When it comes to health & wellbeing, how safe is it to share online?

- When engaging with online platforms for digital health and wellbeing, these platforms can provide users with important space for social support, information exchange, and self-expression. However, online platforms also raise significant privacy and trust concerns among users.

Our project – Sharing While Caring – examines online safety experiences in the context of online platforms for 1) pregnancy loss and 2) fitness sharing.

Through systematic reviews of the literature and empirical work we’ve found that users are concerned about:

- the security of their personal data, including sensitive health information.
- breaches or misuse of their data by third parties.
- privacy violations or harassment.

Users are more competent than we think – how can we cultivate that competence for increased safety?

- Users are concerned about the impact of platform algorithms and insufficient privacy settings.
- While users can take certain measures to actively manage their online safety, key tensions still exist within their online experiences which prevent users from fully protecting themselves on these platforms.

For example:

- Among users who consume and create media about their fitness, their own ability to manage their online safety is weighed against concerns they have for younger populations, who have not yet learned how to do this.
- Users sharing after pregnancy loss are concerned about their sensitive data being circulated beyond their personal networks by platform algorithms.

Co-designing practical design responses to implement for safer digital health experiences

- The next stages of our research will focus on collaboration and co-design with platform users, as we will conduct participatory workshops with participants affected by these issues in our research.

These workshops will aim to:

- Further explore the challenges faced by users on online platforms.
- Develop practical design responses which can ultimately support safer online platform engagement among these users in the future.
- Work with software engineers and platform designers to develop feasible and relevant responses which can be practically implemented for the benefit of users.