Improving safeguarding in the ARISE Hub and beyond

ARISE
Accountability in Urban Health

Synopsis

Recognising the critical importance of safeguarding in research practice, the ARISE hub co-developed understandings of and approaches to safeguarding. Institutional systems and processes provided an opportunity for mutual learning among all ARISE partners, in the North and the South. However, the process itself produced multiplier effects, with ARISE experience and knowledge influencing safeguarding guidance and policy beyond the ARISE project in the UK, India, Sierra Leone, Bangladesh, and Kenya.

Background

Following the high-profile exposé of international NGO staff involved in cases of abuse in 2018, safeguarding has become an area of key concern for donors and organisations funding and providing services to vulnerable groups. This has led to a number of recent initiatives within international development programmes and global research.

Much of the current discussion on safeguarding comes from the perspective of the humanitarian sector, and direct service provision and implementation. Additionally, researchers working in global health also experience safeguarding challenges, and research funders and donors require assurance that safeguarding processes and policies are developed and implemented to protect participants and researchers, yet governance in the research arena is less developed. Recognising the critical importance of safeguarding in research practice, ARISE partners from five countries have united to collectively learn from each other and co-develop understandings of, and approaches to, safeguarding that will continue to evolve.

Key activities

The development of ARISE safeguarding action plans

In February 2019, ARISE held its inception meeting in Nairobi, Kenya, which brought together members of SDI federations as well as researchers and co-researchers (residents from informal urban contexts) as central to the co-production components in the theory of change. During this meeting, the lead safeguarding officer from Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine (LSTM) 'facilitated a face-to-face participatory learning exchange to discuss vulnerabilities and risks, identify practices and share experience across the partnership'. These exercises led to a shared working definition of, and commitment to, 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 the communities 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.

Responding to changes: COVID-19 amplifies safeguarding concerns

As contexts change, so do safeguarding risks and responses; COVID-19 has amplified safeguarding vulnerabilities and the ARISE hub shares experiences through regular check-ins among the ARISE Safeguarding leads, and across the hub as whole. There is very little practical experiential learning literature from specific research programmes, particularly in relation to managing safeguarding concerns during the COVID-19 pandemic, and the ARISE hub is in the process of writing up experiences, including: the exacerbation of relational vulnerabilities, updating mapping of referral organisations, and ongoing training and support; safeguarding interactions in digital, remote, and face-to-face interactions; and, the safety and well-being of ARISE hub staff and co-researchers. The ARISE hub have also set up a fund for counselling support provision for researchers and co-researchers.

Working in country teams, ARISE members discussed safeguarding risks and feasible mitigation strategies. An ARISE Safeguarding Risk Mapping Tool was developed (by adapting a safeguarding risk matrix developed at LSTM), prompting critical reflections from people of their previous experiences, what they could or should have done differently, and the barriers to responding. These were used as a basis for discussing how ARISE could strengthen safeguarding processes throughout the lifetime of the programme to ensure a lasting contribution in this area.

Following the inception meeting, each ARISE partner from Kenya, Sierra Leone, Bangladesh, and India completed a risk assessment, which included information on safeguarding and other risk identification, safeguarding legislation and service provision, and developed 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.

In addition to the development of ARISE safeguarding definitions and action plans, individual ARISE team members drew upon their new knowledge and experience of safeguarding to contribute to the development of safeguarding policies and processes within their own organisations and beyond.

Influencing safeguarding guidance and policy beyond ARISE

Safeguarding in the UK

In 2019, the UK Collaborative on Development Research (UKCDR) commissioned an evidence review on safeguarding in international development, written by David Orr (University of Sussex), who presented at one of the first ARISE hub meetings. This generated much interested amongst ARISE members and raised questions about how best to tackle safeguarding in ARISE research.

At the same time, UKCDR developed the Guidance on Safeguarding in International Development Research, providing actors in the international development research process with a set of principles and best practice guidance on safeguarding. Led by the University of Liverpool in partnership with LSTM and the ARISE Hub, the development of the guidance involved three sets of consultations. Members of the ARISE hub held consultations in West Africa (led by the College of Medicine and Allied Health Sciences (COMAHS) ARISE safeguarding lead in Sierra Leone) and South Asia (led by the ARISE Principal Investigator (PI) at The George Institute for Global Health (TGI) in India), which were developed into case studies in the guidance. This high-impact guidance has been widely cited by many donors, including the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office.

In March 2020, a companion piece to the UKCDR guidance - Safeguarding in International Development Research: Practical application of UKCDR Safeguarding Guidance during COVID-19 - was developed, which draws upon and references ARISE work and thinking on safeguarding.

In July 2020, ARISE hub members (the ARISE PI and the COMAHS ARISE safeguarding lead in Sierra Leone) were invited to present the ARISE story of safeguarding at a webinar on the UKCDR guidance - 'Preventing Harm in Research'. This webinar was widely attended, with over 700 people from a range of organisations, including donors, research councils, and researchers in the UK and beyond.

ARISE safeguarding work has also helped to shape the policies and procedures within ARISE partner organisations in the UK. For example, the ARISE safeguarding work has been shared with the University of York's research governance committee and is a key consideration during the ethical review process. Further, insights from the ARISE safeguarding work have been fed into on-line safeguarding training developed jointly by the University of York and University of Leeds for researchers within the FCDO-funded CHORUS research consortium.

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274 views • Jul 1, 2020

Additionally, following the co-production of an ARISE safeguarding approach, LSTM's safeguarding lead (Phil Tubb) led the development of an LSTM-wide partner safeguarding policy/strategy. To ensure this policy was responsive to the needs of LSTM partners, ARISE colleagues formed an expert consultation group, providing inputs and guidance to the production of the document. In addition, Phil has developed an LSTM safeguarding information portal that draws on policies and case study examples from ARISE partners, and there is a new LSTM online module on safeguarding and ethics, which employs and presents learning from the ARISE hub.

ARISE work on safeguarding has also influenced other Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF) hubs and has been used to build approaches in other projects, including FCDO research projects and the African Cities Research Consortium. At the end of 2019, the ARISE PI and Research Director were invited to present on ARISE safeguarding at a meeting of all GCRF hubs in Newcastle. In addition, in March 2020, the ARISE PI shared ARISE hub learning with the Gender Justice & Security hub and supported the development of their safeguarding process. The ARISE safeguarding lead from Liverpool VCT Health (LVCT Health) in Kenya and the ARISE PI were also invited to present work on safeguarding as part of a webinar on equitable partnerships hosted by the Action Against Stunting hub.

ARISE team members have also been asked to take part in informing and shaping the development of safeguarding resources. The ARISE PI was invited to join a panel to review a "Global evidence review" being developed by the Safeguarding Resource and Support Hub (RSH), and the COMAHS ARISE safeguarding lead will be interviewed by the Open University as part of their work in the UK on developing safeguarding training modules.

Safeguarding in partner institutions and countries
Some ARISE partners already had safeguarding guidelines or policies in place. Others had policies related to child protection; prevention of sexual harassment; child labour and whistleblowing, which were not explicitly labelled as safeguarding but which included some safeguarding concerns. However, for other ARISE partners, safeguarding was a relatively new concept, and the work that ARISE did collectively on safeguarding had multiplier effects – with ARISE members drawing on their learning and experience to influence and inform the development and implementation of safeguarding policies and practices in their own organisations and beyond.

In Bangladesh, ARISE partners at the James P Grant School of Public Health (JPGSPH), BRAC shared the ARISE Safeguarding Policy with JPGSPH's safeguarding team to support the current development of an organisational safeguarding policy and to support safeguarding approaches in other projects.

In Kenya, as a result of the learning gained through this process, Slum Dwellers International Kenya (SDI Kenya) and LVCT Health have taken steps to introduce and improve safeguarding. SDI Kenya are discussing safeguarding, developing safeguarding policies and processes within their organisation, and are working with the ARISE Sierra Leone safeguarding lead on a safeguarding manual. Additionally, partners of SDI Kenya have requested their support to develop a safeguarding policy for a project working with children and young adults.

At LVCT Health, safeguarding had been included in the HR manual. After the ARISE work on safeguarding, to strengthen this focus, LVCT Health formed a committee and have developed a Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) policy and training that incorporates elements and learning from ARISE safeguarding work and they have trained all staff and are monitoring progress across the institution. LVCT Health was also trained and audited for PSEA by UNICEF.

In Sierra Leone, the ARISE safeguarding work also greatly influenced the work to develop the national safeguarding policy for hospitals in the country. In June 2020 (two months after the first COVID-19 case in Sierra Leone), safeguarding was included in discussions of the COVID-19 outbreak, drawing on lessons learned during the Ebola outbreak. At the time, Bintu Mansaray (COMAHS), ARISE Sierra Leone safeguarding lead, was working in the Case Management Pillar of the National COVID-19 Response. In August 2020, Bintu was assigned as the Safeguarding Lead and worked with the Safeguarding Leads of Concern Sierra Leone, Sierra Leone Red Cross Society and

International Rescue Committee to develop the safeguarding policy for treatment centres and hospitals in Sierra Leone. In September 2020, they provided safeguarding training for the respective safeguarding focal points at treatment centres and then rolled out training for all staff working at treatment and isolation centres. As a result of this work, Bintu was invited to join the Safeguarding Community of Practice in Sierra Leone - a large network of safeguarding representatives from national and international organisations working in Sierra Leone.

Also in Sierra Leone, ARISE team members from Sierra Leone Urban Research Centre (SLURC) have been invited to meet with community groups in informal settlements in Freetown to discuss safeguarding issues, following an interactive training around safeguarding that involved ARISE co-researchers.

In India, ARISE members at TGI have used their knowledge and experiences gained during the ARISE safeguarding work to contribute to organisational policies relevant to safeguarding, specifically advocating the translation into local languages of the Prevention of Sexual Harassment policy implemented by the Internal Complaints Committee, to enhance its reach among TGI's employees, associates, and collaborators. In addition, TGI have proposed a series of workshops to sensitise researcher colleagues and civil society partners to safeguarding concerns and good practice. ARISE members from TGI have also shared reflections on safeguarding and drawn attention to the need for plans and practice to promote safeguarding through presentations at the Sixth Global Symposium on Health Systems Research, in November 2020, and intra-ARISE capacity building webinars.

ARISE contribution to change

The processes and learning described above support the GCRF focus on "strengthening capacity for research, innovation and knowledge exchange in the UK and developing countries through partnership"; and GCRF Theory of Change, shorter-term outcome: "Changes in research and innovation capabilities for challenge-focused, interdisciplinary, cross-sectoral work". The process has strengthened the capacity of ARISE team members, including co-researchers, in both the North and the South to talk about, and raise the profile of, safeguarding, and to develop and implement safeguarding policies and processes that are responsive to changing contexts, within the work of ARISE and beyond.

One ARISE team member stated that *"...everyone talks about safeguarding, but we really mainstreamed safeguarding in our work and how we think as a team. Covid has shown how distant and marginalised communities are from power and decision making. The work we are planning to do is that much more important. My ambition is that we are all safe, that we see each other next year, and that we hear more from the communities and it becomes their conversation. Thanks to everyone across ARISE for being supportive and a safe place to work."*

The ARISE hub learning shows how safeguarding should not be seen merely as a procedural check box process. As such, safeguarding is more than awareness raising and more than reporting of incidences. Instead safeguarding must be an iterative, ongoing learning journey that is critical, reflective, and inclusive of vulnerable people. It also involves regular points of reflection on what was done in relation to a particular incident, why this response was considered most appropriate, what unintended consequences, if any, arose from particular responses, and what lessons might be learnt from this. This story of change demonstrates that ARISE has lived up to the promise of safeguarding being an iterative, ongoing learning journey.
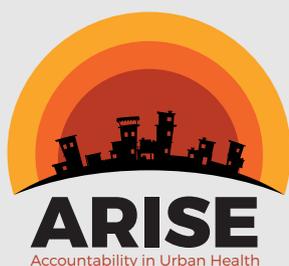
About ARISE

ARISE – Accountability and Responsiveness in Informal Settlements for Equity – is a research consortium launched in January 2019 and funded by UK Research and Innovation's Global Challenges Research Fund for five years. The research consortium consists of ten partners from a range of backgrounds and disciplines, led by the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine (LSTM). The vision of ARISE is to catalyse change in approaches to enhancing accountability and improving the health and wellbeing of poor, marginalised people living in informal urban settlements in Bangladesh, India, Kenya and Sierra Leone.