



USAID Action Alliance for Preventing Sexual Misconduct (AAPSM) Measuring Sexual Exploitation and Abuse in Humanitarian and Development Settings

Challenges in Monitoring and Measuring SEA in the Field and
Using Focus Groups and Participatory Methods to Understand SEA

Presenters

Patricia McIlreavy, Vice President, Humanitarian Policy and Practice, InterAction

Colleen Striegel, Founder and Executive Director, HumanitarianHR

Maureen Murphy, Research Scientist, Global Women's Institute, George Washington University (GWU)

Summary

This session explored the use of focus groups and participatory methods to better understand the prevalence of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (SEA) in humanitarian settings, as well as any environment in which there are significant power imbalances.

Presentation: “SEA Challenges in the Field”

Colleen Striegel, HumanitarianHR

- In 2002 Striegel was asked to help with an investigation into the sexual exploitation of refugees in West Africa. This was the first public major sex scandal in the Humanitarian Sector, and inspired her to pursue the problem further. Despite the emergence of the #MeToo and #AidToo movements, Striegel noted an absence of institutions focused on helping aid organizations concretely strengthen their safeguarding practices. HumanitarianHR was created to meet this need by focusing on prevention and response.
- Striegel highlighted a difference between SEA and the broader issue of gender-based violence. SEA is a subset of GBV, but the response must address the fact that perpetrators are implicated in contracts between organizations and employees.
- Striegel noted that in the majority of her investigations the existence of sexual misconduct is public knowledge, though not reported to humanitarian aid actors through the mechanisms currently available. Reasons not to report include embarrassment, the fear of reprisal (including job loss), and low confidence that complaints will be taken seriously or result in significant change. Striegel noted that children in particular are often fearful and hold “nightmarish” fears of what might happen to them or to others if they report their experiences outside of their confidants.
- Most NGOs currently use community-based complaint mechanisms, but there is little to no data on their effectiveness. In conducting such research, Striegel said, it is important to gain local government approval and to involve beneficiaries to make well-informed

choices of reporting areas and develop culturally-appropriate awareness training. Better data is key to prevention.

Patricia McIlreavy, InterAction

- McIlreavy urged participants to expand the SEA issue beyond the humanitarian sector, and “focus the conversation on power dynamics and the abuse of power.”
- InterAction’s CEO has instituted a pledge on Preventing Sexual Abuse, Exploitation, and Harassment by and of NGO Staff, which was signed in March 2018 by 122 members and partners.
- Many tools for preventing and addressing SEA have been introduced since 2002, McIlreavy noted, but the aid sector has not yet undergone a fundamental underlying cultural change to make workplaces safe for employees and beneficiaries. Too often SEA is viewed through an “HR lens” when it must rise to the CEO level for meaningful reform.
- McIlreavy stressed the importance of “survivor-centered approaches.” Donors sometimes have different priorities than survivors, driven by concerns about reputational risk, but ethical solutions must prioritize survivors’ needs.
- McIlreavy also called for a more effective system to track perpetrators and prevent them from simply moving on to another aid organization after being disciplined. At the same time, she said, not every perpetrator has committed the same level of offense. She also called for greater clarity in policies regarding bystanders and their obligations to report violations or even intervene to stop them.
- InterAction, McIlreavy said, is attempting to coordinate between headquarters and field staff to support the efforts of the latter, adding that “headquarters must own it” if reform is to be effective.

Presentation: “Using Qualitative Methods to Explore SEA”

Maureen Murphy, George Washington University

- Murphy served as an aid worker in South Sudan and Sierra Leone.
- Qualitative and quantitative methods, she said, both have value but answer different questions with different purposes. Across all methods, it is vital to acknowledge and account for the power relations between researchers and the people with whom they work.
- Murphy participated in the “No Safe Place” research project in South Sudan, a quantitative prevalence survey on sexual violence (though not SEA specifically). She recommended reviewing the World Health Organization’s Multi-Country Study on Violence against Women and Girls, which used qualitative, participatory techniques. The study expands sexual exploitation and abuse to include additional categories like rape and rape attempts, other forms of sexual abuse, and transactional sex.
- Murphy also highlighted a resource list of key references on violence against women and girls, including a manual for gender and participatory principles for research in conflict-affected settings.
- As an example of participatory qualitative research, Murphy summarized the GWU Global Women’s Institute new research project, funded by the U.S. Department of State’s Bureau for Populations, Refugees, and Migration, called “Empowered Aid.” Based in Uganda and Lebanon, the project will train women and girls to do research on their own lives and document what is happening to them. The goal of the project is to transform gender and power dynamics in the delivery of humanitarian aid by

highlighting key questions like: How do we put women and girls at the center of the research? How is what we are learning helping the lives of the women at the center of our study?

- Murphy summarized a number of additional key points about qualitative research approaches:
 - Qualitative data will not get you statistics about prevalence. Instead, it offers insight about context.
 - Murphy recommended employing participatory discussion, and the use of self-adhesive notes so that participants can see the results “as the discussion happens” For example, this method could help answer questions like: Can you tell me about the type of violence that happens around the community, at home, or at aid distribution points? Which of these are more common? What are risks happening within your own lives?
 - Murphy also suggested “participatory ranking,” under which participants place stars on the issues of their greatest concern. This helps provide actionable data quickly.
 - Another powerful tool, Murphy said, is open-ended stories that a discussion group finishes itself. She cited an example that was posed to women living in Bidi Bidi Refugee Settlement in Uganda: A woman who is a refugee is taking care of her sister’s four children. An NGO worker asks her for sex to increase her food ration. We ask the community: Where would she go? Why wouldn’t she go there? What helps? What doesn’t help? What could be done differently? This can identify what mechanisms are in place in the camps, what people will do when these situations arise, and what are the lived experiences of peoples’ realities.
 - Murphy also discussed community mapping and social mapping, which are similar to participatory rural assessment and clarify risk areas/areas of protection. Community mapping is physical mapping. Social mapping is non-physical; it documents the relationship among people and organizations. Both types of mapping can be used to monitor changes over time.
- Moving forward, Murphy urged participants to reflect on a few core areas, including:
 - Methods for improving reporting and recognizing that increased reporting indicates improvements in reporting systems.
 - Institutional changes that will help protect women and girls.
 - Ways to track consequences for perpetrators.