

Bringing a survivor centred and feminist approach to Safeguarding

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Today's Agenda

12:00-13:00 Deep dive into feminist and survivor centred approaches to Safeguarding

13:00-13:30 Lunch

13:30-15:00 Group discussions on barriers to reporting, embedding a survivor centred approach

SHEA and Safeguarding at ActionAid International

- AAI's SHEA and Safeguarding approach is about preventing and responding to:
 - **SHEA** – *Sexual harassment, exploitation, and abuse*
 - **Other safeguarding concerns** – *child and adult at-risk abuse and exploitation*
- Carried out by ActionAid staff or other representatives (e.g. partner staff, contractors) or through programs or processes that are unsafe and put people at risk
- Survivors can include anyone we come into contact with through our work (e.g. rights holders, partner staff, AA staff)

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ActionAid International's SHEA and Safeguarding approach

- Creating a safe working culture
 - *Upholding the rights and dignity of all*
- Taking an intersectional feminist approach
 - *Learning from the voices and experiences of marginalised and oppressed groups*
- Survivor-centred
 - *Respecting their power and dignity through confidentiality and right to make decisions*
- Zero Tolerance
 - *All allegations are responded to in a robust, timely, and survivor-centred manner; SHEA and Safeguarding is embedded in every part of our work*

**Sexual
Violence
as Abuse
of Power**

At ActionAid we believe that all forms of sexual violence are rooted in an imbalance of power, particularly gendered and sexualised abuses of power. This is exacerbated by the inherent power imbalances in our sector

Sexual Violence Myths

It's not a big deal if the person doing it didn't mean any harm.

I don't know anyone who would behave in an abusive way.

You are more likely to be harmed by a stranger.

Lots of people lie about sexual violence, so it's hard to tell when it really has happened.

If you dress or behave flirtatiously, you only have yourself to blame.

Survivors will all talk about their experience in the same way.

If they didn't fight back, it means they wanted it.

Men can't help themselves or control their urges

It is easy to make it stop: you just have to say something, report etc

Only women and girls are victims. Only men are perpetrators.

Many accusations are just misunderstandings blown out of proportion.

Barriers to Reporting

- Fear of not being believed
- Stigma of experiencing sexual violence
- Fear of being ostracised
- Fear of losing access to your children
- Fear of retribution/violence
- Fear that this will prevent marriage prospects
- Not knowing that what happened is abuse
- Fear of impact on family or friends
- Belief that you are wrong, 'overreacted', or 'misinterpreted' what happened
- Not knowing you can report/how to report
- Reporting options not being accessible (e.g to people with disabilities, people who cannot write)
- Not knowing what will happen after you report
- Fear that your report will go 'out of your hands' and you will have no control over what happens yet
- Fear that the response process will be re-traumatising

Alongside this, for staff/employees:

Barriers to Reporting contd.

- Fear of losing your job
- Fear that the alleged perpetrator will lose their job
- Fear of seeing the perpetrator in the office every day
- Not trusting the reporting procedures/seeing it fail for others
- Belief that the organisation will not take it seriously because of previous experiences
- Fear that you will see the perpetrator in other parts of the sector, 'small world' fear
- Fear of legal action
- Fear of losing friends at work, that colleagues will see you as a 'bad sport' or as not fun
- Fear of losing opportunities for promotion or career development
- Fear of being branded a complainer, a whistleblower, and not being able to get work elsewhere

Barriers to Reporting cases we receive as organisations

- Partners fear we will stop working with them
- Staff fear that reporting a high number of cases means others will think they have a Safeguarding 'problem', be viewed as high risk etc
- Fear of being penalised for having cases
- Fear that donors and other external stakeholders will think we have a Safeguarding 'problem' and stop funding us
- Not knowing the structures internally for who should be informed, how to manage confidentiality, how processes are managed
- Lack of trust in internal processes
- Fear that it will not be confidential
- Fear of confrontation, having difficult conversations
- Fear that it will mean a resource implication (funding an investigation etc) that is not possible
- ...

Recognising that violence in all its forms is intended to disempower individuals, a survivor-centred approach aims to give power back to the survivor. This includes:

Survivor-Centred approach

- **Survivors do not have to report something they experience**
- **Where appropriate, give survivors choice over what happens and how they want their concern addressed**
- **Choose if/when they receive support and what support they want**
- **Intersectional approach – recognising survivors may have diverse needs and challenges, ensure that our actions do not inadvertently compound harm**

New approach to Investigating Safeguarding concerns

We are committed to ensuring that:

- no one will be victimised for making a complaint
- we will work with complainants to ensure they are central to any response
- Our internal processes are not harmful and do not further disempower individuals
- Support is offered throughout

We believe that:

- Feminist and survivor-centred investigations are not biased, subjective or unfair to accused persons.
- We must remember who the complaint 'belongs' to and ensure we do not inadvertently ignore the complainant
- Professional feminist investigations can ensure the rights of all while not reinforcing unequal power dynamics through an investigation process.

**Survivor-centred approach in practice:
Survivor-centred and feminist investigations at AAI**

**Survivor-
centred
approach in
practice: part 1**

- ❑ Only trained Investigators can lead Investigations; trained on psycho-social aspects, how to manage their power and bias in investigations
- ❑ Interviews carried out in ways to avoid compounding harm or furthering power inequalities (e.g ensuring the individual chooses where to be interviewed, removing 'police-like' approaches to gathering evidence etc)

**Survivor-
centred
approach in
practice: part 2**

- ❑ Support role to be created to ‘walk alongside’ complainants throughout the process, provide information and ensure they are not side lined in their own complaint
- ❑ Decision Making Panels trained on barriers to reporting, myths around sexual violence, and sexist norms so they have a better understanding of Safeguarding cases
- ❑ Oversight system in place to monitor investigators/investigations, ensure learning and accountability

What can we do to remove barriers to reporting?

In groups, we will spend 15 minutes discussing how to remove barriers for:

1. *Staff*
2. *Partners*
3. *Children*
4. *Beneficiaries/Community members*
5. *Marginalised, excluded groups (e.g people with disabilities, LGBTQI communities)*

We will then come back together to discuss as a group

Group Work

Discussion Questions

Embedding a survivor-centred approach

- *What are the challenges to embedding a survivor-centred approach?*
- *Can NGOs really embed a survivor centred approach?*
- *What can we do to embed a survivor-centred approach?*

Thank You!