Safeguarding risk assessment tool for research

Developing a risk assessment is a critical step in any research activity, and there are specific considerations to mitigate safeguarding risks. When researching sensitive issues such as sexual exploitation, abuse and sexual harassment (SEAH), it is even more crucial that this is done considering both **the risks to the research participants as well as the researchers** **themselves**, and the wider community.

Key questions to ask are: “what are the critical safeguarding risks associated with this activity, who would be affected, and how can we manage and mitigate them?”

Involving local researchers in developing the risk assessment will help you capture risks of which you may not be aware.

The risk assessment should be regularly reviewed and updated throughout the research process to take account of any changes to the context.

## Categorising risks

When you are categorising the identified risk, it is useful to consider likelihood (the probability of the event occurring) and impact (how severe the harm could be for an individual or the organisation). By doing this, it will help you decide whether the research should go ahead or it it’s too risky, and what actions you should prioritise to ensure mitigations are in place to address the high likelihood / high impact risks.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 1. Note how likely it is that the risk will occur | |
| Highly likely | H |
| Likely | M |
| Not likely | L |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 2. Note the likely impact for individuals and organisational reputation | |
| High impact | H |
| Moderate impact | M |
| Minor impact | L |

The table below presents a worked example of some safeguarding risks and mitigations (actions to reduce the seriousness of the impact of the risk) that might arise during the research process. They are only meant as illustrative examples and will not be relevant in every context. It is important that the research team sit down to consider the different risks for all those engaged in the research both directly and indirectly before embarking on any research activities.

A blank template is provided for you to use for developing your own risk assessment.

## Worked example

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Country: |  | | | |
| Team members: |  | | | |
| Overall risk level (L/M/H): |  | | | |
| Date of review: |  | | | |
| Risk | Description | Likelihood  (L/M/H) | Impact | Mitigation |
| Potential risk for research participants as a result of taking part in the research.  These risks may include:   * Harm, abuse or harassment of participants * Backlash or stigma * Renewed trauma of participants through sharing experiences with researchers | These risks may arise for the following reasons:   * Communities do not have the opportunity to discuss harm and abuse related to the research/project/advocacy initiative and inform mitigation * Research/projects/advocacy initiatives not adapted or adjusted to context, target groups and risks of harm * Lack of skill and experience in monitoring harm means that risks and harm/abuse not recognised, or reported * Communities, and research participants expectations are raised during the activity which cannot be realised once they return to families and communities * Harm and abuse perpetrated by researchers, partners, service providers not being reported to the organisation * Participants and communities are harmed in the course of travelling to or from the activity * The activities are held in unsafe spaces or places * Psychosocial, and other, support needs are unmet due to lack of referral pathways. * Participants put at risk by breach of confidentiality or other aspects of code of conduct |  |  | Types of mitigations that you might consider include:   * Designing the research with the community members from the outset * Community sensitisation meetings to ensure community is aware of purpose and approach to the research * Ensure there is an identifiable ‘focal point’ for each event or activity that participants and wider communities can raise concerns with * Ensuring reporting and referral pathways are well understood by researchers and communicated clearly to research participants * Map the safety of spaces or places in which activities will take place, including travel to and from those spaces and places, to ensure a safe and confidential space for research process and appropriate safeguards are implemented * Ensure training is provided to researchers on code of conduct and ethical behavioural, and those expectations are communicated to all participants and community members * Raise awareness with communities on what conduct is appropriate during activities and what to do if they have concerns about others behaviour * Reporting arrangements agreed between all stakeholders involved in the research process (researchers, partner orgs etc) and included in agreements and contracts |
| Potential safeguarding risks to researchers as a result of undertaking the research.  These may include:   * Health, safety and wellbeing of researchers is not adequately addressed * Risks to researchers in terms of travel and/or transport to the data collection sites * Harassment of researchers during the research process | * Staff, volunteers and / or data collectors have not received training or do not understand well enough how to apply safeguards in the research * Researchers experience burnout or stress and trauma * Partners or service providers engaged to deliver research do not have safeguarding measures in place * Researchers are harmed in the course of travelling to or from the activity * Partners or service providers are not regularly monitored on how they are implementing safeguarding requirements | Low | High | * Recruitment procedures for selecting and vetting researchers / data collectors have robust safeguarding protocols in place * Training on research approach and tools provided to all data collectors, which includes a specific briefing on safeguarding within the research and context in which it is being delivered * Frequent and regular supervision and check-in with research team * Regular monitoring of research delivery to include whether it is safe or not * Researchers working in pairs / small groups * Ensure protocols for using public transport and travelling at dark are well understood and adhered to * Community sensitisation undertaken prior to the research being conducted * Researchers are aware of the reporting and referral pathways and are confident about how to respond to a disclosure or identified risk |

## BLANK TEMPLATE

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Country: |  | | | |
| Team members: |  | | | |
| Overall risk level (L/M/H): |  | | | |
| Date of review: |  | | | |
| Risk | Description | Likelihood  (L/M/H) | Impact | Mitigation |
|  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |