



# SECURING RIGHTS OF WOMEN DOMESTIC WORKERS IN BANGLADESH

## Guidance Note:

### Ethical and Safety Guidelines for Research and Evaluation on Violence Against Women and Girls

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This Guidance Note provides a summary of the key ethical and safety considerations and recommendations for country teams overseeing data collection for formative research, baselines, and evaluations on violence against women and girls (VAWG) particularly for Securing Rights of Women Domestic Workers in Bangladesh (SRDW) project. This document provides general principles and guidelines as well as ones specifically pertinent to each method of data collection used in this project: Survey (Face-to-Face); survey (online); focus group discussions; key informant interviews and personal stories.

Ethical and efficacy considerations in the design of the questionnaires and interview schedules are not included in this document. Design of these instruments will be done by the Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) personnel of the Securing Rights project with input from the country teams.

#### *Why is this important for research and evaluation on VAWG?*

**General Research Ethics** - Ethical standards exist for all research that involves people as participants, or is likely to impact them directly, based on three principles: respect, beneficence, and justice. Researchers must respect the capacity, rights, and freedom of choice of participants. The benefits of the research must be at least as great as the risks. For a full explanation of how these principles are applied in Oxfam's research, see the resource list at the end of this document.

**Greater Risk and Safety Concerns in VAWG Research** - In research and MEL related to VAWG/GBV, additional care is required because of the increased risks and safety concerns, and the potential for research activities to do harm or provoke more violence. The WHO guidelines developed in 2001 provide the basis for ethical and safety research guidelines for VAWG. More recently, additional research recommendations have been developed for different types of VAWG and for intervention research.<sup>i ii</sup>

#### *Basic Ethical Principles for this Project*

These basic principles apply to all forms of VAWG data collection, management, and use:

1. **Informed and voluntary consent** is required from all participants.
2. **Confidentiality** should be maintained at all times (with some possible legal exceptions).
3. Participants have the **right to refuse** to answer a question or terminate participation at any time.
4. **Do no Harm** – As much as possible, ensure the safety of all participants and staff.
5. **Respond immediately** and appropriately to distress, disclosure, or requests for assistance, as determined by the local partner organization and the Oxfam country team.
6. **Research Integrity** – Ensure the quality, accuracy, and beneficence of the research.



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### Box 1: Informed Consent, Privacy and Confidentiality

**Informed Consent:** The communication process by which a potential study or intervention participant receives information relevant to their role and is able to make a voluntary choice to participate. Informed consent often involves discussing the research or intervention itself; stating the potential risks, benefits, and uncertainties of participation; and assessing participant understanding.

**Privacy:** Participants being able to control the extent, timing, and circumstances under which they share their experiences, thoughts, beliefs, etc. with the researcher.

**Confidentiality:** An explicit or implicit guarantee by the researcher to the participant that the information disclosed by the participant will only be disseminated in ways consistent with their original understanding. Confidentiality requires researchers to be mindful that only authorized access to information occurs and the privacy of participants is respected.

### General Guidelines for all data collection methods

- **A Generic Safe Title** – The title of the survey or research initiative should not be directly about VAWG, rather it can be labelled as a women’s or family health study. A more detailed explanation of the research topic will be provided to potential participants in the process of obtaining informed consent. The generic safe title is necessary during the actual data collection. However once the primary data collection is complete – in analysis and reporting, it is safe to use direct VAWG terminology.
- **Standardized Scripts** – The research team needs to have standardized scripts to explain the project to potential participants, to obtain informed consent, and to use if outsiders ask about the project. Examples of scripts will be provided.
- **Selection of Research Staff** – Discretion, attitude, and skills are important in staff selection, including interviewers, facilitators, and enumerators. Age, ethnicity, sex, community of origin, and other socio-economic factors need to be taken into account in staff selection to ensure that trust can be established with participants and the most accurate data collected.
- **Staff Training**- All research team members should receive specialized training and ongoing support. Training will include neutral and sympathetic approaches, avoiding bias and “victim-blaming,” and protocols in case of interruption, distress, disclosure, and termination. Staff will be bound by confidentiality agreements.
- **Informed Consent** – Potential participants need to receive a clear explanation of the purpose of the study, confidentiality, how the data collected will be used, the potential risks and benefits of participation, and their right to terminate at any time. Consent will be documented in written, verbal, or digital form depending on the type of data collection and the circumstances. Templates are provided with the data collection instruments.
- **Possible Limits of Confidentiality** - The limits of confidentiality should be explained to participants for certain types of violence and in particular situations, i.e. there may be legal requirements to report evidence of child abuse, etc. Check the legislation in your area.
- **Staff Well-being** – Data collection on VAWG can be stressful, whether staff members have had personal experience with abuse and violence or not. Support needs to be provided for staff such as appropriate preparation, assistance, and debriefing. Contracted survey firms will provide this for their own teams. Oxfam and its partners will provide this for their staff members implementing the FGDs, KIIs, and other data collection processes.
- **Data Confidentiality** – Protocols should be in place to manage confidentiality of all types of data collected: digital, audio and audio-visual recordings, and written notes.
- **Referrals for Assistance**<sup>1</sup> – Although the project is not directly collecting data about personal experiences of violence, all staff should be prepared for the possible need to make a referral if there

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<sup>1</sup> Please note that referrals should only be made if it is considered safe for both the interviewer and the participant.

is distress, disclosure, or a request for assistance. The country team needs to have protocols for this and have a handout prepared of currently-available, good-quality referral services.

- **Presentation of Findings** - Research data should be presented at an aggregate level to ensure individuals or communities cannot be identified. In case study presentation or when using quotes from participants, the identity of the individual must be hidden by changing key details. The names and any identifying details can only be used if explicit consent was obtained in writing.

## **Roles of Oxfam MEL Personnel and Project Coordinator**

The Oxfam MEL personnel and the Securing Rights country project manager/officer/coordinator need ensure the overall guidelines provided above are maintained throughout the course of the research. In particular, Oxfam staffs need to follow the following ethical guidelines in addition to other mandatory guidelines as per Oxfam policies:

- Ensure that survey firms, enumerators, and other consultants hired for data collection have experience in working on VAWG research, or more generally with gender-sensitive issues, and have ethical and confidentiality procedures embedded in their operational structures.
- Ensure that all contracted firms, consultants and enumerators adhere to Oxfam policies and codes of practice.
- That a mix of male and female enumerators are recruited
- That the consultant/research team receives specialized training on undertaking data collection.
- Ensure quality of the translation of the of all data collection tools.
- Data collection tool pre-testing and reporting on revisions is required.
- Data quality checks are also required.
- Track that informed consent and confidentiality is maintained at all times.
- List of all participants for the different types of data collection is retained by the consultant and submitted along with all signed consent forms (where relevant).
- Ensure that all original notes and audio/video recording must be submitted by consultant.
- Provide overall coordination and support for timely data collection following all ethical guidelines.
- The survey company must have and explain to Oxfam at the time of contracting, what data management procedures the company follows to protect the confidentiality of the data collected.

## **Roles and responsibilities of Consultant/Survey Firm**

The consultant/survey firm or Oxfam implementing partner undertaking data collection must follow the following ethical guidelines for the different types of primary data collection in addition to other mandatory Oxfam mandated policies/guidelines and their own internal processes. Below are the core ethical guidelines that need to be followed by the consultant/survey firm or Oxfam implementing partner for each type of primary data collection provided.

### **Surveys:**

- Staff and enumerators signs confidentiality wavers.
- Women are interviewed by female enumerators only.
- Ensure all enumerators receive specialized training and are provided with on-going support.
- Ensure the safety of research team and enumerators, by travelling in pairs, not travelling at night, using safe modes of transportation and having accessible communication.
- Accurate translation of survey tool.
- Questionnaire is pre-tested with trained enumerators and feedback provided within set timeline.

- The following sampling protocols must be followed to minimize risks of causing further violence against women who participate in the study:
  - Only one woman per household should be interviewed even if there are more than one eligible<sup>2</sup> woman per household
  - Men and women from the same community/village are not to be interviewed
    - *Example: The geographic focus is 5 villages (A, B, C, D, & E) in Province XYZ. A total of 200 respondents need to be surveyed in XYZ for the household survey of which 50% must be male. Therefore men will be interviewed in villages A & B and women in C, D & E. The same principle will apply in the case of neighbourhoods in a town/city, men and women from the same neighbourhood should not be interviewed.*
  - If it is difficult to ensure that men and women from the same community/village are not interviewed, then it must be ensured that men and women from the same household are not interviewed
- Ideally, enumerators should not conduct interviews in their own community. It is preferable to have people from a similar nearby community, so that they are familiar with the context, but do not move in the same social circles. If this is not possible, research teams should identify how to reduce potential problems with data accuracy and confidentiality if the interviewer and respondent are part of the same community.
- Ensure that informed and voluntary consent is gained through the appropriate means: digital, written, or verbal.
- Although it may be difficult, it is best if the interview is conducted in a place where other members of the household cannot overhear, including children. Rescheduling may be required if there are interruptions or concerns. For example, the interviews can happen in a quiet space within the household compound or outside the home in a safe place/area of the participant's choosing such as a religious dwelling.
- Enumerators need to have a handout with referral resource contact information to give out. This resource list needs to be either small enough to be hidden, or it can be a larger document that includes more than just VAWG resources. Ensure the information is up-to-date and referral services are from legally registered service providers. Please note that referrals should only be made if it is considered safe for both the interviewer and the participant.
- A distress protocol<sup>3</sup> needs to be established for what the interviewer does when distress is detected. If necessary, the research process can be suspended, and a referral for assistance can be made if it is safe to do so.

### **Box 2: Minimizing Participant Distress**

“Interviews on sensitive topics can provoke powerful emotional responses in some participants. The interview may cause a woman to relive painful and frightening events, and this in itself can be distressing if she does not have a supportive social environment. Interviewers therefore need to be trained to be aware of the effects that the questions may have on informants and how best to respond, based on a woman's level of distress. Most women who become emotional during an interview actively choose to proceed, after being given a moment to collect themselves. Interviewer training should include practice sessions on how to identify and respond appropriately to symptoms of distress as well as how to terminate an interview if the impact of the questions becomes too negative.”

*Researching Violence Against Women – A practical guide for researchers and activists, 2005*

<sup>2</sup> Eligible men and women refer to men and women above the age of 18 years.

<sup>3</sup> If distress is detected in participants, stop the interview and allow the person to recover. Offer support/comfort and remind them that they can discontinue at any time, or can re-schedule if they still wish to participate. Ask the participant what THEY want to do, and how you can help.

### **Focus Group Discussions (FGDs):**

- Accurate translation of the FGD guide with questions for different groups of stakeholders.
- Questions are reviewed, and a mock FGD conducted if possible and all feedback provided within set timeline.
- Ensure informed consent is obtained either in written or tape recorded form from each participant.
- A skilled facilitator must undertake the FGDs to ensure that the discussion does not cause harm to any participants, good process is followed, and that all voices are heard.
- Use both tape recording and a note-taker to document the discussion, with the consent of all the participants.
- Ensure the tape recording and notes are recorded with anonymity.
- FGDs are conducted in a private and safe space. Ideally they are conducted in a neutral place where the participants feel free to discuss sensitive topics.
- Where a FGD is not possible, an in-depth interview can be conducted and should follow the protocols listed under “Key Informant Interviews”.

### **Key informant interviews (KIIs)**

- Accurate translation of the KII guide with questions.
- Questions are reviewed, and a mock KII conducted if possible and all feedback provided within set timeline.
- Written informed consent must be obtained using the consent form provided at the beginning of the tool.
- Interviews should be conducted in a private place that is agreeable to the participant.
- Interviews may be audio-recorded and/or written notes taken. Again, consent needs to be obtained for this, and appropriate, confidential management of data needs to be in place.

### **Collection of Personal Stories**

- Accurate translation of the guiding questions.
- Questions are reviewed, and a pre-tested and feedback provided within set timeline.
- Greatest care is taken to obtain voluntary and informed consent, and to ensure participants understand their right to terminate participation at any time.
- If the results will be used in a published story, determine if the participant would like to be anonymous or not.
- The Consent Form provided with the tool must be used to collect consent for participation and level of use of the information.
- A screening process using professional psychologists or other trained professionals is recommended by the WHO and other international institutions to ensure that survivors or those at risk are ready to be interviewed. This may be difficult in many of the contexts in which Oxfam works, so we suggest that we only interview survivors who are identified by a partner woman’s organization and who have a relationship with that organization. Our partner organizations can recommend women who they feel are best positioned to do this.
- The facilitator (preferably female) must have experience with VAWG research and interviewing women to obtain information about their personal experiences.
- Ensure the privacy and appropriateness of the interview location.
- A distress protocol needs to be established in partnership with the organization with whom the participants are affiliated for what the interviewer does when distress is detected. If necessary, the research process can be suspended, and a referral for assistance can be made if it is safe to do so.
- Facilitators need to have a handout with referral resource contact information to give out. This resource list needs to be either small enough to be hidden, or it can be a larger document that includes more than just VAWG resources. Ensure the information is up-to-date and referral services are from legally registered service providers.

## Resources

Oxfam Research Guidelines:

- [Undertaking Research with Ethics](#)
- [Conducting Semi-Structured Interviews](#)
- [Conducting Focus Groups](#)
- [Researching Human Interest Stories](#)

Ellsber, M, and Heise L. (2005). [Researching Violence against Women: A Practical Guide for Researchers and Activists](#). Washington DC: World Health Organization and PATH.

Hartmann, M., and Krishnan S., (2014). [Ethical and Safety Recommendations for Intervention Research on Violence against Women](#). RTI International Global Gender Center, August 2014

Jewkes, R, Dartnall, E & Sikweyiya, Y (2012). [Ethical and Safety Recommendations for Research on Perpetration of Sexual Violence](#). Pretoria, South Africa: Sexual Violence Research Initiative, Medical Research Council. Available at: <http://www.svri.org>

WHO Department of Gender, Women and Health (2001). [Putting women first: Ethical and safety recommendations for research on domestic violence against women](#). Geneva: World Health Organization. Available at: <http://www.who.int/gender/violence/womenfirsteng>

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<sup>i</sup> Research recommendations for more specific types and contexts are detailed in: Hartmann M, and Krishnan S., (2014). *Ethical and Safety Recommendations for Intervention Research on Violence against Women*. RTI International Global Gender Center, August 2014, p. 3.

<sup>ii</sup> Hartmann and Krishnan, 2014