Safeguarding in research and practice on accountability, health and well-being: A call for experience sharing

ARISE — Accountability in Urban Health

What is ARISE?

- Transforming the lives of marginalised people in informal urban spaces is vital to accelerate progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals. The aim of this poster is to share process and practice relating to safeguarding within the GCRF Accountability for Informal urban Equity Hub – known as ARISE.
- ARISE is a new research consortium, aiming to enhance accountability and improve health and wellbeing of marginalised people living and working in informal urban spaces in low- and middle-income countries (Bangladesh, India, Kenya, and Sierra Leone).
- The consortium brings together researchers, service providers and federations of slum dwellers from these countries and the UK. At the centre of our research design are iterative community-based participatory action research cycles conducted with co-researchers who are people living and working in urban informal spaces.

Why is safeguarding important?

- Following high profile cases of sexual and gender based violence and abuse from staff in international NGOs, safeguarding concerns have rapidly risen up the agenda for donors and organisations that fund and provide services to vulnerable groups or conducting research.
- Safeguarding concerns are not limited to sexual abuse and exploitation, but include physical and psychological abuse, exploitation and neglect. Vulnerable people are those who may be at risk of abuse or neglect due to the actions (or lack of action) of another person.
- Safeguarding concerns may emerge for a range of potential reasons. However, power relations, such as those related to gender, class, disability or control over resources limit or enable people's abilities to protect themselves from abuse and also to safeguard others.

The ARISE experience

Step one: Sharing institutional guidelines and practice across the hub

Some of our consortium partners already had safeguarding guidelines or policies in place. Others had policies related to child protection; prevention of sexual harassment; child labour and whistle-blowing which were not explicitly labelled as safeguarding but included some safeguarding concerns e.g. sexual assault, abuse and gender-based violence. We identified both country specific and international policies and guidelines regarding safeguarding (see Table 1).

1

Step two: A participatory process to agree a joint definition of safeguarding

The exercise took place in two stages. Initially, we had a collective discussion about various terms and phrases that should be considered within safeguarding definitions. From this discussion we developed a safeguarding 'word cloud' (see Figure 1) to visualise our shared understanding of safeguarding to use and reflect upon during the ARISE programme of work.

2

Steps 3 and 4: Developing and discussing an ARISE safeguarding risk assessment

Risk assessments include information on: 1) safeguarding risk identification and other risks; 2) safeguarding legislation and service provision: and 3) an action plan. The action plan included: further training for all research team members, including co-researchers; ensuring that community mobilisation processes incorporate safeguarding principles; creating cross organisational links for reporting of any safeguarding incidents; support and supervision for research teams and the establishment of referral systems to appropriate local organisations in the event of safeguarding incidents.

Working definition of safeguarding for ARISE

"Safeguarding is a framework to protect children and vulnerable adults and prevent harm. Our research programmes will treat participants and their communities with dignity and respect and we will ensure systems are in place to empower people in the communities where we work and our programme staff to openly speak out about abuse of power, including but not limited to sexual abuse, child abuse and exploitation and report and respond to safeguarding concerns."

The ARISE Safeguarding Word Cloud (Figure 1)

Please write down words that are important to you to promote safeguarding – from the ARISE word cloud or your own:

Safeguarding

Photo: community map drawn by residents association in Korail informal settlement, Dhaka, Bangladesh

Table 1: International, regional and national policies supporting safeguarding practice

Bangladesh	India	Kenya	Sierra Leone	UK
International Policies				
The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989). UNICEF. (Ratified by the General Assembly Resolution on 20 November 1989).				
Convention for the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). 1979. (Ratified by the General Assembly Resolution on 18 December 1979).				
The Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women. United Nations. (Ratified by the General Assembly resolution on 19 December 1993).				
Inter Agency Standing Committee (IASC). Protection against Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA). Global Standard Operating Procedures. May 2016				
Keeping Children Safe Keeping Children Safe. Child safeguarding standards and how to implement them (2014).				
Regional Policies				
		The African Charter on the Welfare and Rights of the Child (ACWRC) of 2002		
National Level Policy and/or Legislation				
National Children Policy 2011	Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act (2012)	The Constitution of Kenya (2010)	The 1991 Constitution of Sierra Leone (Currently under review)	House of Commons International Development Committee (2018) Sexual exploitation and abuse in the aid sector. Eighth report of the session 2017-19. HC 840. 23 July 2018. Published on 31 July 2018.
National Action Plan to Prevent Violence Against Women and Children (2013-2015)	UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1990)	The Children Act Kenya (2010)	The Sexual Offences Act 2012 Sierra Leone (currently under review)	Charity Commission (2014). Policy paper. Safeguarding Children and Young People. 14 July 2014.
Early Marriage Protection Act 2017 MoWCA	Constitution of India (1950) - provisions for vulnerable groups, including women, scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, persons with disabilities, children, persons living with HIV, and the aged	Sexual Offences Act (2006)	The Persons with Disability Act Sierra Leone (2011)	UK Policy Governance Association (2006). Act of Parliament. Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act 2006 (chapter 47)
Domestic Violence (Protection and Prevention) Rule 2013 MoWCA		Research Ethics guidelines	The Child Rights Act Sierra Leone 2007	Office of the Public Guardian (2017). Policy paper SD8: office of the Public Guardian safeguarding policy (web version) Updated 4 July 2017.

In ARISE we argue that, as with research ethics, safeguarding should not be seen merely as a procedural check box process. Instead safeguarding must be an iterative, ongoing learning journey that is critical, reflective and inclusive of vulnerable people. Ultimately safeguarding processes need to be situated in a critical understanding of power relations, committed to changing them and promoting equity.

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