direct with each design choice. Designers did not make decisions to “see what happens” but rather because they knew “what might happen.”. Therefore, it wasn't the method that changed but the knowledge, skills, and behaviours that surround how that method is implemented. For instance, conducting an interview, but thinking about how a particular question might affect the participant, or how the participants understanding of abuse might affect their interpretation of accounts.

To deepen an understanding of designers mindsets the following sections will begin by exploring the backstory of how designers began working in this area. Following this, it explores identified themes from the analysis on necessary changes, where designers focused on responsibility, care, and learning.

### 7.3.1 Stories of how the designers got into IPV work:

This section will explore how designers began working in IPV. Following the data collection and analysis, the researcher reached out to them via email, asking to share the following: how they got into the work and whether they see this as long-term for them? Two key themes emerged from their stories, with each designer fitting into each category: (1) a job within IPV emerged either through opportunities provided in their existing workplace or (2) by chance. The following stories expand on theme (2):

“For me it was a bit of an accident. I had switched from 5 years in commercial tech to working in the non-profit space, and it just so happened that at [organisation] worked in gender based violence. I do think it could be long-term work for me because I am passionate about the mission and have gathered a lot of subject matter expertise.” (AR(1))

“To be honest, I got into it because there was a work opportunity to do human-centred design for an NGO. I managed to stay on the IPV project for more than 6 years, so I got a lot of experience-based expertise in IPV. This work led to more work in IPV, but in other areas as well (e.g. education, children, livelihoods). For the long-term, I won't specialize in IPV though I might keep doing IPV work - I prefer to be a generalist because I care about many social causes equally and love the ability to sense patterns across different problem areas.” (PC)

“I started working for the private sector for a large business in the innovation area and they did cultural transformation projects and I happen to be assigned to a project that had to do with sexual harassment. (...) It was very much through a private sector lens. So everything was very linked to HR or legal processes. After that, I saw a job post about [project], that was piloting so I felt like it made sense, having come from the latest project in sexual harassment.” (MP(2))

The others were motivated to engage in this work due to a combination of professional experiences in related fields (1). This background quickly enabled them to transition into work involving IPV, which they were personally connected to through their own experiences or close friends' experiences.

“I was interested in research exploring [how] LGBTQIA+ individuals experiences of IPV as I had known from personal and professional experiences that this is a significant and pervasive issue. I am generally passionate about LGBTQIA+ health and well-being, and related systemic issues. I am queer and so I wear multiple hats in this space, ultimately leading to my commitment to this research and work. When I saw the ad for [Project] I thought it would be a great opportunity to apply my skills and learn more about this area and contribute to the development of resources that will directly benefit LGBTQIA+ [in Country].” (QS)

“I started developing works on gender equality in my master's thesis, and it was natural to think of a research project focused on gender-based violence, mainly because it is a central problem that prevents women from thriving. Unfortunately, some personal issues drove me to this subject. I had a friend who suffered from intimate partner violence, and I always felt useless when I remembered this tragic story. Hence, I decided to give some contribution to this phenomenon.” (GDR)

These stories demonstrate the potential for building opportunities for coincidental ways of engaging in IPV projects or for people to ‘pay it forward’ with their own experiences, which, as mentioned in section 3.3.2.1, can be beneficial for individuals with prior experiences. This approach might open up new routes and expand the design's role. However, given its obscurity as a field of work in design, it can be challenging to find these opportunities; as noted by MP(2):

“I would love to keep working in that field. I don't know if there's a job market? To be honest, I feel like they find you. If they do exist. I don't know if there is an active type of profile they're hiring for. If it is, then I would love to, but I'm not sure it's a reality.”(MP(2))

### 7.3.2 Designers responsibility to the process & contexts

Lima (2023) highlighted the need for designers to take greater responsibility for the impacts that become possible through their designs (section 3.1.3). Responsibility is vital in IPV due to the potential harm resulting from ill-informed design decisions. Through discussions with designers across the cases, there was a sense of responsibility to adapt their approaches and themselves to better account for users' safety and well-being. AR(1) noted how:

“I find that with a lot of the designers I've been working with that there's a lot more personal investment in making sure that this process is done right. I think it's good that we're taking that individual responsibility. I think that's probably the right level of severity that we need to take when talking about these subjects.” (AR(1))

A topic like IPV is not a topic many designers will work on. As noted in section 7.3.1, it often comes from a personal drive or existing work. However, through working on the topic, responsibility is established, where designers slow down their processes. PC noted how design is often executed quickly through embedded practices such as design sprints and agile working. However, in the Global South context she was working in, she was met with pushback to slow down, to go at the participant's pace, and at the speed at which relationships were built as opposed to forcing the timeline. She commented that working on sensitive topics changed the way she perceived how design needs to be done – building a greater responsibility to consider the process deeply.

### 7.3.3 Designers self-care

Section 3.3.4 outlined the harm researchers might face in these contexts – through vicarious trauma or re-traumatisation. Across the cases, there were a few designers who had experienced abusive situations or knew people who had. Designers working on response and recovery interventions frequently observed that their teams often included individuals with lived experiences of abuse or those from the same community (LGBTQIA+). However, this approach was not reflected as prominently in prevention efforts. This difference could be due to people with

experiences of abuse wanting to 'give back to others in similar circumstances as them' (section 3.3.2.1). On the prevention side, most designers worked in consultancies.

#### 7.3.4 The learning designer:

Some designers shared how while designing they constantly checked their biases, language, and assumptions. Thus, due to dominant ideologies in this space, there is a need to engage in this work through constant critical self-reflection. Collaborating with subject experts in the field also meant that deflections were exposed. However, they noted that designers should not lean on others to do their work. Instead, they recognised the required learning and took appropriate action, such as attending courses, volunteering and reading around the subject.

It was evident that designers were heavily committed to this work, that there was particular personal investment where transformation could occur from entering this work. However, this process takes time, and designers in common organisational structures might not have the time or space, and sometimes barriers. AR(2) shared how:

"Unless we do courses on like ethical design and inclusive design, we're not necessarily going to show up in organizations and be that designer that can think in that transformative way. We might first need to work in an organization that holds those values. And then we change, it's not us that make the organization. For instance for me they had trauma-informed values and then you learn how to be that way in your own design and research.

But it would be an interesting to explore who's setting the tone for that caring mindset because oftentimes I'm hearing from designers that their senior managers are not giving them time, space and budget to do the work properly. So they're trying to do it on their own. But they don't know all the answers, either to do good work.

It's always about getting the project finished as fast as you can. Where do you change your mindset? If you're always working a million miles an hour."  
(AR(2))

As Bellini et al. (2023) noted, there is an invisible labour in implementing safety practices that needs to be supported by their institutions. To do this work, as mentioned in section 7.3.3, takes time, where one builds expertise through learning and practising.

### **7.3.5 To be an expert designer informed by IPV or not?**

In 7.3.1, with designers' stories regarding how they got into IPV work, they emphasised how they gained subject matter expertise through working in this area. Whether or not designers needed this was a debate among them. Some designers saw themselves needing to dedicate themselves to IPV to become experts. Recognising that political work requires long-term thinking. Others saw their lack of expertise on the topic as a strength as it put them in the space of the unknown and needed to engage with the community.

Overall, most understood their role as facilitators, making ideas tangible through design. However, this lack of expertise contradicts what has been noted throughout this doctoral research. While the designer cannot fully comprehend the complexities of the subject matter as a gender expert would, they should still be fully aware of how their understanding, language, and actions may harm others. Uphold a responsibility to be accountable for the risks and needs of the context. From another perspective, does merely being a person identified with a gender or not provide some form of expertise in the matter? Bringing with the self the bodily experiences of navigating the world and the experiences of sexual objectification or not.

As demonstrated throughout this section, there has been a shift in designers mindsets, towards one that is drawing on personal or worldly experiences, taking responsibility for the work, and, alike what Lima (2023) argues for, a more expanded skillset and understanding of the issue. This makes it more challenging to capture the essence of this field since contributions are not tied to specific methods or toolkits that future designers can then directly apply to IPV work. This research aims, therefore, to develop guiding principles that encapsulate what it means to engage in IPV. The goal is to synthesise and formalise findings from the case studies into these principles, which will:

1. Provide a foundation for new research in design addressing IPV;
2. Inform both new and existing designers about best practices;
3. Communicate to the IPV field that adopting a design practice can align with their work and should be further utilized as a key tool in addressing IPV.

## 7.4 Guiding principles

Recognising the need to adapt design to IPV contexts, which hold contextual priorities that other circumstances might not, principles are derived from the experience and empirical evidence (Fu et al., 2017) of designers engaged in this work. While Bijl-Brouwer and Malcolm (2020) examined the principles inherent in practice outcomes to reveal rationales, this thesis cross-analyses the rationales in each case to uncover the principles that connect both. Table 7.2 illustrates how principles were derived from the literature and case study insights. These include **critical awareness, supportive care, relational focus, dialogical engagement, encouragement, and making visible**. They combine elements of IPV with design and offer opportunities for designers to adopt informed decisions into their practice while emphasising the tensions in doing so (Bijl-Brouwer & Malcolm, 2020).

These principles do not aim to be universal prescriptions for practice. Instead, they are based on the cases examined in this thesis and, thus, focus on individual and interactional approaches to influence people's behaviours and shift attitudes. More structural approaches might require the support of other principles or adapting these to consider better, for instance, institutional structures and policy making. Equally, other principles might be necessary for those interested in examining designers' role in preventing tech abuse in their products, such as banking apps or social network platforms. As noted in section 7.2.1.1, there is a Global North and South divide in interventions. Thus, any use of these principles must be grounded and adapted to what is contextually relevant. For instance, what does encouragement look like in different contexts?

Thus, overall, the principles aim to clarify and solidify the contemporary design agenda in this context. These do not aim to replace design principles but rather support them with IPV-relevant circumstances that must be considered, channelling action. These principles emphasise that every moment in IPV work can serve as an intervention.

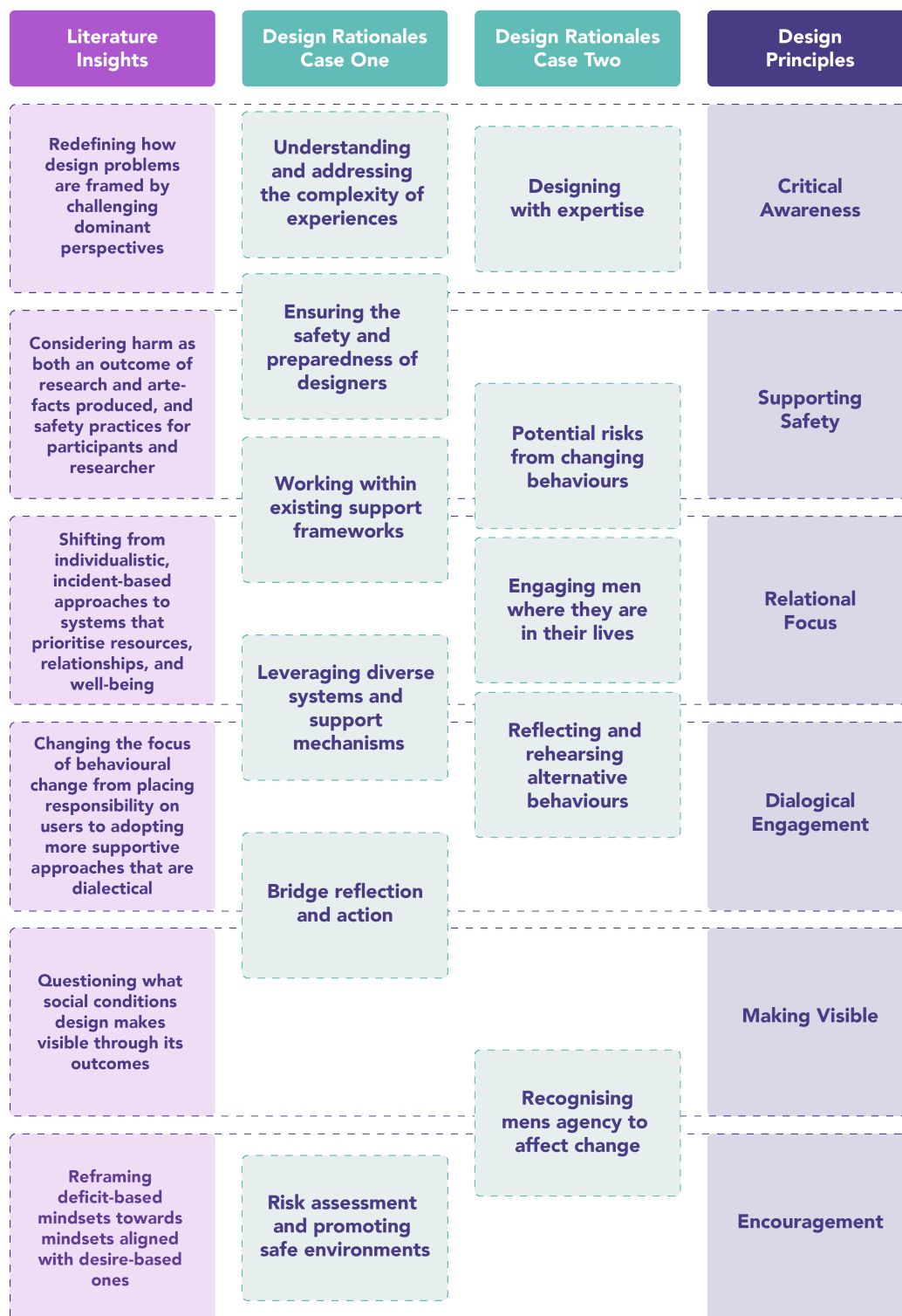


Table 7.2- Principles development



### 7.4.1 Critical awareness



Critical awareness should be the starting point for any designer entering IPV contexts. It is a generative process (Noel, 2023) that involves deep learning about the factors contributing to IPV, existing practices and procedures, and the personal impacts of working in IPV contexts.

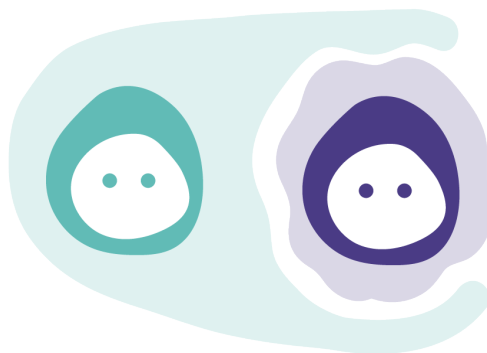
There is no single factor that can explain why some people are at higher risk of experiencing or enacting abuse (Heise, 1998; Wathen & Mantler, 2022). IPV is a complex social issue with varied health and social impacts on individuals (Wathen & Mantler, 2022), and each experience is unique to the person (see section 2.3). Key to this understanding is that abusive behaviours can manifest in various ways depending on the specific context of the partners involved. While a designer might not be able to capture all its manifestations, addressing IPV involves examining the outcome of interactions influenced by factors across individual to societal levels (Wathen & Mantler, 2022).

Designers are not entering an uncharted field; rather, they are contributing novel approaches and perspectives. Part of critical awareness is understanding one's role and agency (Lima, 2023; Noel, 2023) to address IPV. Collaborating and drawing on expertise across disciplines can better support a multifaceted approach to addressing IPV. Here, designers must not lean on others to develop ethical procedures. Instead, by building critical awareness, designers can better understand why risk, harm, and trauma must be thoroughly considered throughout the design process and output. Not concentrating on these concepts can gravely impact those designers aim to support.

In practice, critical awareness means that during engagements, designers will be able to validate accounts from people with lived experiences and enter with a healthy degree of scepticism (Bellini, 2021) to the accounts of men and those who enact abuse. Additionally, it supports an understanding of what dominant societal perspectives must be challenged through interventions. For instance, IPV is only physical abuse or addressed solely through separation. This perspective requires designers to question their background and disciplinary training to understand how their position might influence their perceptions and behaviours and how IPV applies to the factors in their lives.

Ultimately, critical awareness is about holding the complexity of experiences without reducing them down to a single factor to be solved. It equips designers to challenge societal structures that influence harmful practices and criminal ideologies while holding onto the individual's support needs.

### 7.4.2 Supporting safety



The central goal of any intervention is to support environments where people may build safety into their lives. The 'supporting safety' principle reinforces that safety is not a commodity or a single act but rather a process contingent on each person's conditions (Mosher, 2015; Agid, 2019; Kaba & Ritchie, 2022). The concern about the risk of harm applies to users, participants, and designers of all genders and experiences.

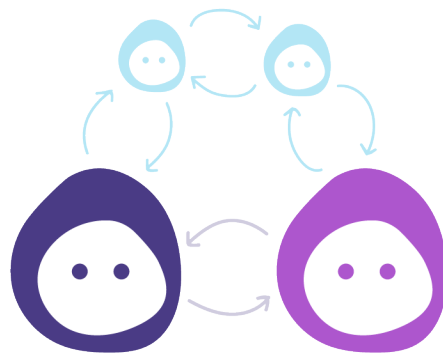
Supporting safety recognises that people in situations of abuse are already building strategies, resisting and coping with abuse. Designers, therefore, are not designing safety but instead supporting people's processes - offering measures to reduce the likelihood of abuse (Stohmayer et al., 2022) and strategies they may leverage when abuse occurs. Furthermore, it fosters safe environments where people can explore risks and alternatives – which may mean changing community norms. Therefore, designers must be intentional about their research and intervention goals and focus on achieving these by thoroughly assessing where designers can reduce risk and harm. Harm can, however, continuously occur – it is not **if** violence happens but **when**.

Safety strategies may vary from context to context. In practice, supporting safety means examining practices and organisational structure and considering whether they can support direct engagements with communities, specifically those with trauma experiences. In both research and outcomes, designers must ensure that individuals have resources to help users and participants understand and manage risks and provide access to support opportunities.

Alongside critical awareness and dialogical engagement, supporting safety equips designers with the behaviours that can support individuals in distress during engagements attuned to the changes in tone, and silence. Additionally, this combination supports designers in recognising the impact this work may have on themselves, where they are encouraged to understand signs of re-traumatisation and vicarious trauma and implement self-care strategies. Strategies can include offering counselling after interviews.

Supporting safety may require additional time in the design process to thoroughly assess risks and develop appropriate responses. For instance, presenting research designs to subject matter experts for feedback. Overall, this principle encourages designers to embody the societal changes they wish to see—one that supports, interrupts, and heals from harm.

### 7.4.3 Relational focus



IPV is the outcome of interactions. At the centre, it happens between people in a close relationship. These behaviours are then influenced by those around them, for instance, friends, neighbours, and the wider community—norms around gender relations. A relational focus aims to centre relationships in design to acknowledge those who may harm and those who may support them.

Recognising that people are in relation to each other disrupts individualistic and incident-based thinking. It recognises that while abuse may exist in relationships, it may still be loving and interdependent (Levine & Meiners, 2020). Therefore, changing an abusive situation is a process rather than a single act. This principle is critical to use alongside 'supporting safety' as it enables designers to consider how partners might use interventions to enact further harm. Thus, both partners in the research and the outcome are considered as users who will impact and be impacted by it. In a contradicting turn, this principle equips designers to consider designing out users who aim to enact harm.

One distinctive characteristic of this guiding principle is its focus on creating environments conducive to the emergence of new and existing relationships, ultimately fostering meaningful change. For example, individuals such as bystanders or family members may be interconnected with those who are experiencing abuse. When these individuals' capacities are built with the skills and resources necessary to intervene in situations of abuse, they can effectively utilise their relationships to provide support in a safe and personal manner. In prevention, collective

engagement through group activities or discussions is considered to build a shared sense of awareness and change.

In practice, a relational focus also involves leveraging existing infrastructures and networks that individuals are already a part of or can easily reach. For instance, when efforts are made to reach out to those affected by abuse, partnering with well-established organisations or community groups—where these individuals are likely to seek help or engage—can significantly enhance outreach opportunities. Examples of such infrastructures include local churches or health clinics, which can be reframed and utilised as platforms for IPV interventions.

The principle recognises that changing abusive conditions is a mutual process affecting and being supported by those around individuals.

#### 7.4.4 Dialogical engagement



Dialogical engagement is a principle that emphasises that change comes through an evolving dialogue where there is a moment of reality transformation (Van Amstel et al., 2023)— whether it is the participant's internal self-dialogue or the dialogue between men and partners as they explore topics and exercises. Though this approach, interventions are not a one-way information delivery that aims to change people's behaviours; interactions cannot be fully predicted as they are contingent on each person who interacts with the design. It recognises that change is a process, not a product.

In practice, this principle acknowledges that abuse continuously denies people their realities and sense of self. Designers approach all engagements as a space where people's experiences and feelings are validated and valued. This equally extends to men, where they are not labelled as violent—a one-way conversation that creates resistance. Designers stay open to men's perspectives, values, and motivations through dialogue. This, coupled with the critical awareness principle, is approached with a healthy degree of scepticism (Bellini, 2021).

The dialogical process in IPV interventions may prompt individuals to reflect on their experiences, challenge existing behaviours, and explore new ways of relating and acting. This process moves them between critical reflection and action. It does not generalise people and assume what they want and need but rather 'asks' what they want and what support they need. Thus, they are open and exploratory instead of prescriptive or direct content, prompting people to reflect. Moving into action brings the dialogue into exploring what works for them—making change relevant and easy to integrate into people's lives.

### 7.4.5 Encouragement

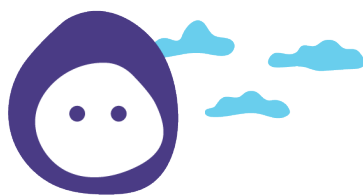


Encouragement is the antidote to design urges to 'solve' and frame issues from a deficit and dependency lens. People in abusive situations are not helpless victims or criminals but rather individuals who, with the right support, can change their situations to more preferred ones. It is, thus, agentic and open (Leitão, 2020). However, designers must understand that this is not just about positivity but also its interplay with resistance and trauma. Together, these validate people's experiences and motivations towards changing situations. Thus, this principle is focused on encouraging new possibilities and life models.

A design process that centres encouragement does not overly aim to protect participants, especially those with lived experiences of abuse, to the point where their voices are excluded. Instead, it considers how to create supportive spaces where their voices can be encouraged or included through indirect means. Men's voices are not dismissed as ill-informed due to complicity with harmful patriarchal values, but rather, their motivations are explored and centred on how to overcome that.

Interventions are not pulling people on a journey, similar to the principle dialogical engagements; the intervention is walking alongside people, critically prompting them. Encouragement can be manifested in interventions through imagery and content that communicates that change is possible. Focusing on developing encouraging content recognises that people have often taken much courage and effort to get to those interventions. They should encourage them to keep interacting and start exploring the change. These include making people feel like support is available or affirming what they want to achieve. The latter is complementary to the final principle of making visible (section 7.4.6).

### 7.4.6 Making visible



This principle acts as an overarching aim that sits across all the principles: to make visible another way of being that dismantles harmful relations. Making visible also provokes designers to question what realities they are making visible through their work—for instance, a space where healing is possible or where violence is inevitable. Likewise, implementing this should not include unobtainable goals or be grounded on what designers believe people users' aim should be. Rather each manifestation, must be grounded in local constructions of gender, values, motivations and thus, their own realities.

In practice, it surfaces and makes visible cultures, thus making tangible these experiences for users and subject matter experts to work with. In doing so, it makes visible the complexity of social structures, making possibilities attainable. Overall, every intervention is a space of possibilities for other ways of being to emerge.

## **7.5 Chapter summary**

This chapter encapsulates the findings across the cases in Chapters 5 and 6 and presents their similarities and differences. It identifies that underpinning these findings is a shift in designers' mindsets, where different priorities, attitudes, and behaviours take the forefront during design. To capture this shift, the chapter identified six principles to guide designers in IPV contexts.

The principles offer a framework that is informed by existing theories and empirical data of designers practising in IPV contexts. They provide important directions for designers, addressing key concerns raised throughout this thesis, such as resistance from men to engage, staying with the complexity, and centring safety of both users and designers. The principles become a foundation for designers upon which they adapt and build. Thus, these principles do not aim to be prescriptive and require a space to further explore and apply these to the situational and contextual conditions designers work with. In response, Chapter 8 will explore what space can support designers to adapt their practices.



# Chapter 8. Inventory of possibilities

## Chapter overview

This chapter aims to explore what could support designers in adapting their practice. It presents the final research investigation as part of the second phase of the research study. The goals of this phase was twofold: to engage designers in (1) incorporating their perspectives on the initial findings of Chapters 5 and 6 and (2) exploring their perspectives on the types of spaces that could support their work. This chapter focuses on the latter objective. This investigation emerged in response to findings outlined in Chapter 7, which argue that a key element of design adaptation is in designers' mindsets. The principles, then supported in capturing the mindset, and serves as guidance for designers. From here, based on the framework presented in section 3.1.4., illustrated in Figure 8.1, is space running through all the layers, where designers may explore the dynamics between these and consolidate their practice. The aim is to generate a research output that supports the adaptation of design in ways that reflect the ever-changing social structures shaping IPV, open to both theoretical and collective concepts (see section 3.1.4).

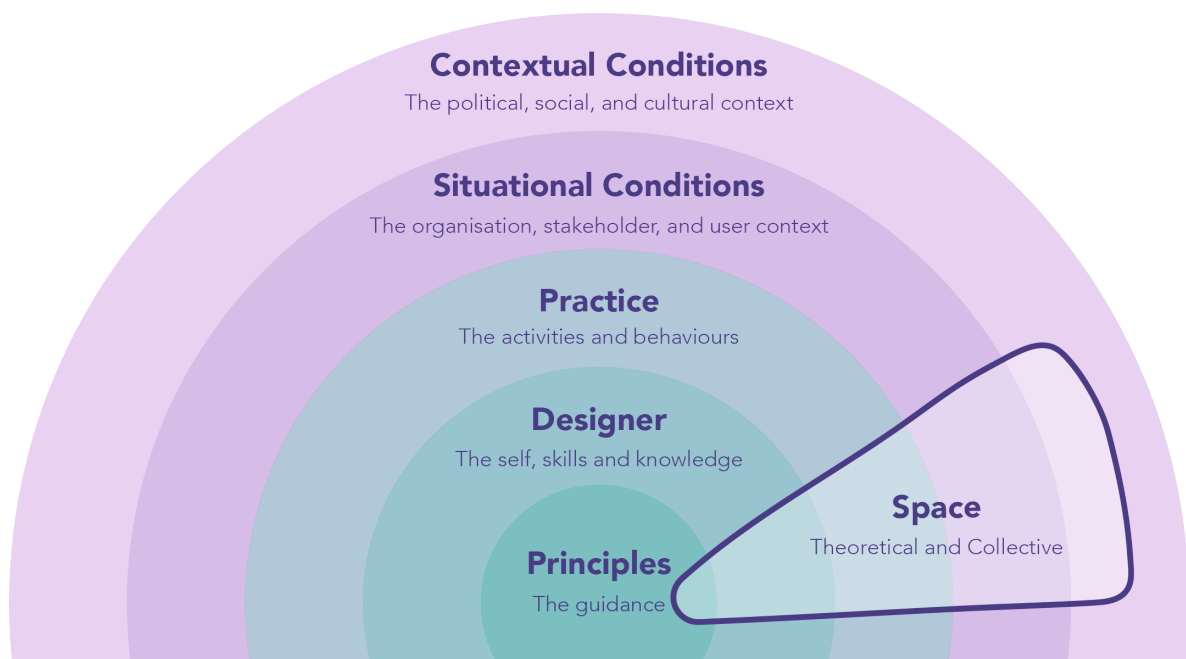


Figure 8.1- Space to consolidate practice

Through a workshop and interviews with designers, the concept of space was explored through the 'inventory of possibilities' – a theoretical space where designers are prompted to question their practice developed collectively. The chapter begins by presenting the structure of the 'inventory of possibilities. It then presents three themes from the data analysis, which encapsulate a space of developing critical awareness and skills, knowledge exchanging, and mutual support. It concludes by revisiting literature in Chapter 3 to create a conceptual framework that encompasses established theories and emerging ideas from designers to explore their relationships.

## **8.1 The inventory of possibilities**

As explained in section 4.2.2, the aim of the inventory of possibilities was to answer the third research question – Which spaces could support designers to adapt their practices? The primary objective of this study is to yield an output that can continuously shift with the ever changing social structures, and contextualise the principles in Chapter 7. As evidenced in Chapters 5-7 there is no prescriptive solutions to designing in IPV but rather critical engagements responsive to the situational and contextual conditions – thus any intervention for designers must reflect that (see Figure 8.2).

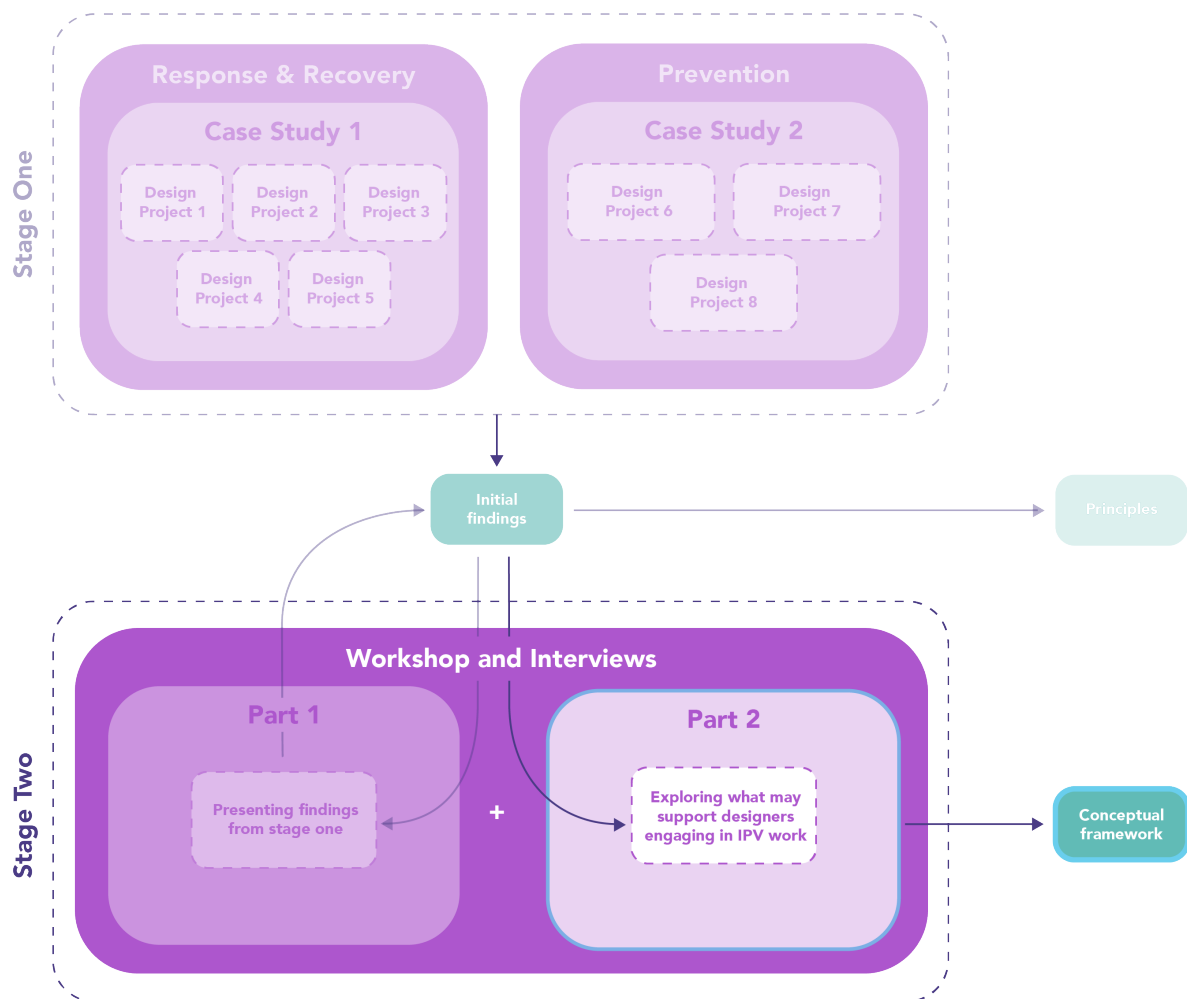


Figure 8.2- Research study framework: focus on part two of stage two

The inventory of possibilities drew inspiration from Abdulla (2022), Armbrust (2023) and Akama et al. (2023) to create a space for designers to imagine alternatives to their existing practices. The workshop engaged designers in developing prompts for existing and future designers in response to the preliminary principles derived from the cross-case analysis. These were later revised and presented in Chapter 7. Participants were asked to respond independently to a pre-existing framework with preliminary principles for designing to address IPV, as shown in Figure 8.3. This framework included three sections, each with two principles that capture the design process, outcome, and designers' learning. Participants were also offered prompts which included: Bring up ethical and moral considerations; convey an idea/practice; imagine a possibility; ask a question to designers and/or yourself; respond to someone's post-it (see Appendix D.2). Following this, participants regrouped to reflect on their input. Subsequently, a discussion was held and facilitated

by the researcher exploring what space (metaphorical, or physical) could be developed in response.

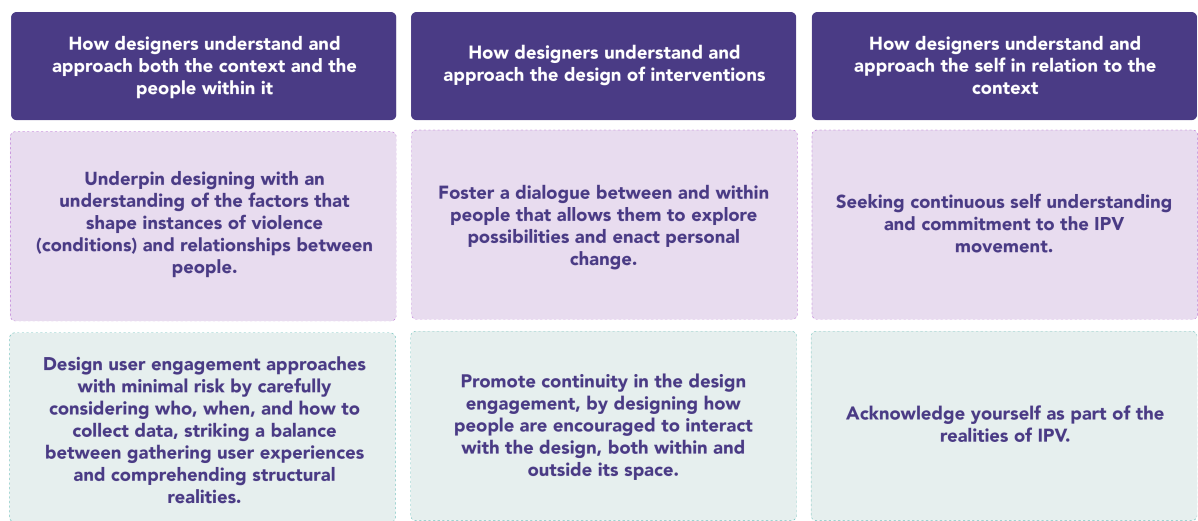


Figure 8.3- Workshop task framework

From analysing the prompts designers developed in response to the task it became apparent that the statements provided were not comprehensive. The principles were too specific and needed space for bringing more nuances into these and supporting moving thought to action. This directly feeds back into Chapter 7 where the principles were reframed to be open and allow for exploration

Overall, three people attended the workshop and five additional individual interviews were conducted. Table 8.1 outlines the participants and the ID codes that will be used in the following sections. All were conducted online and were recorded. Interview participants did not complete the same tasks but rather openly discussed their perspectives in response to the findings from the workshop.

Table 8.1- Participant ID codes

Project Identification Description	ID Code	Case Study Allocation
Messaging_Prevention	MP(2)	Case Study 2: Prevention
Faith-based_Prevention (Rachel Lehrer)	FP	Case Study 2: Prevention

Abuse-Recovery	AR(1)	Case Study 1: Response and Recovery
Collectivity_prevention	CP	Case Study 2: Prevention
Prevention_designer	PD	-
GBV_design_researcher	GDR	-
LGBTQIA+_support	QS	Case Study 1: Response and Recovery
Abuse-Recovery	AR(2)	-

## 8.2 A space for designers

From the data analysis, three prominent themes emerged, focusing on the dynamics of the space and its impact on designers, which will be discussed in subsequent sections. A space balancing working on the self and working with others helps designers move from thoughts into action, building capability and confidence.

### 8.2.1 A space balancing working on the self and working with others

During discussions, all designers shared that they would look for a space that balanced working on the self and with others, learning and sharing knowledge. Grounded in theory and practice, designers shared that they would find it necessary to be supported in critically reflecting on biases, assumptions, positionality, and key theories. This critical process should then be accompanied by a space for discussing insights and reflections with others.

“having some reflections or some thoughts about what that looks like. And then having a space to go and talk about those things with other people who are going through the same things.” (AR(2))

A balance between working by oneself and others, to safely explore their vulnerability and become vulnerable – supporting their preparedness to enter IPV. The following subsections outline elements.

#### 8.2.1.1 Critical engagement: theory to personal journey

Overall, all designers agreed that it would be critical to support designers with information and reflection prompts to help them critically understand IPV and their personal investment in this work. Moreover, PD and AR(2) highlighted the importance of having a space where people could reflect on their critical awareness - how they understand the topic and how they may be impacted by it – the basic understanding that any designer should have when entering this work. This critical awareness may be achieved through a database with readily available resources, such as literature and existing projects, that are easily digestible and accessible (AR(2) and CP). For instance, some designers shared that there should be a 'curriculum' on power, decolonisation, and ethics (PD and GDR) – central to understanding one's positionality. CP shared how this would be valuable when conducting desk research for IPV projects, especially when under competing project time constraints:

“There are so many things and it could be never ending. So understanding what is most relevant. A knowledge sharing platform where it can be very easily accessed” (CP)

Furthermore, as demonstrated in Chapter 3, these literatures are often framed for other disciplines rather than design. AR(2) noted how sharing the findings from this thesis itself with other designers would already be very useful in supporting their work. Similarly, FP noted that already focusing on them in this thesis helps to shed light on their work: "No one pays attention to us, so someone paying attention to us is great news." (FP)—further solidifying designers' role in IPV.

Besides literature, CP suggested that contained in a database should be information on existing and ongoing interventions. This inclusion could mitigate projects 'inventing the wheel' every time - conducting lengthy research processes to achieve similar outcomes (CP). For instance, two projects from case study one (based in different countries) took similar approaches to masking

their apps with a news icon. QS reflected that it would have saved them considerable time and resources to have already been informed on common UX considerations such as adding the 'exit button'. Furthermore, CP shared that this could support people to start from a midpoint:

“What if there was a database of interventions with strategies that have happened or been tested and then you can pick those relevant to you, leverage them, or change them to fit the context.” (CP)

All designers thought knowledge sharing on best practices and learning was vital in this work, as seen in section 8.2.1.2. PD and AR(1) mentioned that this should be complemented by experts commenting on practices and helping people work through their perspectives. FP, in particular, highlighted that the success of sharing insights and stories would be dependent on people identifying themselves, as it is important to acknowledge the social location of the designers and their projects. She believes this would support the credibility of the suggestions being provided.

Finally, some designers, AR(1) and AR(2), found that critical prompts could be integrated besides offering literature in the space. They found the example of the inventory of possibilities a beneficial way to stimulate designers and ignite those necessary internal conversations for IPV work. In particular, PD mentioned how this could be an opportunity for designers to reflect on whether the context will be triggering and understand whether they have gone through the adequate healing journey. The space could prompt designers to recognise themselves as people who can be affected by the context (PD) and recognise the complexities they will need to navigate. For example, both AR(1) and QS mentioned how it is difficult to sit with the feeling of personal responsibility for the user's feedback.

“There is a personal responsibility, that you might feel to implement some of the feedback. And the difficulties of that, because obviously, after spending a lot of time with somebody and really hearing their needs, to then present that back and have to say ‘Yeah, sure. But it's not going to happen this year. Or we're not going to make those changes. Or that's just one voice, and actually we haven't heard that anywhere else.’ That can sit with you as somebody who was in that conversation and who felt the responsibility to represent that voice.” (AR(1))

These contexts are incredibly complex and challenging to navigate. Providing a space to confront and explore these thoughts can help designers work more sustainably and confidently.

#### 8.2.1.2 Being open and vulnerable together

“I could definitely imagine having a community practice or a small group where what you're looking for is people who can, through different stimulations and topics, peak your interest and start conversations.” (AR(1))

Designers shared how, besides critical engagement through resources, actually coming together, meeting others, and sharing experiences and knowledge would be valuable. They all recognised that IPV work is a space where one will never have or know all the answers. Designers were interested to hear (and for other designers to hear) stories of people practising design: “what other people are grappling with” (AR(2)), what are their biggest mistakes and best practices (CP), sharing research process’ (AR(1)), stories of doing user research (AR(2)) or practical recommendations on what to do when in unexpected situations (PD). Generally promoting more open working across the field, sharing ongoing experiences and process’ –

“spaces to share more open working. I think that sometimes sharing your process’ online means that you’ve got to feel really confident about it being the right way – but as a lot of designers say there is no one right way, it’s not a perfect process. But then sharing it with other people who will equally share and comment on them. We won’t perfect our processes, but at least we could improve it. There is this feeling of it needs to be finished and it needs to be polished and in this space (of IPV work) that doesn’t help us” (AR(1))

This open working creates a safe space to rehearse practices and imagine alternatives together where people can be openly vulnerable and share situations they are concerned about and where they are after being supported by others:

“So when we critically reflect on where the gaps are in our knowledge and experience, you are then held in some way, and you can discuss it with people that are in similar situations to you, and they can give you ideas and examples of how they have managed certain situations. “(AR(2))”



“those practical things that we run into and can't anticipate. For example, talking to a man who is saying all these things that really rub against us and how to react and remain as a design researcher - curious and empathetic. Those real life situations that happen.” (PD)

Designing in IPV situations is not just about what one knows about IPV but also about one's attitude and behaviours when engaging with people with lived experiences of abuse. Thus, designers' lived experiences of encountering these moments are equally valuable. PD suggested that mentoring or coaching could be offered to support people in questioning their beliefs and understanding what might be blocking them from being more open. CP mentioned the benefits of building a networking space where people can advertise their expertise and job opportunities.

### 8.2.2 A space that moves designers from thoughts into action

Designers were cautious of a space that solely divulged information for people to reflect critically. They stated that it must also encourage designers to consider what actions to take based on their newfound understanding.

“then what do you do with that from there? So you might think ‘ok I'm going to need to go and understand a bit more of the language that the person from a different culture uses when they talk about IPV’. or I might ask a colleague of mine to help me understand, or I might change the way I do my research in light of that understanding.” (AR(1))

The aim of sharing experiences or resources between designers is not to provide a ‘one-way’ of doing design in IPV contexts but to provide people with a space to explore their practice. At AR's organisation, they shared how they were considering training people in TID. As it is, like IPV, more of a mindset; they don't believe it can be achieved with a workshop and tasks:

“is there a way that we can train or provide a format for coming up with your own format as an organization or as an institution. On how you're going to do your research and design. As what is our principles might not be appropriate for other organisations.” (AR(1))

Thus, the space must support people in questioning and exploring – becoming a stepping ground upon which individuals' or organisations' practices may be built. Some designers shared the value of having simple frameworks with quick statements to stimulate thought, especially for people with less experience (QS and AR(1)). By applying the framework, they can further explore their practice – learning through doing (GDR) – within a safe infrastructure.

Formats and frameworks without restricting and universalising undertones support guiding people through a process. Formats are equally vital in community groups. FP shared that when they had joined a digital community of practice, they found it was full of researchers doing exploratory work and no practitioners who were implementing the work - "I went to one last time, and then they tried to create this working group, and I never want to show up, I don't want to do like side work on this." (FP). Any space should be beneficial and relevant to the ongoing practices that designers are engaged in. She instead suggested developing a format based on another community she had once joined, which was based on people's suggestions and concerns:

“consider what peoples big questions are. (...) Every month they would send out surveys to be like what are you all interested in. Everyone would put in a challenge. It would be nice as we'd work on my problem or we'd do something that everyone is concerned with. It was good for sharing internal challenges kind of like AA meetings” (FP)

Like any design intervention, a space should also consider designers experiences and needs.

### **8.2.3 A space that works towards building capability and confidence**

While designers emphasised the need to enhance designers' critical awareness and practical abilities to work in this area, some noted that criticality might risk undermining people's confidence. Thus, any space must also focus on supporting people through that transition, supporting them also to recognise their capability to enter these spaces and therefore support them in building their confidence.

“You have to go through this sort of period of being like ‘Oh, my God, maybe I don't know anything about this. Maybe I'm not very good at this’. I think

everyone kind of goes through that if they are a credible designer working in this space, which is incredibly complex and difficult at times to navigate. But coming out of that process with people to talk to about it, or people who have been trying other things and having a bit of a community element, would be nice” (AR(2))

As AR(2) mentioned in section 8.2.1, shifting away from learnt practices is an uncomfortable transition. GDR and AR(2) shared how this space could be one for healing and vulnerability, where as a designer goes through this transition, they recognise their own experiences. Here, such a space should not be constrained to only exploring designers limitations and barriers but also showcasing their capabilities:

“if you have a material capable to make people comfortable of being vulnerable in this field, I think it's interesting, and also a new thing. I don't know maybe it could be a place of healing (...) And a place where you can really embrace this field, that is so sensitive, but at the same time, show your capability and our capability as people and as a design community to make difference.” (GDR)

Equally, building on suggestions outlined in section 8.2.3.1, AR(1) suggested that a list of questions could also be used for supporting people to prepare themselves before entering the field:

“questions you can ask yourself to feel more confident that you have thought thoroughly about this, even if you feel quite in equipped, or feel like you don't have the kind of knowledge and expertise to take this work on. (AR(1))”

Overall, this shows the caution and care designers take into engagements. Such a space to support designers to adapt is about designers exploring themselves and supporting each other to build their capabilities and confidence to enact change.

### **8.3 Conceptualising a space**

This section will combine insights from the literature review in Chapter 3, findings from Chapters 7 and 8, and concepts shared in Chapters 5-6 to articulate a concept of a space that could support

designers in adapting their practices. By consolidating the findings across this thesis, this conceptual framework aims to encompass established theories and emergent ideas to describe the relationship among components (Luft, 2022). The aim is that this framework may be applied in future research and design work that aims to support designers.

Aligned with scholars in design for social change (Lima, 2023; Noel, 2023) and TID (Dietkus & Place, 2023; Eggleston & Noel, 2024; Fathallah, 2024) (see section 3.1.3), the concept of space emphasises that working in IPV is not a check-box exercise but rather a transformative, and potentially long-term practice. However, unlike TID, which may be applied to various contexts that intersect with trauma, IPV is particular to its context. However, it does intersect with many other forms of harm and social issues – e.g. rough sleeping. As designers shared in section 7.3, this is a long-term commitment for some, and others, while passionate about the cause, also see themselves working on other social issues.

Based on the insights, it is evident that designing in IPV contexts is an engaged, committed, and deeply caring practice that is also vulnerable, complex, and contingent. Thus, such a space must reflect it. Designers shared a mixture of personal reflection and learning, supported by collective explorations, sharing of knowledge, and emotional support—a combination that helps people move between thought and action.

It is possible to find similarities between what designers propose here and the interventions shared in Chapters 5 and 6. At the core of these interventions was creating an environment where people could question their behaviours and practice alternative behaviours in a ‘safe space’ towards building capabilities to perform alternative behaviours in everyday practices. FP noted this:

“FP: Look back at the projects and explore which one of these is our solution, or do we need a mash up for them. Or do we use the context we create for other people on ourselves. (...) I saw this all the time where were like lets change someone else’s behaviour. But I don’t want people to change my behaviour, or I’ll never do the things I’m asking other people to do like sit in a training for 5 days. But yeah what if we did do that and use that as a form to alter our own ideas about what we should do for other people.”(FP)

For instance, similar to response interventions RS and QS, there could be a website with resources and databases for designers to explore the dynamics of abuse, its structural element, and existing practices and knowledge. Here, designers could share stories and experiences of being a designer in IPV situations (e.g. '*Unequal Stories*' website<sup>55</sup> (Cook, 2023)). This website could be supported by AR's interactions, where there could be courses to explore people's previous experiences of abuse, the personal journey they are about to embark on and have grounding exercises ready. Furthermore, the website could be protected to avoid people who enact abuse to learn tactics. For the more collective side of what designers were proposing, MP's intervention could support a remote method for designers worldwide to engage with one another. They could rehearse interviews to practice responding to distress or harmful behaviours. Here, experts in specific approaches, i.e. engaging men or TID, could facilitate group discussion and respond to queries. The website might have a notice board where people could share their ongoing projects and insights and ask for others' perspectives.

This quick illustration of space outlines how designers' journeys can reflect what they design for users. In both, there is a focus on changing one's behavioural practice towards understanding and exploring alternative ones. Figure 8.4 outlines the conceptual framework based on insights from this thesis. It demonstrates how addressing IPV rests not only on the outcomes of design but also on how coming together and sharing learnings and practices are equally vital (Kisslinger & Williams, 2021) to address IPV. IPV is not a field with intellectual properties and non-disclosure agreements; instead, building on each other is encouraged to accelerate addressing the abuse in people's lives.

“How do we use the experiences of people which are pretty specific and well-earned in this field. How do you use it to prove or accelerate the process, for the most vulnerable women in the world. That’s a cool question. But in order

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<sup>55</sup> Unequal Stories researches gender equality in design disciplines. Their website includes anonymous stories shared by designers worldwide (mostly UK and South Africa, where the project was based). It shares different experiences people encounter when working in the industry, such as discrimination and lack of confidence. Through encountering these, like Bates (2022), one begins to understand their experiences not as isolated events but part of a structural phenomenon. Potentially validating people and building solidarity.

to do that you might want to talk to more people or get us all talking to each other and share resources". (FP)

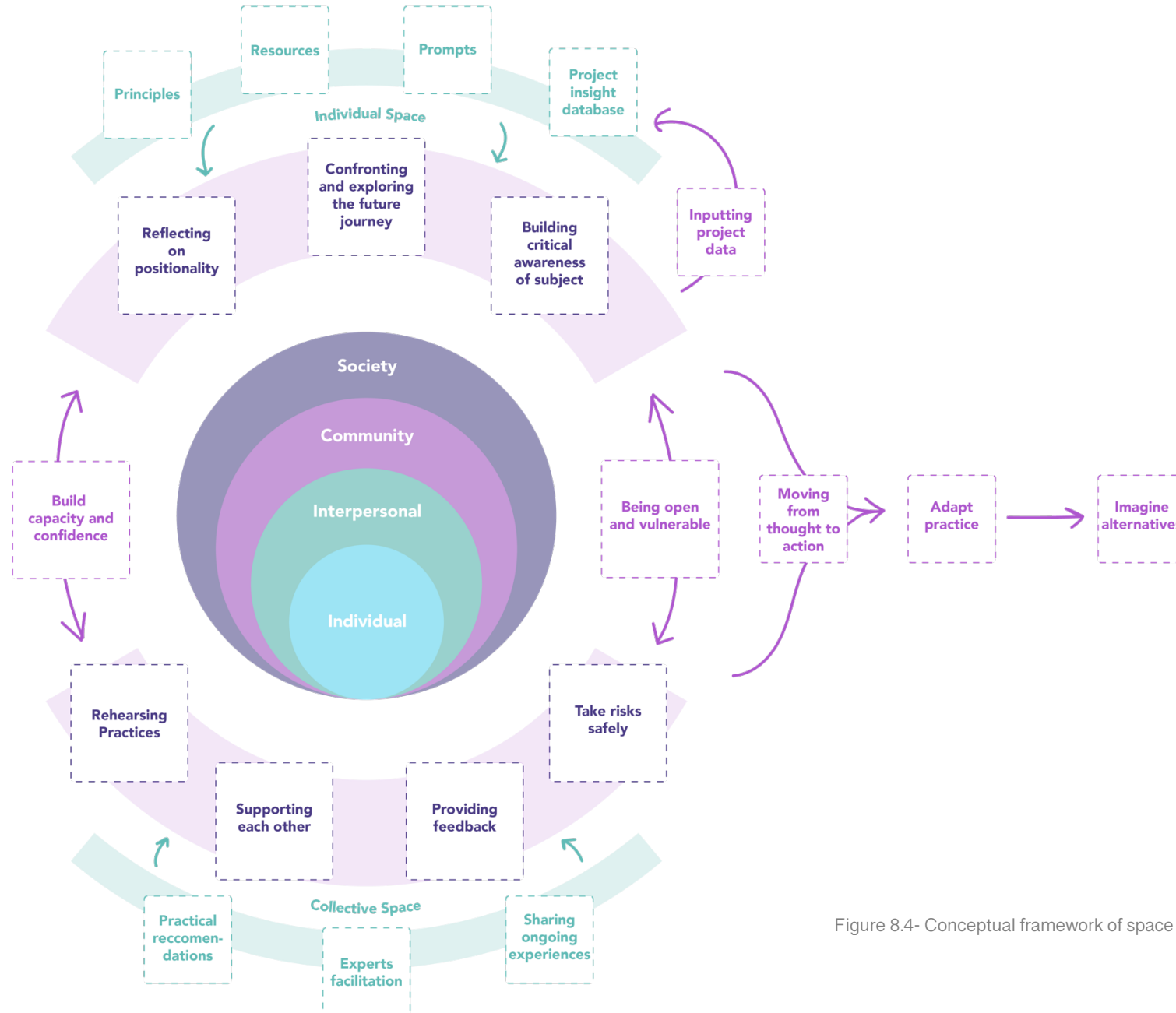


Figure 8.4- Conceptual framework of space

## 8.4 Chapter summary

This chapter presents the metaphorical concept of a space that could support designers in adapting their practice. Alongside Chapter 7's findings, which indicated that the designer mindset is critical to design adaptation, this chapter further evidences this, where findings focused on knowledge, behaviours, and skills development rather than a process, framework, or method that all could apply. Thus, this thesis cannot offer a single outcome to support designers in addressing IPV; instead, it can offer a dynamic outcome that reflects the practice and can shift alongside social structures like IPV.

Due to the absence of earlier studies, this thesis has taken a broader approach to exploring design practice within IPV contexts. The conceptual framework and findings presented throughout the thesis may serve as a reference for future research, allowing a closer examination of the relationship between designers working in this field and what collectivising could produce. The thesis will now turn to the discussion chapter to examine the findings in the context of the broader field and the implications of these insights.



# Chapter 9. Discussion: a space of possibilities

## Chapter introduction: recapitulation of the research

This chapter articulates the contributions of this thesis by synthesising and discussing the findings derived from theoretical and empirical inputs. It provides a reflective overview that consolidates diverse insights on design adaptations within specific contextual and situational circumstances associated with IPV. Overall, this chapter aims to answer the following research question:

Overarching research question (ORQ): In addressing intimate partner violence, how does design adapt in response to contextual implications?

To answer this, this thesis set out to explore design practice and its common patterns across different contexts rather than focusing on isolated events. It aims to contribute to social design with design knowledge that can recognise and understand the distinct ways design and IPV arise—capturing intimate harm as a distinguished form of harm in design. Therefore, it adopted an exploratory approach to gain insights into the role and adaptation of design, rather than providing methods or tools for its application.

The primary aim of this research was to fill a gap in existing knowledge regarding the fragmented understanding of design addressing IPV. Current literature tends to focus on isolated practices within specific contexts and lacks communication across diverse approaches and settings (see section 2.5.2). Specifically, literature has overlooked exploring designing in IPV from the perspective of those who do and may enact harm. Overall, there was uncertainty around what considerations and shifts in practices support designers in addressing IPV, as existing practices, like TID, mainly focus on user safety and preventing re-traumatisation and actively do not aim to address trauma (see section 3.2.3). Based on the reviews in Chapters 2 and 3, existing literature indicated that there are existing areas of concern when social design is applied to situations of harm, especially intimate harm, that warranted further attention:

- Redefining how design problems are framed by challenging dominant perspectives;
- Considering harm as both an outcome of research and artefacts produced, as well as safety practices for participants and researcher
- Shifting from individualistic, incident-based approaches to systems that prioritise resources, relationships, and well-being;
- Reframing deficit-based mindsets towards mindsets aligned with desire-based ones;
- Changing the focus of behavioural change from placing responsibility on users to adopting more supportive approaches that are dialectical;
- Questioning what social conditions design makes visible through its outcomes.

These were directly addressed in Chapter 7 and will be revisited in this chapter.

In response to the above, the thesis applied a feminist emergent methodological (FEM) approach (Chapter 4), which aimed to be responsive to both the ongoing findings and the social world. Chapters 5 and 6 presented a nuanced account of designers' experiences applying IPV. These chapters explored rationales necessary for the particular situational circumstances of (1) response and recovery interventions and (2) prevention with men. It identified areas of concern for identifying and assessing how to address IPV but also offered theoretical frameworks that may support designers in interpreting IPV manifestations in these circumstances. Following the case study, the thesis analysed and synthesised findings across both, capturing a contemporary design that addresses IPV as part of a continuum of interventions. It presents principles to inform and equip designers to engage in these circumstances meaningfully (Chapter 7). The thesis concluded the research investigations by exploring and proposing a space informed by existing design practitioners working in the field (Chapter 8). It ends by capturing an underpinning thread across these investigations: that change and adaptation reside in designers and their communication with one another and other forms of knowledge.

This chapter will now present a summary of the findings across the investigations and how this contributes to the field of social design. Due to the absence of earlier studies, this thesis took a broader approach to the research combining theoretical and empirical work. As discussed in Chapter 1, there were three distinct yet interrelated sub-research questions:

RQ1: What are the realities and possibilities of designing in IPV situations?

RQ2: How might particular circumstances of designing within IPV contexts affect designers' rationale?

RQ3: Which spaces could support designers in adapting their practices?

Research questions (1) and (2) are addressed together through the studies rather than being answered by specific contributions. In contrast, research question (3) stands alone, as it was developed in response to a recognised need for supporting the implementation of findings within the design field. Moreover, upon reflecting on the FEM approach, contributions to Gaver et al.'s (2022) emergent strategies were also identified, making a final contribution to social design investigations. This chapter is structured into four sections, each corresponding to a research question or methodological approach. These sections address the contributions of the thesis as outlined in items A through F:

### **Constituting a design that addresses IPV**

RQ1: What are the realities and possibilities of designing in situations of IPV?

- A. Realities: Outlining and distinguishing intimate harm from other forms of harm. Providing conceptual clarity on key concepts and definitions related to design and harm (IPV).
- B. Possibilities: Uncovering design's role in addressing IPV. Expanding current understandings of social design to incorporate uncommon concepts such as risk, harm, trauma, safety, and healing.

### **Design adaptations in response to contextual and situational conditions**

RQ2: How might particular circumstances of designing within IPV contexts affect designers' rationale?

- C. Identified methodological and practical implications that arise across different approaches and contexts. Emphasising that every moment in a design process is influential and thus an intervention.
- D. A set of principles for a design to communicate necessary adaptations and considerations to take into account when engaging in IPV contexts.

### **Supporting designers adaptation**

RQ3: Which spaces could support designers to adapt their practices?

- E. Conceptualisation of a space of possibilities for designers. Re-centring their journey and agency to address social issues.

### **Feminist emergent methodological strategies**

- F. Building on Gaver et al.'s (2022) emergent strategies, four additional ones are offered back.

## **9.1 Constituting a design that addresses IPV**

This thesis set out to understand what constitutes a design that addresses IPV. As argued by Dorst (2015), designers must delve deeply into their practices and adapt them to the new context. The first research question, therefore, was designed to capture the realities and possibilities of designing in IPV situations, questioning the structures and environments that influence IPV and make designing possible but also equally influenced by them.

This section synthesises these contributions across Chapters 2-7 to answer RQ1 with an understanding of design practice within the 'new'<sup>56</sup> context of IPV. It begins by expanding on the setting – cultural and practical changes – upon which design emerged within IPV. Following this, it defines the realities of designing in IPV by conceptualising intimate harm as a distinct form of harm. Finally, it will outline the possibilities of design's role in addressing IPV. Altogether, this section will contribute to a design framework that addresses IPV.

Around the world, IPV provisions and interventions vary. Chapter 2 noted how carceral ideologies emphasise incident-based behaviours, and narratives that suggest that violence is inevitable can be found in women's safety apps. Chapter 5's background literature noted how Global North, specifically high-income countries, have infrastructures in place to respond to the impacts of IPV. These include social and temporary accommodation services. Reflecting this, Chapter 7 identified patterns in response and recovery interventions, which were primarily found in Global North countries, while prevention efforts were more concentrated in Global South countries. It identified fewer specialised support services in low-income countries due to a lack of financial resources to support victims (Bacchus et al., 2024). However, they have a higher number of prevention approaches. A combination of these factors has directly influenced the role of design in the field.

The insights on the discrepancy of design applications around the world align with observations by Julier and Kimbell (2019), who noted that design consistently operates within external environments, such as policy landscapes and economics, which shape and reshape it. Equally, findings across the cases identified that there can also be a dependency on specialist IPV organisations to do the work ethically. Thus, their approaches may directly reflect organisations' agendas.

As noted by designers' accounts throughout the chapters and by Julier and Kimbell (2019), design culture encourages emergent qualities such as learning through doing, working fast and

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<sup>56</sup> While this may be a new context for design, this is by no means a new social phenomenon. Design must recognise that it is not only building upon decades of work in IPV but also decades of IPV being sedimented into our societies in such a way that it has become an embedded practice.

agile, and operating outside one's expertise. However, these factors create internal limits that must be addressed when working in IPV. By clarifying design roles and adaptation, this thesis can support designers in recognising what shifts they must take, building confidence, and becoming less dependent on organisations. Thus opening up new routes that will expand design roles. Moreover, solidifying this intersection between design and IPV may open up further opportunities for designers worldwide with different areas of expertise. Namely, by combining knowledge from across the world in this thesis, Global North designers may use what they have learned from Global South designers in Chapter 6 to prevent violence<sup>57</sup>. Opening up different forms of prevention in the UK, for instance, that deviate from current school-based training.

Thus, the following sections will begin by conceptualising intimate harm and then clarifying designs of contemporary roles based on insights from this thesis.

### 9.1.1 Outlining intimate harm as a distinct form of harm

The first contribution of this thesis outlined intimate harm as a distinct form of harm requiring design attention. Chapter 1 argued that distinguishing intimate harm from other forms would highlight the contextual adaptations necessary in design. It initially described intimate harm as occurring in close partnerships, often at home and over long periods.

Chapter 3 findings revealed a misalignment between the functions of design artefacts and the structural realities of violence. For instance, women's safety apps reflected individualistic and isolated notions of harm focused on protecting women from sexual violence in public, from strangers, when in fact, harm is most likely experienced with close partners. In response, the case studies not only advanced an understanding of how intimate harm takes place within design but also challenged its initial description to consider other forms of intimacy.

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<sup>57</sup> This may be limited to FP's project where the research was able to be open about the cultural context being located in Uganda. However, does this mean that preventing IPV in Ugandan diaspora communities could seek to adapt these circumstances?

Chapter 5 more closely illustrated intimate harm as the potential threat from an intimate partner. It argued that partners must be considered as potential users where the reality of the intervention is obscured. This requirement presented a rather unusual perspective in social design: actively excluding certain users from interacting with artefacts. However, it is common in data protection and privacy. Equally, Chapter 6 illustrates that, regardless of when interventions take place in relation to violence—whether before or after (Flood, 2019)—the possibility of intimate harm remains. Partners can manipulate these interventions to inflict further harm.

Thus, there is a temporality that designers must consider, which extends beyond one-time engagements and can have lasting effects. The harm experienced may persist once the violence ends, as people can experience a fractured sense of self (Hussain, 2021). This perspective aligns with accounts in Chapter 5 and existing literature on healing, where designers must integrate strategies that validate individuals' experiences. Temporality must be considered in both the design process and outcomes. For instance, when working with people with lived experiences of abuse, they are reflecting back on what they have experienced. Furthermore, these reflections are based on the time they occurred (i.e. five years ago), which might not reflect how abuse mechanisms have evolved – i.e. tech abuse. Abuse is not the outcome of one-off actions but a pattern of behaviours, which are further sustained by long-term influences of societies. **Thus, temporality is a key characteristic of intimate harm**

Chapter 6 specifically demonstrated that intimate harm is not solely inflicted by a partner but can also arise from other relationships - families and communities. These relationships often reinforce norms and may punish individuals for seeking change. This perspective challenges the initial premise of this thesis, which suggested that intimate harm was contained within close relationships. This initial description reflects a prevailing assumption that IPV is contained within an incident between two people, further demonstrating how researchers are influenced. Instead, this section has argued that intimacy can have a profound and long-term impact on individuals' lives. These perspectives are critical to consider in other forms of intimate harm, such as female

genital mutilation and honour-based violence. Alongside IPV, they are shaped by deep-rooted cultural and social factors that often target women and girls, further informed by norms.

The implications of naming harm as intimate may risk isolating it as interactional, dismissing structural harm. Thus, this attention to intimate harm must still occur within the framework of 'thinking structurally' (Chapter 2), which considers the different layers of the socio-ecological model and how each one creates particular risk factors for intimate harm to occur. Where 'intimate' is contingent on the contextual conditions. Consequently, similar to Van Amstel et al. (2023), understanding social structures is a foundation for any design going into situations of harm. Then, considering the concept of intimacy leads designers to consider harm not contained within one individual harming another but how social factors sustain it. Thus, the perspective shifts away from individual users to relations.

In contributing to the discourse on social design addressing harm, this research indicates that while violence is not inevitable harm may always arise in our societies (Kisslinger & Williams, 2021; Strohmayer et al., 2022); however, how designers seek to address it affects how interventions can meaningfully mitigate harm.

### 9.1.2 Uncovering design's role in addressing IPV

The premise of this thesis is that as design becomes persistently involved and integrated into all forms of societies lives, increasingly being leveraged by NGOs and governments<sup>58</sup> (Julier & Kimbell, 2019) understanding design's role in IPV is paramount (Chapter 1 and 2). As argued in Chapter 2, part of the 'social' in social design is for designers to be aware of their roles and responsibilities within societies (Resnick, 2019). However, current literature at the intersection of IPV and design remains fragmented and limited to specific contexts. This section will now present key themes this thesis unearthed regarding design's role.

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<sup>58</sup>In particular, the UK Labour government (in 2024) committed to halving VAWG (Home Office et al., 2024).



This thesis focuses on design as a verb – an action (Glanville, 1999). Therefore, it recognises how the role of design is never static but instead consistently defined and redefined within society (Tonkinwise, 2019). Thus, the designers' role in addressing IPV will always be everchanging. Generally, accounts collected in Chapters 5 and 6 contribute towards answering the research question by illustrating the multifaceted possibilities of design addressing IPV. Building on these accounts, the following discussion will highlight the role of design in the process and outcomes, aiming to contribute to a contemporary understanding so that further expertise may be developed.

Chapters 5 and 6 highlighted the critical role of designers as facilitators who bring together diverse voices from various disciplines and communities. By integrating these different perspectives, designers help make culture visible and tangible, enabling individuals to conceptualise and implement meaningful change. Although designers were working with disciplines and organisations specialised in IPV, they still considered risk, particularly related to trauma, throughout the process and mitigated it as much as possible.

Lima (2023) envisioned the designer of the future as "a mix of psychologist and anthropologist, sociologist and ecologist, system theorist and futurist, activist and reformer" (p.197) (section 3.1.3). While designers worked with experts in the fields outlined by Lima, some knowledge and skills were applied in practice, such as attention to trauma (psychologist) and cultural norms (anthropologist). To add to his list, designers must also be **risk analysts** assessing potential risks. Such a skill pushes designers to be critically aware of *research and design harm* throughout the process. However, as argued by designers in Chapter 7, incorporating many of these skills into their practice is a life-long work. Thus, while building expertise, they must always acknowledge and incorporate the expertise of other disciplines and the deep knowledge each individual has about their situations.

When it came to actively addressing IPV, which Chapter 3 recognised was a limit in TID practices, the role of design was multifaceted – yet there was a cohesive nature to it. Like many other social design areas, there is no singular response to intervening. Nevertheless, all interventions had a similar goal - to create conditions where people can live safely and thrive. As identified in Chapter

3, safety has no universal definition (Kaba & Ritchie, 2022); thus, how each intervention reached this reflected the contextual conditions they were working with. These interventions demonstrate safety when designing in IPV, aligning with the ideas of Strohmayer et al. (2022), Agid (2019) and Kaba and Ritchie (2022). Here, safety is conceptualised as dynamic, and the designer's role is to create systems that prioritise people's well-being (Strohmayer et al., 2022) and offer sets of resources, tools, skills and, in some cases, relationships to support individuals' safety practices.

This conceptualisation is a shift in mindset from delivering product safety to fostering process'. Change through delivering products is demonstrated in Chapter 3, where products such as women's safety apps aim to **restrict, monitor, and alert**. Instead, the interventions outlined in Chapters 5 to 6 focused on **building awareness, disputing, and rehearsing practices**. These are focused on open and agentic behaviours, prompting people to enter into dialogue. Ensuring that regardless of how long an individual interacts with an intervention, change may begin to happen. A critical insight that supports conceptualising designs role throughout the research studies is that **the change is not contained in products, but rather change comes from supporting users to explore what change could look like for themselves**.

This framing supports shifting traditional mindsets in design that reproduce given life models. Instead, it encourages new possibilities and models (Leitão, 2020). Like many scholars (e.g. Noel, 2023; Abdulla, 2019; Leitão, 2020; Desmet & Pohlmeier, 2013;) who disagree with designs urge to 'fix' solutions, the inherent scope of the social issue that is IPV cannot be fixed or solved. Adopting the roles mentioned above challenges narratives of perpetual victims outlined in Chapter 3 to **people who can change their situation with the right support**. In practice, this looked like (Chapters 5 and 6) interventions that made information more accessible and digestible to understand the dynamics of abuse and options for support. Likewise, when engaging men, the role of design is to create spaces that resonate with men's contexts (Bola, 2019) and explore alternative practices. These accounts from designers add to the body of work in IPV literature, providing a new perspective on how developing interventions may be approached through a design-based perspective.

The potential of design addressing IPV cannot be ignored. While there must be apprehension in fully opening the gates to designers, this thesis demonstrates that with adequate critical awareness, collaborations, and adaptations of practice, design can work to address IPV.

## **9.2 Design adaptations in response to contextual and situational conditions**

Generally, this thesis has been underpinned by a structural understanding of IPV that outlines how contextual and situational conditions are crucial to consider throughout the design process. It contributes to the field of design with theoretical frameworks developed with design areas in mind. These frameworks, alongside accounts of Chapters 5 and 6, offer directions for designers to reach a midpoint in the design process faster—as argued for in Chapter 8. Thus, designers may begin to draw and apply the findings directly.

Chapter 2 provides a brief overview of the 'thinking structurally' framework, outlining factors that influence IPV outcomes. Chapter 5 presents a model of the stages involved in changing abusive situations, which can assist designers in understanding the situational factors individuals face when they might consider seeking support or are actively pursuing it. Critical in this chapter was the insight that people may only have a 15-minute window to find information online. Finally, Chapter 6 expanded on the concept of masculinities, emphasising how they are reproduced and the necessity to consider strategies to overcome resistance to change. Theories across these chapters support designers in conceptualising IPV not as a singular phenomenon but a behaviour (social outcome). After engaging with these theories and subsequent contributions in this thesis, designers will understand the importance of considering risk, harm, trauma, safety and healing within their structural element.

With this in mind, the second research question aimed to explore how the particular circumstances of IPV affect designers' choices. As argued in Chapter 2, a crucial aspect of this question is understanding that while social design methods can be applied from context to context without drastic adaptations, the contextual and situational conditions present in IPV require a

more sensitive consideration. By answering this question, the findings get closer to understanding design adaptations in IPV as resting in shifting designers' mindsets.

Eggleston and Noel (2024) argue that UX heuristics are a basis for making trauma-informed digital design. Likewise, to address IPV, design knowledge and skills are still necessary to effectively develop interventions that are contextually-led to users' situations and engaging. While Eggleston and Noel (2024) see trauma-informed design as an addition once websites have been developed with UX heuristics in mind, this thesis argues that IPV theories must be considered at the onset of any project. Thus, in the process of adapting to IPV contexts, designers do not leave their foundations behind. Instead, adapting their priorities (Chapters 2, 3, 5 and 6) and mindsets (Chapter 7) to guide subsequent design decisions.

The following sections will elaborate on two contributions that answer the second research question. Capturing the mindsets that precede adaptations: Every moment in design should be regarded as an opportunity for intervention, and a set of principles complements setting the tone and directions for design.

### **9.2.1 Every moment in design should be regarded as an opportunity for intervention: methodological and practical implications**

Throughout this thesis, there has been a consistent discussion on the methodological and practical implications of working in IPV circumstances. This thesis has captured a few of these in Chapters 3, 5, and 6, alongside accounts from designers on how they grappled with these. Each implication is relevant to given contexts. In doing so, it aimed to identify underpinning rationales towards revealing a design practice in IPV contexts. While this section will not list the identified implications, it claims that these contributions can support designers in navigating complex situations and provide a starting point – as argued in Chapter 8. A further study, such as Bellini et al. (2023), which evaluates and assesses these, is vital and necessary (see section 10.4). Thus, this section captures the orientation that governed these implications, that – every moment in design should be regarded as an opportunity for intervention (Ellsbery & Heise, 2002; Bellini et al., 2023).

Chapter 3 introduced a statement argued for by Ellsberg and Heise (2002) and Bellini et al. (2023) that ‘research should be treated as an intervention’ (Bellini et al., 2023, p.8). Similarly, Wathen and Varcoe (2023) argue that TVIC principles are based on the belief that each interaction is influential. Thus, present in IPV scholarship is a recognised orienting mindset for implementing safety strategies where researchers assume that their research and outcomes will directly impact those they involve and themselves. This statement also aligns with conceptualisations of safety discussed throughout this thesis as an action-oriented process (Kaba & Ritchie, 2022). Therefore, any approach where safety is centred must reflect this. However, this statement was drawn from the perspective of working with at-risk people, people who experience or enact abuse, and not men in violence prevention scenarios.

During discussions with designers in Chapters 5 and 6, this statement was apparent and contributed with insights on how it is relevant and understood from a design perspective. In the design process, like the authors (Ellsberg & Heise, 2002; Bellini et al., 2023; Wathen & Varcoe, 2023), designers were acutely aware of how their research could impact participants, potentially causing harm to users. This priority shaped their method choices and who they involved. Additionally, adopting this orienting mindset also challenges designers to consider the positive impact they can already begin to generate. Chapter 3 outlined how, although researching IPV carries inherent risks, avoiding such research ultimately leads to more significant harm to individuals affected by IPV. It can be a beneficial space where experiences get validated, issues are amplified, and people may ‘pay it forward’ (Burgess-Porter, 2015; Ellsberg & Heise, 2000). These benefits are evident in Chapter 5, where two organisations have directly integrated a lived experience network to input into the product. Furthermore, as identified in Chapter 6, it can be a moment when men are prompted to begin to reflect on their alignment with patriarchal structures (Flood, 2013).

Although Flood (2013) argues that employing ‘challenging methods’ with men can undermine the precondition for disclosure, given that design research is more inclined toward understanding behavioural change – challenging methods may be directly applicable. Further research exploring

these ‘challenging methods’ in design – as adopted by CP through role-playing and drawing exercises - is necessary. Therefore, designers must consider the opportunities to address risk in research and foster healing and critical reflection. In all these circumstances, the necessary change lies in how designers handle these interactions – with care, respect (Burgess-Porter, 2015), and a healthy degree of scepticism (Bellini, 2021).

These opportunities for interventions are also aimed at designers and the organisations they are working for or with. Chapter 6, in particular, outlined how both had to consider their own biases, assumptions, and behaviours they adopted. Whether they align with what interventions were aiming to change, for instance, it was highlighted that those implementing the intervention's values must align with its goals. As demonstrated in Chapter 8, designers shared that their learnings and awareness required interventions to support it. Finally, this opportunity also ended with personal connections to IPV. Chapters 3, 5, 6, 7, and 8 highlighted how designers became aware of this and are affected by engaging in this work through vicarious trauma and re-traumatisation. Adopting such a mindset thus re-centres the designer's journey in the process, as their actions are critical in this work. This perspective is expanded as a contribution in section 9.3. Thus, with all the above in mind, this thesis argues that to adopt this mindset, (building) expertise is necessary to understand what intervention opportunities are required.

This orienting mindset emphasises how working in IPV, like TID, changes how design, the world and oneself (Dietkus, 2023) is understood. Addressing IPV occurs through the outcomes and actions taken until their implementation (further explored in section 9.3). This evidences that social designers should not seek to enact change only within the outcome but consider how it can begin at its conception – how they frame the problem, what they do throughout the research, and how their positions are explored.

### 9.2.2 Offering principles of design responsive to IPV

Principles, as described in Chapter 3, is a category of knowledge explication, making it a suitable contribution to knowledge. Principles can make explicit the often implicit design knowledge in IPV

contexts and facilitating communication of practice. It outlined how principles may significantly influence design decisions. Thus, the principles guide new and existing designers, demonstrating directions that should be taken, explored, and contextualised. To recall, the principles, illustrated in Figure 9.1, aim to guide designers towards being intentional about their design adaptation while navigating the complexities of IPV. Based on the aforementioned perspective that every moment is an opportunity for interventions, these principles put this into action where each principle is open, exploratory, and never restrictive. Equally, these may serve as a contextual example of applying desire-based framings as shared by scholars (Tuck, 2009; Leitão, 2020; 2022) in IPV contexts.



Figure 9.1- Guiding principles

The principles (Chapter 7) reflect a move away from deficit-based mindsets. As outlined in Chapter 3, these mindsets focus on designating users as vulnerable and passive, confining them to their past and making visible their current living conditions. In these mindsets, there is a focus on individuals and isolated aspects of their lives that oversimplify the complexities of the social experience and do not account for the temporality of harm. Leitão (2022) noted that this is reflected in design through needs-based approaches confined to given life models. Instead, mindsets that align with desire-based (Tuck, 2009; Leitão, 2020; 2022) focus on understanding

complexity, contradiction, and self-determination and mixing loss with hope. This section will now expand on how the principles show resemblance with desire-based mindsets in IPV circumstances and, thus, in design:

- *Critical awareness* directly prompts designers to engage with theories and politics that help build an understanding of the world as more social than natural (Van Amstel et al., 2023), where complexity and contradiction can be explored (Tuck, 2009);
- *Supporting care* aims to account for loss, risk, and harm without overly protecting users, thus recognising their capacity to make change;
- *Relational focus* actively disrupts individualism and isolated experiences by recognising the interdependency and influences across people. It also recognises that relationships can be both loving and abusive (Levine & Meiners, 2020);
- *Dialogical engagement* centres on creating spaces where people explore alternative behaviours with themselves and others. This is similar to findings from Bailey and Gamman (2022) and Mazzarella and Schuster (2022), which addressed violence by developing discussions and amplifying people's capabilities;
- *Encouragement* is the antidote to design urges to 'fix', similar to Noel's (2023) use of joy to overcome this frame. Encouraging is a mixture of support, confidence, and hope—thus, it focuses on people's agency to make change;
- Finally, *making visible* directly captures the ethos of desire-based framings, which focus on visions and encouraging new possibilities and models (Leitão, 2020).

These principles deserve future research to fully capture strategies to support their application and how they vary depending on contexts. Whether they can be applied to other situations where designers work with harm, specifically intimate harm, and what variations would be necessary. It is crucial to consider whether there are situations in which they are not applicable or are no longer relevant. For instance, where abusive tactics vary.



What is interesting about reflecting on these principles, is how it disrupts assumptions and ideologies about IPV, that its centred on right and wrong, punishment, distress, and vulnerability. It captures the potential for building structures centred on people's well-being. They outline the mindset where key priorities, attitudes, and behaviours are salient.

#### 9.2.2.1 Trauma-informed design and design addressing IPV

In Chapter 3, trauma-informed design (TID), was noted as an existing design practice suitable for IPV contexts. As a practice that actively considers trauma within the design process and centres users' and designers' safety throughout. However, TID does not actively aim to address trauma, whereas in this research, practitioners are actively concerned with addressing harm and changing behaviours and systems that reproduce them. This limitation has been noted by scholars in IPV (Wathen & Varcoe, 2022), who have actively implemented violence into trauma-informed care, considering structural and interpersonal experiences of violence and providing strengths-based and capacity building – towards breaking cycles of abuse. Yet, not from a design perspective.

Like trauma and violence-informed care (TVIC), the findings from this thesis, specifically the principles, can build on TID to incorporate it into areas of social design where making social change is at the core of what designers do. Unlike other common uses of TID that focus on avoiding future harm: "We encourage others to build on, adjust, and expand both the UX heuristics and trauma-informed principles to meet the needs of people who have been excluded by harmful digital design" (Eggleston & Noel, p.13).

Interestingly, this research found that TID was not consistently applied across the case studies in Chapters 5 to 6, yet as noted in Chapter 7, similarities between implemented safety practices were visible. For example, considering user safety through adding exit buttons to surveys. The principles in Chapter 7 have values similar to those of TID. Both Chayn's and SAMSHA's principles (see section 3.2.3.1) focus on creating environments and organisational procedures that ensure positive and safe interactions with people who have experienced abuse (Supporting Care). Underpinning an attitude to treat people with care, focus on their agency, and develop interactions to support them. Hope, in particular, from Chayn, resonates with the principles of Encouraging and

Making Visible. Their principle focuses on growth and learning and aims to uplift mood, provide a safe environment and inspire hope and healing. Another principle they include is power sharing. Interestingly, although a critical aspect of IPV due to links with power and control, this research did not particularly focus on theories of power. Further research should explore this. Other principles include Accountability and Privacy (Hussain, 2021) when designers embed opaque reporting mechanisms and how data is used. Although threaded through accounts in Chapters 5 and 6 – these were not made explicit in this work. This oversight might be due to the inherent focus of this research addressing social issues and, less so, organisational structures that enable this. This difference highlights the importance of diverse perspectives in IPV work and learning from one another.

TID and Chapter 7 principles can be used side by side, building on each other to make a combination that works for the particular context a designer is working with. However, the principles in this thesis also focus on the **change** that designers and users must undergo in this area. Which, of course, can only be done with other principles similar to TID.

### 9.3 A space of possibilities for designers

The space of possibilities for designers answers the third research question:

Which spaces could support designers in adapting their practice?

Ultimately, this question aimed to stimulate discussions around what knowledge, skills and formats designers would seek to support them.

Chapters 7 and 8 illustrate that intervening in social issues does not rest solely on the interventions themselves but also on how designers practice and learn to create alternative possibilities in the world (Kisslinger & Williams, 2021). One Million Experiment's collection of projects (Kisslinger & Williams, 2021) demonstrate that learning, sharing and envisioning are equally vital to respond to harm, which resonates with Chapter 8's intentions to understand what space can support this. Thus, at the centre is a contribution to re-centring designers' journeys in

the design process as a critical element to consider and investigate how they learn and share with others – offering moments of vulnerability (Akama et al., 2023). The conceptual framework diagram offered in Chapter 8 can be used as a discursive object, following Baily and Gamman (2022), and emphasising designers knowledge and skills as vital. It can provide a reflective moment for designers to commit to an ethical practice (Akama et al., 2023). In response, this research contributes to prompting academic researchers to foster environments of change for designers to share and learn together rather than methods and tools that stay contained within the research context. This contribution aligns with literature emphasising the importance of acknowledging designer's perspective and constructions of the problem (Suchman, 2002; Noel, 2023).

Overall, this thesis argues that the very process of engaging with the social issue of IPV changes a designer. This social issue begs us to question what we know and have taken for granted. As noted in Chapter 3, design education is a critical way in which designers' learning and development are centred where they can deepen their design practice. However, this is not to say that instead of students designing a chair as their first project, they tackle IPV. Instead, there can be value in prompting design students to explore topics related to intimate harm in their projects, as it can help understand how to grapple with complexity and contradiction during the design process. However, it must be done in a highly supportive setting that centres on the safety of designers and those with whom they involve. Given that education ultimately benefits students and universities, the risks may not outweigh the benefits (Ellsberg & Heise, 2002; Burgess-Porter, 2015; Dragiewicz et al., 2023). Therefore, further work must examine how this intersection in design education may occur without giving up critical values in this work.

A recurring theme in Chapters 5, 6, and 8 is that designers should be willing to intervene in their practices, just as they do with users – they are equally part of systems. However, this statement must be taken cautiously, as a (NGOs) white designer in other countries will not be part of their systems. Thus, both systems must be examined. The space of possibilities for designers might be challenging, given the inherent culture of design. However, it is in the struggle against restricting

cultures, where collectivising is necessary to build relational care as people aim to overcome it either individually or through collectively challenging institutions and structures (Van Amstel et al., 2021; McEntee, 2021; Fiadeiro et al., 2023c). Thus, there is value in pursuing further work that studies the process and impacts of collectivising designers and prompting organisations and institutions. As argued by Bellini et al. (2023), there is invisible labour in the work researchers do to ensure safety. While the space should not overload designers with more work, it should make this labour visible, recognised and supported.

A space of possibilities for designers was limited to speculation in this thesis and requires building and further research. However, its conception supports arguments threaded through this thesis that, critical to adapting design to work in IPV contexts is the designers' mindsets – how they interpret and respond to situations. (Chapter 7). However, this must not reproduce the outdated values of the lone genius designer, but rather that this mindset is built and continuously shaped in cohesion with others and related to the contexts and actions that emerge from them (Kimbell, 2011)

This thesis argues that there is value in placing design in complex spaces which challenge its very nature. This argument aligns with Lima (2023), who states that designers must build critical awareness beyond design to other disciplines to develop an ethical design framework. IPV must be one of these spaces.

## **9.4 Feminist emergent methodological strategies**

The final contribution to knowledge in this thesis is its methodological approach. When reflecting back on its implementation, it was apparent that four further strategies for applying Gaver et al.'s (2022) work from a feminist perspective were developed.

*This will be discussed in the first person as I will be sharing my personal experiences.*

Given the lack of earlier studies, this research was inherently exploratory and thus applied a feminist emergent methodology (FEM), responsive to new knowledge, structural change, and

material potential (Gaver et al., 2022; Place, 2023). This research valued allowing the unfolding of an investigation rather than sticking to a predetermined path of testing theories or developing methods for design application. Thus, applying a FEM approach to IPV, which has not been done before to the best of my knowledge, is a crucial contribution to knowledge. In doing so, this research builds on Gaver et al.'s (2022) strategies for encouraging emergent methodologies, outlined in section 4.1.2 and offers additional strategies that have emerged from conducting the research. Incorporating these strategies alongside work by Gaver et al. (2022) is crucial for those working in conditions of harm, making this methodology transferable to researchers in other areas.

#### 9.4.1.1 Emergence strategy A: encouraging emergence - take the structural materials as sources of inspiration that suggest deeper explorations

When addressing a contemporary issue like IPV, with continuously evolving policies, laws, and cases in the media (such as those involving Gisèle Pelicot<sup>59</sup>), it is essential to consider the social structures that play a crucial role in this dynamic. By doing so, it shifts away from research practices outside of social structures, e.g. solely conducting workshops with design students at a university. Instead, research was informed by designers who currently practice and have previously practised in this area. As Ahmed (2017) states, "Ideas would not be something generating through distance, a way of abstracting something from something, but from our involvement in a world that often leaves us, frankly, bewildered." (p.12). Part of a feminist emergence methodology is just that - being actively (as opposed to passively) involved in the world, building a sense of what is not quite right.

I worked at the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) (UK Government) and in two volunteer positions in IPV organisations (Arts and Crafts Facilitator, Hestia and Helpline Worker, National Domestic Abuse Helpline), getting closer to acting within the social structures. At the MoJ, I was involved in

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<sup>59</sup> Gisèle Pelicot was drugged and raped by her husband Dominique Pelicot, whom also invited 49 other men to rape her while drugged. It disrupted myths of rapists as bad apples and monsters, where these men were also husbands, fathers and neighbours, taking up professions such as soldiers and journalists (Gillett & Gozzi, 2024).

creating a systems map that visualised how people experiencing abuse interacted with the criminal justice system and specialised domestic abuse support. It informed the research on the complexity of the IPV system that people must navigate, interact with various services, and face structural barriers. As a volunteer working with people directly with abuse, I learnt the mindset required when emotionally supporting people. Often, as I chat with survivors, I notice myself discussing aspects I had just written in this thesis – such as relationships being both loving and abusive – and vice versa. Furthermore, I underwent extensive training, during which Volunteer Managers stated that a key element of such roles is to encourage people to explore their experiences and options – further validating the principle ‘encouragement’ among others.

#### 9.4.1.2 Emergence strategy B: managing emergence - recognise the researcher as emerging alongside their work affecting and being affected by the practice

When working in such an emergence-friendly process, it can be quite unpredictable what information will emerge as studies “shift their focus and concerns over time” (Gaver et al., 2022, p.520) and what emotional response may emerge. Gaver et al.’s (2022) article focuses heavily on how designers adapt and learn through the materials but does little to account for the designers’ learning about the social self that may emerge alongside research projects. How, for example, they might now, with newfound knowledge, be able to name previous experiences – e.g. as sexual violence. Which, as noted in section 1.2.1, is what happened to me.

What felt difficult during this work is not only the previous experience of sexual violence and assault I carry but also the ones that happened throughout the research. Thus, critical to any strategy that supports managing emergence is the inclusion of self-care strategies. For me, these included counselling, being in community with others, embroidery, and taking a shower.

#### 9.4.1.3 Emergence strategy C: narrating emergence - embed research insights into narratives of the design research

This strategy is closely linked to the common phrase “do what you say, say what you do”. It emphasises that research insights should not only be shared with the research community but also serve as essential insights for the researchers’ own work. Part of emergence is recognising

the research output as inspirations for the researcher's narrative, where insights are directly applied in narrating the research.

Chapter 7 presented six principles: critical awareness, supportive care, relational focus, dialogical engagement, encouragement, and making visible. These formed the foundations of how this thesis was approached. It aimed to build readers' *critical awareness* by prompting them to question why this social issue is prevalent in the first place (Chapter 1 and Chapter 3) and how it can be different (Chapter 1, 5 and 6) (Noel, 2023). *Supportive care* is provided to readers through a wellness pack at the beginning of the thesis and to myself through exploring self-care strategies (Fattalah & Rabelo, 2024). *Relational focus*, similar to interventions for IPV, recognises the need to create environments (spaces) that nurture relationships among designers to learn with and from each other (Agid & Austin, 2023)(Chapter 8). *Dialogical engagement* occurs through the conversations with designers in Chapters 5 and 6.

Given the critical nature of engaging in such critical work, much attention is often paid to denouncing design complicity with structures of harm (Agid, 2022; Keshavarz, 2020; Van Amstel et al., 2023). Likewise, this thesis was framed from this perspective for a long time, which then shifted to *encouraging* designers to find their capacity and confidence in this work. Overall, this thesis is an experiment in *making visible* not only IPV in all its complexity, but also a design that addressed IPV.

#### 9.4.1.4 Emergence strategy D: assessing emergence - to account for what is happening and what could be

Research under such methodology emerges from understanding the manifestations of harm in our societies and is accountable for recognising and redressing harms. Grounded on feminism as a political stance, this research is political and intentional in its framings, research, and outputs. Thus, it recognises both criminal and abolitionist perspectives. Equally, bringing in IPV stories, although fictional, is based on real accounts and provides a moment of accountability for what is happening in the world.

While emergence waivers researchers' accountability to the original intentions of the research projects where research beginnings and framings are provisional (Gaver et al., 2022), a feminist stance still finds importance in maintaining accountability to what is happening. Thus, including in this thesis policies, laws, cultural contexts, and support services. At the same time, it aims to imagine what could be by questioning, proposing, and acting in research and the social world (Ahmed, 2017; Olufemi, 2020). Research is always part of enacting the world we aim for (Ahmed, 2017).

## 9.5 Chapter summary

This chapter has outlined the main contributions of this thesis, and identified how the three sub-research questions have been addressed. By situating these within existing literature, this research demonstrates how it has contributed to expanding design's role in IPV, its adaptation, what may support it and a methodology that may support future investigations towards similar contributions. The thesis has aimed to contribute with knowledge to support designers in recognising and understanding the distinct ways design and intimate harm intersect. It argues that critical to addressing IPV is a shift in mindset that balances individuals' situations and socio-cultural conditions, which should be supported by continuous learning and sharing across the field. This work aims to build expertise not only in individual designers, but in the field itself, so that those without expertise may enter and build capacity in the work.

As this thesis has taken a broad approach, it has generated more questions that require further research. Thus, this marks the beginning of future studies building on insights from this work. The next chapter will expand on these and conclude the thesis. Before moving on, the stories of Maria, Ben, and Grace and Joseph are revisited for one last time – Box 9.1.





Since participating in the intervention, Joseph and Grace feel more in sync. Joseph feels he understands Grace's response and position to contribute to the household economically. Grace still feels Joseph needs to alter some of his behaviours.



With the support of IPV specialists, Maria has found a new home for herself and her children. Tom has applied for a child arrangement order, where they will be attending court to define child contacts and living arrangements. Tom has been using this court order to further his abuse, alleging that she is abusing the children and making Maria spend her savings.



Josh has returned to his relationship with Ben; he feels that Ben has slightly improved his behaviours.

Box 9.1- IPV stories endings

# Chapter 10. Conclusion

This thesis aimed to explore how design adapted in response to the contextual implications of IPV. To the best of the researcher's knowledge, it is the first design research that explores design's role in addressing IPV across various contexts and applications. It addresses a gap in knowledge for understanding common characteristics that shape design practice across the field. This thesis concludes that shifting priorities, attitudes, and design behaviours have emerged through engaging in IPV contexts. Traditionally, social design tackles urgent social issues to improve the lives of others and prioritise participatory practices (Resnik, 2019). While these are still applicable to IPV, they cannot be applied within the frameworks on which they were built, where a focus on elements including intimacy, risk and harm prompts designers to question, among others, how to centre people's safety and consider social norms.

Furthermore, as IPV is a pattern of socialised behaviours deeply influenced by norms, regulations, and culture, it requires dialectical ways of confronting it, as harm cannot be fully 'designed out' (Strohmayr et al., 2022). From this perspective, this research illustrates a shift from deficit-based mindsets that afflict social design towards an alignment with desire-based ones (Tuck, 2009; Leitão, 2020; 2022). Through engaging in IPV, designers have expanded their design knowledge and skills; this thesis has captured this in the case studies and offers back principles and a concept of space that communicates this shift and offers guidance.

Thus, based on the above, this research has answered the three subsequent research questions as follows.

**RQ1: What are the realities and possibilities of designing in IPV situations?**

The research provides a structural understanding of the realities of IPV situations. It captures and communicates this through the concept of intimate harm – a contingent and temporal form of harm enacted and experienced through relations. Furthermore, building on this concept, the thesis illustrates how designs role is directly influence by contextual factors related to IPV – e.g. whether there is a predominance of IPV specialist support. It argues that this research will support

designers in becoming less dependent on this influence through conceptualising design roles and actively disrupting others. Thus, the thesis presents the possibilities of design's contemporary role. It captured this as (1) the facilitator of diverse voices, making tangible the often intangible forms of culture (Vink, 2019), and (2) generating change through supporting users to explore what change could look like for themselves. Similar to IPV, the answer to this question is a set of dynamic concepts and definitions that reflect the given social structures.

**RQ2: How might particular circumstances of designing within IPV contexts affect designers' rationale?**

When faced with the particular circumstances of designing within IPV, designers have adapted their mindsets to align with situational and contextual conditions. As a result, this has shaped their rationales when designing, which varies depending on their approach and the context in which they operate. This research identified these in case studies exploring (1) response and recovery and (2) prevention. Though differing in priorities and approaches, the thesis concludes that a mindset shift is common across interventions, identifying orientations that support this shift – considering moments in the design process as opportunities for interventions and applying guiding principles that support change.

**RQ3: Which spaces could support designers to adapt their practices?**

Finally, the thesis presents a conceptual framework that captures the desired components that could support designers' adaptation and the relationship between them. This concept includes design-related IPV theories, sharing knowledge, and practising together. Overall, the conceptualisation of space further shows that to support designers in adapting their practices, more attention must be paid to their own learning and development. Not to privilege the designers with a special authority but rather as human beings who equally shape and are shaped by the contexts they are working in.

Overall, this thesis concludes that while applying design, as predominantly conceptualised, will generate harm in the IPV field, with support and informed shifts in mindsets, design can create an array of possibilities where people may explore their situations and move towards changing them.

Table 10.1 illustrates how each of the contributions to knowledge answers the research questions:

Table 10.1- Contributions to knowledge

<b>ORQ: In addressing intimate partner violence, how does design adapt in response to contextual implications?</b>			
<b>RQ1 - What are the realities and possibilities of designing in situations of IPV?</b>	<b>RQ2 – How might particular circumstances of designing within IPV contexts affect designers' rationale?</b>	<b>RQ3 – Which spaces could support designers to adapt their practices?</b>	<b>Methodological Approach</b>
<b>A:</b> Outlining intimate harm as a distinct form of harm;  <b>B:</b> Uncovering design's role in addressing IPV	<u>Orienting mindsets:</u>  <b>C:</b> Every moment in design should be regarded as an opportunity for intervention: methodological and practical implications  <b>D:</b> Offering principles of design responsive to IPV	<b>E:</b> A space of possibilities for designers	<b>F:</b> Feminist emergent methodological strategies

This chapter elaborates on the theoretical contributions outlined above. Subsequently, it will identify the current applications of this thesis within the field and explore further ones. Additionally, the conclusion will address the limitations inherent in this thesis and reflect on the necessary directions for future research.

## 10.1 Theoretical contributions

Overall, this thesis offers a theoretical and empirical advancement on what constitutes a design that addresses IPV. The research contributes to and extends existing theories in the following ways:

In *social design*, it stretches the agenda of social designers to work in IPV contexts. This research has done this by offering theoretical frameworks to engage with IPV critically and introducing overlooked concepts of risk, harm, trauma, safety, and healing that present methodological and practical implications in design. It responds to calls from design scholars (Bakırlioğlu & Yetiş, 2024; Agid, 2022; Keshavarz, 2020; Costanza-Chock, 2020; Agid, 2019; Julier & Kimbell, 2019) for design to recognise structural causes of inequality where Julier and Kimbell (2019) provocatively stated that "as currently configured, social design practice is destined not to tackle the causes and consequences of inequalities" (p.20). Thus, the research has demonstrated this by outlining a configuration that actively aims to tackle the causes of IPV (prevention) and its consequences (recovery and response).

At the intersection of *design and harm (crime)*, while still growing in design, this thesis contributes to a further understanding of what lies at the intersection of design and harm, providing the concept of intimate harm to consider societal to individual elements of harm. For instance, it supports other areas of design concern, such as knife crime (Bailey & Gamman, 2022; Mazzarella & Schuster, 2022) and policing (Agid, 2022). To facilitate this, it provides orienting mindsets that support design to consider intimate harm characteristics, especially in violence and crime. Particularly for situations involving trauma and safety, the research centres on how these factors affect designers' personal lives and the practical adjustments they need to make. It acknowledges that their work circumstances can positively and negatively influence them. This perspective can apply to other areas of interest, such as the climate crisis, where designers may be directly affected by its impacts.

Finally, in the *IPV field*, this thesis serves as a communication tool for the role of design in supporting IPV agendas. It contributed to theories on developing interventions for IPV from a design perspective, pointing out strategies that must be considered, such as using positive imagery and particular UX interfaces to enable supporting environments and deter abusive partners. While written from a design perspective, this thesis provides professionals in IPV fields with insights into the potentials and limitations of design, as well as how to best support and be supported by design.

## 10.2 Existing and future applications

This research is particularly relevant for all designers working in IPV contexts or those planning to enter it. It offers foundational theories to be grappled with and supports building critical understandings of IPV as structural. Moreover, the interventions outlined in Chapters 5 and 6 offer directions for designers to explore in their work. They offer reflections and experiences of overcoming methodological and practical implications that may inform designers of what they may encounter. Finally, the six principles in Chapter 7 and the statement – that every moment in design is an opportunity for an intervention - capture the orienting mindset necessary in this work. Overall, this research offers designers a foundation for their practices, thus supporting them to directly begin to draw and apply insights.

This application of these insights has already started. The researcher helped organise and facilitate a UXforChange event focused on IPV in London, UK (see section 1.2.2). The researcher ensured the workshop was trauma-informed, developed pre-reading materials for designers – based on research insights (Appendix A.2) – and presented the PhD findings focused on UX decisions for people experiencing or recovering from abuse. The pre-reading materials and presentation were vital, as participants only had 2hrs during the workshop to develop concepts. During the event, it was noticeable that designers applied research insights, where during group discussion, they grappled with the complexity of making seemingly straightforward design decisions, such as introducing gamification, in an IPV context with care. Furthermore, they

identified strategies such as verifying whether a user was at a crisis point and redirecting them to relevant services. When participants were sent a feedback form asking, amongst other questions, if they took away something that could apply to their work, one participant responded: "Yes, the design methodologies and strategies shared in Rute's research".

Thus, the findings are relevant to many people in the design field, including design students, industry designers, design educators<sup>60</sup>, and design organisations. However, this extends further to those interested in addressing IPV, including: criminology, epidemiology, gender academics, VAWG and IPV specialist organisations, healthcare workers, (international and local) NGOs, and funding bodies. It can offer reassurance and accountability for these workers when collaborating with design, demonstrating that under the right circumstances, it may ethically and safely work in these situations<sup>61</sup>. For instance, the researcher has been invited to review articles across different journals, including Violence Against Women Journal and invited as a guest speaker to a symposium for educators focused on engaging men and boys. This recognition demonstrates the interest and value of a design perspective in IPV-related work.

Design's role in IPV outlined in Chapter 9 can serve as the basis of conversations between designers and collaborators (i.e. governments and specialist IPV services) on how design could be leveraged to address IPV. Not only this, but it can also be argued that this framework can be further applied to other social issues that intersect with risk, harm, and trauma. This research allows actors across different fields to intersect and collaborate, using design as a starting point for making such complex issues tangible. While this research focuses on the adaptation of design, with its methodological and practical implications, it also showcases design's potential to be a key approach when addressing IPV. This thesis aims to amplify the breadth of effort and work existing

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<sup>60</sup> The researcher presented the findings of this thesis in 2022 to new RCA lecturers to inform their teachings when their students are working directly with social contexts related to GBV or other forms of harm.

<sup>61</sup> This insight, in particular, comes from a conversation with an epidemiologist (see section 4.4), who, during the discussion, asked the researcher how they could trust the designers to do the "right thing."

designers do, where future IPV practitioners should collaborate with design practitioners (informed by the principles outlined in this thesis).

Now more than ever, with an increasing movement to address IPV and violence in all its forms, we need, as Kisslinger & Williams (2021) share, a million experiments where we learn and create the world we want. This thesis provides examples and accounts of the many ways in which design is already proposing new worlds through the ongoing work of designers worldwide. There may and will always be many more directions.

### **10.3 Limitations**

Important factors influenced the interpretation of the findings in this research. These factors included the choice of methodology, sampling, and the researcher's positionality and professional experience. To begin with, the methodology aimed to reflect the exploratory nature of this research; thus, methodical choices reflected this, heavily relying on interviews with designers. Consequently, the interpretation of practice depended on designers' reflections, which did not fully capture how such activities and interactions occur within their contexts. Other methods, such as ethnography, could have produced this type of data. Equally, practice-based or practice-led research could have developed more concrete and nuanced findings of what it means to practice design, with it developing richer accounts of researcher reflections and conversations; for instance, Bellini's (2019) and Leitão's (2021) theses' provided rich accounts of their experiences designing in IPV situations. By focusing on applying a feminist emergence methodology (FEM), this research became quite personal. However, while a few personal accounts are shared throughout the thesis to draw attention to the impact of the research, a more thorough examination was not taken. Incorporating methods such as auto-ethnography, reflective writing, and diaries could have supported better narrating and accounting for what transcended when applying a FEM approach.

Under this methodological approach, sampling critically affected the research. Firstly, there was a bias toward English-speaking designers, whose work was publicly available, as most recruitments



were led by identifying projects online and the designers behind them. There is, therefore, a gap in the accounts of community-based projects and projects by practitioners (who might not call themselves designers) developing interventions that address IPV. Equally, less was explored on interventions for those who enact abuse. Furthermore, interventions that might not be directly intervening in IPV but addressing risk factors or outcomes of it<sup>62</sup>, for example, rough sleeping, transformative justice and alcohol and substance abuse, were omitted.

Finally, the researcher's positionality and professional experiences inevitably shaped the perspective taken. While much of the empirical work explored design through a global lens, this research is heavily situated in the UK. The researcher has an educational and professional background in design and IPV in the UK, where interpreting the structural elements and implications was limited to its comparison to UK contexts. Therefore, the researcher's interpretation is biased towards Global North's understandings of design and violence. Likewise, through the researcher's position as a white cis-woman, she experiences and understands safety in specific ways and different to other social locations. While this research has preliminarily engaged with aspects such as structural violence and abolitionism (Davies et al., 2022), other aspects such as racial capitalism, imperialism and colonial occupation, which produce gendered violence (Vergès, 2022), are required to deepen knowledge in this area.

## 10.4 Future research directions

This thesis has opened up new research directions:

1. **Further research deepening thesis insights and knowledge:**

As discussed throughout Chapters 1 and 9, due to the absence of earlier studies, this thesis took a broader approach to exploring design practice within IPV contexts.

Consequently, while the thesis offers several outputs, these must be further tested and

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<sup>62</sup> Examples of the types of interventions that are missing from this research can be found in 'One Million Experiments' from Interrupting Criminalization and Project Nia (One Million Experiments, n.d.). This website provides a vast collection of projects around the US that aim to keep communities safe.

explored to grapple with their implications fully. Firstly, this thesis outlines several methodological and practical implications. A future study that evaluates and assesses these findings (see Bellini et al., 2023) and gathers additional implications based on the thesis insight could develop a database with directions and strategies for designers. Secondly, while drawn from practitioners' insights, the principles must be further applied and tested to identify strategies supporting their application. Furthermore, they may vary depending on contexts; some of which may no longer be relevant, due to shifting priorities reflecting unexplored approaches to addressing IPV. Finally, research exploring design as experienced from the perspective of those who are involved (users and collaborators) is necessary to better capture design's role and further necessary shifts;

## **2. Research into promoting exchange of knowledge between designers:**

Chapter 8 concluded by offering a conceptual framework of a space to support designers in adapting their practices. As it remains conceptual, developing and testing the framework may provide insights on changes it generates and whether it accelerates the process and knowledge for designers. Further research should explore adapting Global South interventions (Chapter 6) to Global North contexts. Through this, an adaptation model or narrative may be developed to promote further knowledge exchanges. Finally, the combination of TID and design addressing IPV principles must be further explored, where TID is applied to uncommon areas such as violence prevention to explore further adaptations.

## **3. Expanding interventions reach:**

While this research and the resulting thesis covers many approaches to intervening in IPV situations, further opportunities exist to apply design and challenge its role. Firstly, research should explore design applied at more societal-level and institutional-level interventions (see section 2.3.4), whether the principles outlined in this thesis are applicable, and whether further adaptations are required. Secondly, while this thesis covers a case of specialist interventions for LGBTQIA+ individuals, further research into

specialist interventions is necessary. For instance, supporting 'by and for' organisations across different social locations, such as disabilities and race.

Furthermore, when working with men who have experienced abuse, different factors emerge in these contexts. Similarly, although people who enact abuse were covered in this research by one designer – this was not comprehensive and requires further investigation into the implications and rationales that arise—further combined with abolitionist strategies such as transformative justice. Finally, further research should continue to understand design and prevention, particularly with boys. While well covered in this thesis, it requires further investigation and amplification. This research should explore challenging methods that prompt men and boys to reflect on their alignment with patriarchal structures.

This thesis now comes to a close, however, this research is far from over.

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