

# Responding to Sexual Violence in the Aid Workplace



Learn how to take action, report, and get support when sexual violence happens to you or a colleague in the workplace.



## Forms of Sexual Violence in the Workplace

### A Note to Learners

This resource provides guidance for survivors and their colleagues in the aftermath of sexual violence occurring in the workplace. This guide is for employees at any level from management, program officers, field staff to volunteers who are working for local and international relief and development organizations, aid agencies, or nonprofit organizations. It does not provide guidance to organizations on prevention, response mechanisms, professional medical and psychosocial support, investigation or criminal justice. These aspects are beyond the control of individuals and should be addressed at an organizational and community level.

# Sexual Violence and Abuse in the Workplace

## Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (SEA)

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Occurs when an aid worker attempts or performs acts of sexual exploitation, violence, or abuse on children and adults in communities where they are working.

## Sexual Violence in the Workplace

### Sexual Violence in the Workplace

Occurs when a person attempts or performs acts of sexual violence on a colleague, peer, former employee, or volunteer at work.

## Forms of Sexual Violence and Abuse

Sexual violence is any sexual act or attempt to commit a sexual act, sometimes done using violence or coercion. Sexual violence in the workplace can range from unwanted sexual comments and harassment to rape. No form of sexual violence is ever deserved or the fault of the survivor. Sexual violence can have serious, long-lasting physical, emotional, and psychological effects on the survivor. Regardless of the form of sexual violence, all survivors need the support of their colleagues, peers, management, and organization to effectively respond, report, and receive follow-up care.



### Unwanted Sexual Comments

When a person uses verbal advances including whistling, shouting, and/or saying sexually explicit or implicit phrases or propositions that are unwanted by another person.



### **Unwanted Sexual Touching**

When a person touches another person in a sexual way without the person's consent (under or over clothing). This can include massage, groping, grabbing, or grazing of any part of another person's body with sexual intent.



### **Sexual Harassment**

When a person requests sexual favors, bullies, coerces, or makes unwanted sexual advances towards another person. A person can sexually harass a targeted person at work to explicitly or implicitly affect a term, condition, or decision concerning the targeted person's employment. Sexual harassment can also be used as a means to unreasonably interfere with an individual's work performance or create an intimidating, hostile, or offensive working environment.



### **Aggressive Sexual Behavior**

When a person demonstrates potentially violent behavior focused on gratifying sexual drives.



### **Stalking**

When a person carries out unwanted or repeated surveillance or acts towards another person. Stalking can include following or monitoring a person, harassment, or unwanted attention that will result in intimidation and fear.



### **Sexual Assault**

When a person intentionally sexually touches another person without his/her consent or coerces or physically forces a person to engage in a sexual act (without penetration) against a person's will. The perpetrator may use a mix of coercion by physical force, verbal threat intimidation and even placing blame on the victim in order to perpetrate the attack.



### **Rape**

When a person uses a verbal threat or force to inflict harm on another person in order to engage in sexual intercourse or other forms of sexual penetration (mouth, anus, vagina) with a body part or object against the will of that person and without consent.



### **Attempted Sexual Assault or Rape**

When a person attempts an act of sexual contact, assault, or rape on another person without his/her consent.



### **Other Sexual Acts**

Other examples of sexual acts in the workplace are when a person takes or shares nude pictures or videos of another person without permission.

# Examples of Sexual Violence in the Workplace

## Unwanted Sexual Comments

A supervisor in a field office makes comments about your body and repeatedly asks you to meet privately outside work to discuss your career opportunities.



## Unwanted Touching

While traveling in a car, a colleague keeps touching your legs and rearranges your hair for you.



## Sexual Harassment

- During work travel, a senior colleague keeps suggesting you should come for dinner at private hotel room and hints that if you engaged in sexual acts, a follow-up contract could be arranged for you.
- Someone from your donor agency suggests that more money would be given if you had sex with them.



## Aggressive Sexual Behavior

You started a consensual relationship with a colleague who then starts to verbally abuse you by calling you names, and then physically forces himself on you using aggressive and intimidating arguments.



## Sexual Assault

While at a party with colleagues, someone from another aid organization pushes you up against a wall and aggressively kisses you. You try to say no and struggle until you are able to get away.



## Stalking

A colleague keeps leaving the office at the same time as you and regularly follows you home. On weekends, this person waits on the street for you offering you food. In the evening, you receive text messages from the colleague.



## Sharing Sexually Explicit Photos

A colleague, with whom you are in a consensual sexual relationship, has been sharing nude photos of you at work without your consent.



## Rape

- While sleeping, an intoxicated soldier comes into your tent and rapes you.
- You have spent a nice evening with a colleague where you kissed but you clearly stated that you would not want to engage in further intimacy. You said *"Don't touch me"* and *"Take your hands off me"* when he touched you. You struggled to get away when he forces himself on you.





## Supporting Survivors of Sexual Violence

### Supporting a Colleague After Sexual Violence

The first people survivors interact with after sexual violence can greatly impact their recovery process. Knowing how to respond, what to say, and how to support friends or colleagues who have experienced sexual violence is essential to helping them on their path to recovery.



#### Ways to Support Survivors of Sexual Violence

- Be present.
- Listen actively and be engaged.
- Give them space to make their own decisions. Do not make decisions for them.
- Encourage them to express negative and difficult feelings that can help empower them.
- Accompany them, if they wish, during difficult moments of the response (medical care and psychosocial care appointments, making reports, consulting with lawyers, attending court).
- Maintain privacy and confidentiality about their information and experience.
- Be trustworthy.
- Show empathy, not sympathy.

### What to Say to Survivors of Sexual Violence

- How can I help you?
- What do you need in this moment?
- Do you want to take action? And how?
- Everything you are feeling right now is normal.
- You have a right to feel this way.
- This is not your fault.

### What Not to Say to Survivors of Sexual Violence

- Question their version of the events.
- Suggest that they might be lying or that the perpetrator is too nice to have done this type of act.
- Suggest that this is a misunderstanding that could be cleared up by talking to the perpetrator.
- Tell them that they are to blame for the experience.
- Tell them to get over their feelings or deal with things.
- Decide what actions and decisions they should take.
- Perpetuate victim-blaming attitudes or rape myths.
- Give false hope about actions or outcomes.

## Being a Good Advocate for Survivors of Sexual Violence

Being a good advocate for survivors of sexual violence in the workplace can also mean helping the survivor push for change if they are not fully able to articulate what they need. This could mean helping a survivor:

- Get a specific type of support.
- Push for organizational and cultural change.
- Shift the conversation from what a survivor might have done to end up in a situation (victim-blaming) to how the workplace environment is a contributing factor that allowed the act to occur.

**Protecting the survivor also means protecting yourself.** The survivor is experiencing a trauma, but you might also experience vicarious trauma as you hear about the traumatic event. Make sure that you have access to support services, so that you can continue to be a good advocate and not suffer from lasting damage or effects while supporting a colleague.





# Being a Good Advocate Means Being a Good Bystander

Being a good advocate means that you are an active bystander who will intervene and help prevent sexual violence in the workplace. Follow these steps on how to be a good bystander.

**Say something.** If you see something happening in your office, social circle, or in the field, say something. For example, if you see a colleague acting strangely at a party or overly intoxicated, help get him or her to a safe location.

**Take action.** If it is safe to intervene in a situation that is actively happening, then do so.

**Offer help.** Ask friends and colleagues if they need help or an escort out of a situation.

**Make a report.** Report things you have witnessed through reporting chains. This can help provide more evidence when a survivor is ready to come forward, or give them the courage to speak up.

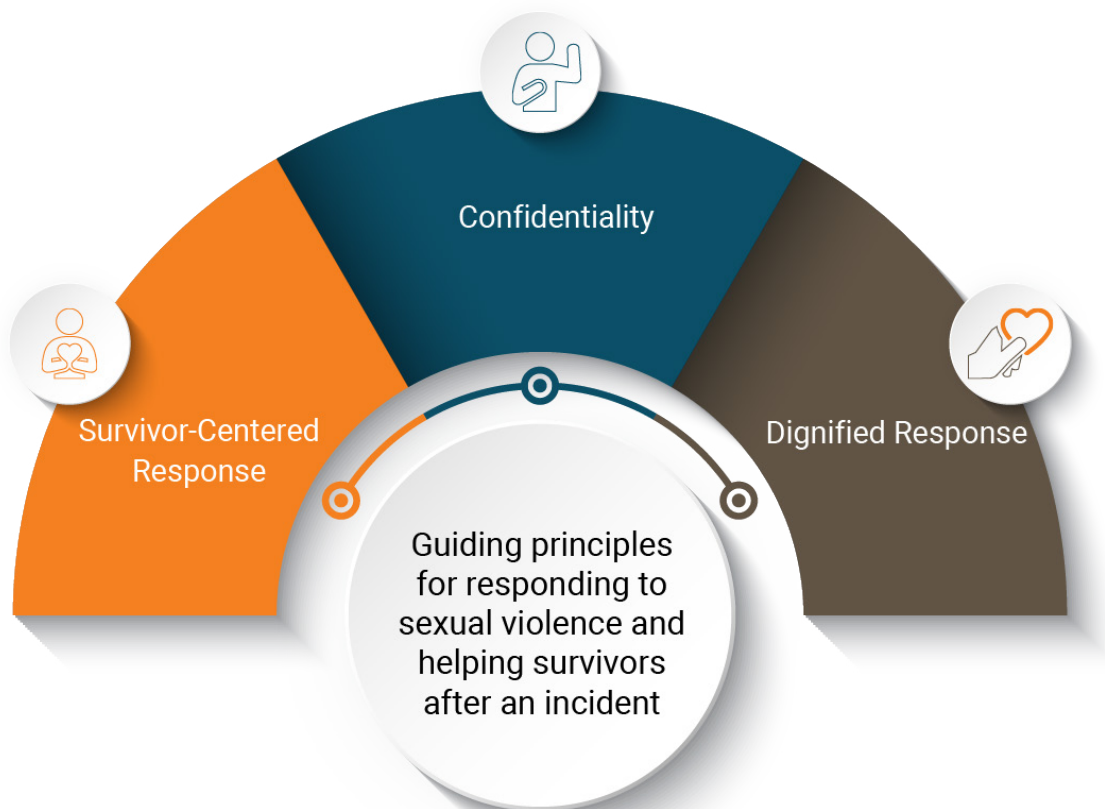
**Promote safety at work.** Create an environment that helps prevent unsafe actions and behaviors from happening in the first place.

**Empower others to be bystanders.** Your actions can help encourage other colleagues to become bystanders. This makes everyone safer.



## Responding to Sexual Violence

### Guiding Principles for Responding to Sexual Violence



## Survivor-Centered Response

Survivors are given the opportunity to make their own decisions about how to respond to the sexual violence they have experienced. This includes refusing to follow specific medical treatment or to make a report until they are ready. Being survivor-centered is giving a survivor back the control that was taken from them during their experience with sexual violence and giving them the ability to say yes or no to different options.



## Confidentiality

Keeping the survivor's experience confidential will ensure that he or she can trust the process and remain safe. Experiencing sexual violence can be dangerous for some survivors in different contexts, which could result in them being harmed further or killed.



## Dignified Response

Basic humanity and dignity is always essential, especially post trauma. This means empowering survivors, giving them a voice, and not rushing or forcing them to make decisions until they are ready.



## Responding to Sexual Violence

Responding to sexual violence involves **medical care, psychosocial support, accountability, and legal justice**. Not all types of support may be needed for every incident. For example, a sexual harassment case might not require medical care. Available support and services for survivors at their workplace can greatly differ by location and organization. Ideally the survivor's organization has prepared response plans and services for sexual violence. However, if such mechanisms are not in place, you and the survivor should advocate for specific care in the workplace.



# Medical Care for Survivors After Sexual Violence

Access to safe and comfortable medical care may be limited in many locations where aid work takes place. Regardless of the type of incident, here are some key considerations when looking for medical care for survivors after sexual violence.

## Medical Care



Survivors receiving medical care must always:

- Feel safe and comfortable.
- Give their informed consent to all medical decisions concerning care, medications, and treatment.
- Feel empowered to say yes or no to any medical care options presented to them.

## Physically Violent Incidents (rape or sexual assault)



Survivors of physically violent incidents (rape or sexual assault) should:

- Seek immediate medical care, ideally within 72 hours or less.
- Take medications in Post Exposure Preventive (PEP) Treatment kits within 72 hours; the sooner, the better.
- For women, take medications to stop or prevent potential pregnancy within 72 hours or less.
- Take Sexually Transmitted Infection (STI) medications as needed, even after 72-hour timeframe.

## Medical Care



Survivors with limited or no available medical care should:

- Seek support from international health organizations, such as International Committee of the Red Cross or Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors without Borders) as an alternative option.
- Inquire about alternative ways to access different forms of post-sexual violence drugs that may be limited in the survivor's current location.

Local aid workers and staff may get medical care in their own country or prefer to get medical care in another country due to the sensitive nature of the incident and any feelings of shame, stigma, or fear associated with their culture or context.

# Psychosocial Support for Survivors After Sexual Violence



Many survivors find that psychosocial support, when they are ready for it, is a vital part of the recovery and healing process. Follow these key considerations when looking for psychosocial support services for survivors after sexual violence.

## Specialized Psychosocial Support

- Ask for referrals to known psychosocial support networks with experience in assisting humanitarian workers with mental health issues. Many therapists are often former aid workers themselves.
- Ask for a therapist who is specialized in addressing sexual violence, and someone who speaks the first or second language of the survivor.
- Seek support from organizations specializing in mental health and psychosocial support (Thrive Worldwide, Headington Institute, and Centre for Humanitarian Psychology).



## Limited or Lack of Psychosocial Support

- Local aid workers may have the option to seek support from local psychological structures or ask for access to services available to international staff.
- Use technology, such as phone, skype, or other platforms, to connect with services based in North America or Europe.
- If services are not available in the survivor's language, ask for a translator, cultural mediator, or a trusted peer (if nothing else is possible) to help with translation during sessions.

# Accountability and Legal Justice for Survivors After Sexual Violence

Many survivors find that, when they are ready for it, accountability and justice may contribute to recovery and healing process.



## Administrative Accountability

All organizations, local and international, must:

- Have reporting mechanisms to streamline administrative accountability.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of reporting mechanisms for survivors regularly on a case-by-case basis.

## Legal Accountability

- Legal accountability is a bigger challenge for survivors. Not all acts of sexual violence are criminalized in every country.
- Local justice mechanisms can often be fragile, broken, or unfriendly to survivors.
- A survivor's sex, gender, sexual orientation, race, nationality, ethnicity, religion, social mobility, language, age, ability, or marital status may have an impact on whether local justice is possible. The status and identity of the alleged perpetrator will also have an impact on whether justice is possible.
- Ideally the survivor's organization may provide support or guidance on how or whether it is safe to seek local justice. However, this is still not the norm.

## International Staff Members

- Seek guidance from the local or regional embassies. Embassies may have lists of trusted, local lawyers for legal advice.
- Contact your own government or national institution for help if the sexual violence happened outside your home country.
- Seek your own legal help.

## Local Staff Members

- Getting support and navigating legal structures can be different for local staff, however, they are just as entitled to seek legal justice accountability as international staff.
- Shame and stigma may be stronger based on local culture and norms.
- In some countries, a local staff member could be arrested for adultery or prostitution for filing a criminal complaint.



## Reporting an Incident of Sexual Violence



### Reporting Sexual Violence in the Workplace

Reporting sexual violence in the workplace can be challenging and triggering for all survivors. It is not easy to talk about the experience privately with trusted family and friends, and it can be especially traumatic to relive the events in front of colleagues at work. It may not be safe for all survivors to report sexual violence due to local laws or cultural or religious stigma.

All survivors of sexual violence always have the right to decide if and when they make a report. Reporting mechanisms and requirements may vary based on the survivor's organization and/or the organization of the perpetrator. Survivors may also choose to report to external organizations to create a record of the event.

#### Types of Reporting

- **Administrative accountability:** report by email, hotline, web platform, or in person to a focal point or colleague.
- **Criminal accountability:** report to the police, rape crisis hotlines or services, and/or domestic violence units.
- **Global reporting system for the aid sector:** report on the Insecurity Insight global reporting platform.

# Reporting

Survivors can choose to report experiences of sexual violence and abuse. Depending on the incident of sexual violence and local law, organizations and the police may conduct investigations that can involve thoroughly questioning the survivor, alleged perpetrator, potential witnesses or anyone involved in the incident. Investigations can be scary and overwhelming for all parties involved. Administrative and criminal investigators should be trained on how to speak with survivors of sexual violence, however, this is not always guaranteed. Global reporting platforms create a record of abuse and help to campaign for safer workplaces for all aid workers.



## Administrative Investigation

During an administrative investigation, the organization will:

- Ask the survivor to describe the event in detail.
- Collect information at the event and surrounding circumstances from witnesses, colleagues, and the perpetrator.
- Collect forensic, physical, or electronic evidence.
- Determine whether the allegation is substantiated by evidence and probability. If there is a lack of sufficient evidence or probable cause, this does not necessarily mean that they do not think the incident did not occur, but do not have enough supporting evidence to take legal action.
- Write a report that will be shared with the survivor and perpetrator.
- Establish disciplinary actions, training, and other relevant procedures for the organization.

## Criminal Investigation

- The police or local authorities will lead a criminal investigation.
- A criminal investigation follows the beginning steps to an administrative investigation, however, after the collection of evidence, the police or the prosecutors will decide to press charges or not.
- If the perpetrator is charged, then criminal proceedings will follow.
- Criminal investigations typically take longer due to more complex legal proceedings.



## Global Reporting

- Survivors who feel ready to share their experience have the possibility to anonymously and confidentially share their story using a global reporting platform.
- Using an anonymous and confidential reporting platform is a way of creating a record of what happened.
- Global reporting on incidents of sexual violence and abuse helps to raise awareness and to campaign to create safer workplaces for aid workers.
- On a global reporting platform, survivors only provide the details they feel comfortable sharing.
- Information is always kept anonymous and confidential.
- Some survivors find closure and comfort in being able to leave a testimony of their ordeal in a safe space.
- Reporting should be an empowering process kept in the hands of survivors.
- Reporting incidents helps others come forward and speak out because it shows that survivors are not alone.
- Survivors have helped develop different global reporting platforms.
- To make a report on a global platform, visit Insecurity Insight's "Sexual Violence in the Aid Workplace".

## Gathering Evidence for an Investigation

Gathering evidence is a key part of any type of investigation. If survivors are concerned about the ability of the investigation team to adequately collect evidence, or if a criminal investigation is unlikely at the current stage, they can collect evidence to support their own case. However, this does not replace getting advice from an expert.

### Collecting Evidence for Sexual Harassment

- Keep multiple copies of any electronic messages (emails, texts).
- Whenever possible, ask another trusted person to be present or nearby to witness the harassment for the report.
- If possible and safe, use video or audio to record the places where the incidents usually occur.

## Collecting Evidence for Rape

- Keep all clothes and fabrics worn before, during, or after the incident in a separate, labeled, sealable plastic bag.
- Take swabs of the inside of the mouth and any other orifice. Keep the swabs in separate, labeled, sealable plastic bags.
- Keep the first urination in a clean, labeled, sealable plastic cup.
- If possible, collect a blood sample shortly after the event, particularly if there is a fear of drugging during the incident.
- Take images or videos of any items, physical injuries, or other documentation of the event.
- Keep multiple copies of any messages sent to or from the perpetrator before, during, and after the event.

## Documenting the Event

If survivors do not feel that they can seek accountability or justice after an incident of sexual violence, they should document what happened. This information can be used in the future when they are ready to come forward with their experience. To document an event:

- Write down what happened and share it with trusted friends. They may be your witness later.
- Use an existing online reporting mechanism to create a record of the event. This will be evidence that you reported the event before you felt comfortable to seek accountability.

## Justice for Survivors

In an ideal world, it would be possible for every survivor of sexual violence to get justice. Organizations are continuously improving their response plans and reporting mechanisms; however, retaliation is still occurring. If there are barriers for survivors to receive adequate support from their manager or direct reporting line, they should report to higher levels within their organizations, either regionally or at headquarters.

Being a good advocate, bystander, and support to a colleague or friend who has survived sexual violence in the workplace will help them throughout key stages in the response and recovery process. This means:

- Encouraging them to speak up about their needs, take action, and get the respect and support they deserve
- Maintaining confidentiality
- Advocating for information being shared with them
- Keeping them actively involved in the investigation process
- Helping them make informed decisions about their health, safety, and wellbeing