16 Days of Activism against Gender Violence (November 25 – December 10)

**16 tips for guiding ethical collection and analysis of data on gender-based violence**

In commemoration of the global 16 Days of Activism against Gender Violence, the Gender and Empowerment team shared tips that that cut across all of our programming. On each of the 16 Days, we sent out one tip to guide safe and ethical data collection and analysis on gender-based violence (GBV). If you are engaged in formative research, monitoring and evaluation, research, gender analysis, or communications, these tips are for YOU!

**Tip #1: Interview only one person per household.**

This helps to avoid alerting other women who may report back about the nature of the questions to potential abusers.

**Tip #2: Ensure confidentiality when asking questions and afterward.**

Disclosure of sensitive information has the potential to put the participant or others at risk. Record numbers or codes instead of real names to identify questionnaires, and keep responses separate from any biographical information. Store data in a secure area, such as a locked cabinet. Impress upon all staff the importance of confidentiality.

**Tip #3: Conduct interviews in complete privacy.**

Interviews in the house are rarely private. Try to find a private space where others cannot eavesdrop.   If others enter the room during the interview, ask fake/”dummy” questions about non-sensitive issues. If you can’t ensure privacy, reschedule the interview for a different place or time, or if impossible to reschedule, then end the interview, thank the person for their time, and discard the partially completed interview information.

**Tip #4: Train interviewers to recognize and deal with a respondent’s distress during the interview.**

Asking about violence can cause people to relive some of the most traumatizing moments of their lives, or even to provoke questions about a topic no one has brought up before. If you ask about violence, you must make sure that the interviewers are prepared to give information and referrals to services that can help the respondent’s situation. Be prepared and have the information ready to give out from the very first interview.

Your first concern related to researching gender-based violence is the potential for causing unintentional harm to respondents through their participation in the study or assessment. For instance, a respondent may suffer backlash violence if a partner finds out that she has been talking to others about their relationship (or even if you asked questions about violence, regardless of their response). Because many violent partners control the actions of their intimate partners closely, even the act of speaking to another person without his permission may trigger violence.

**Tip #5: Given the possible risks of asking about violence, primary data collection on violence should only be initiated if you plan to use the results for programming.**

How will the answers to the question help you plan or change your programming interventions? If that is not clear, then the questions should not be asked. If at all possible, try to get the information from other sources besides asking direct questions of survivors, so as to minimize risk.

**Tip #6: Gain informed consent**.

In the respondent’s native language, clarify the intention of the exercise, that participation is voluntary, who is conducting it, how the information will be used, methods and the time involved. Ask participants of their availability or interest to participate. Make sure that participants know that they can end the interview at any time (and have their data destroyed), or skip over any questions they do not want to answer.

**Tip #7: Press releases and public media should never use real names or show faces of survivors.**

Given the risks of stigma, discrimination, arrest or abandonment for people who reveal their identity as a survivor of violence, the stakes are high. To honor the safety of survivors as first priority, we recommend that press releases and public media should not use real names or show faces of survivors,even if respondents have given their consent to do so. In general, use caution showing photos of people’s faces in stories about GBV, as it implicates them as a survivor (even if they are not), and label images of people if shown (e.g., staff at clinic providing survivor services).

**Tip #8: Anyone asking questions about violence must be prepared to refer anyone who requests assistance for medical, legal, counseling, and protection services.**

Asking about violence in and of itself can re-traumatize individuals. We must be prepared to refer respondents to assistance. Similarly, any activities aimed at awareness raising about GBV must be coupled with access to appropriate services for survivors, including medical, counseling, and legal support. If no referral services exist, then do not ask community members questions about sensitive topics; instead, ask service providers like doctors, nurses, social workers, teachers, about their experiences or perceptions more generally.

**Tip #9: Be sensitive to the time of participants.**

Have you consulted with community members to find out when different groups of people are generally free (e.g., men, women, boys, girls)? This helps make sure that you do not keep someone from school, income-generating activities, or delay chores, which could result in punishment by abusive partners or family members. Be up front about how long an exercise should take and ask permission to conduct the discussion. Sampling should ensure representation across the community, and be sure that the same people are not selected repeatedly for exercises.

**Tip #10: If names of respondents must be recorded, ensure that names are separated from data. Data should be kept in a secure place with limited access.**

Have a plan for shredding or destroying documents when no longer needed. Don’t re-use paper or recycle paper with sensitive data on it.

**Tip #11: End the interview on a positive note that emphasizes the survivor’s strengths.**

This is especially important after respondents have revealed information that makes them feel vulnerable. For example, you could end by asking for their ideas for what could be done to prevent violence or better assist survivors. Give respondents a chance to give you feedback about the interview and ask you any questions. Thank participants for their time and help.

As another example, the WHO study on violence against women ends each interview with the words, *“From what you have told me, I can tell that you have has some very difficult times in your life. No one has the right to treat someone else in that way. However, from what you have told me I can also see that you are strong and have survived through some difficult circumstances.”*

**Tip #12: If asking questions about violence, take care to word them in a way that minimizes the risk to respondents**.

Questions should be simply worded, as most will require translation and possibly multiple translations. Work with local community members, advocacy groups and service providers to ensure that questions are culturally appropriate and don’t create undue risks for respondents. In most cases, this will mean avoiding asking people directly about their own experiences of violence. Rather, try to ask questions about the situation in the community, or the perception of the respondent of risks or solutions.

* **Poorly worded question**: Have you been raped?
* **Better**: Has violence against women or girls in this camp/community increased or decreased in the last six months, or stayed about the same? What about violence against men or boys? What are communities doing to protect people in this community from violence, or to prevent violence?

You can still learn about violence in a community by asking the second question, but without risking exposing the respondent by asking about his or her personal experience of violence.

**Tip #13: Provide safety and confidentiality to potential GBV survivors in focus group discussions by avoiding asking about personal experiences of violence in group interview settings; instead, focus the questions on general issues of safety in the community, or on services available, or community attitudes about violence.**

Confidentiality cannot be fully guaranteed in group interview settings, because you can’t be sure that focus group participants will not tell others what was said in the session. It’s best to avoid asking pointed questions about personal experiences of violence in general groups.  Make it clear in the beginning of group discussions that you do not want any information about specific cases, but rather are interested in general information about the community.

**Tip #14: Anyone who asks direct questions for assessment/research needs to be trained to do so, but if the assessment has a component focused specifically on GBV, the assessment team will need additional specialized GBV training.**

This specialized training should include an orientation to gender-based violence issues. Interviewers need to be trained to be aware of the effects that questions may have on respondents, how to ensure confidentiality, to obtain informed consent, to refer to services when applicable. The training should also provide role play instructions for various situations that may be encountered. During fieldwork, regular debriefing sessions and counseling should be held to give the research team an opportunity to debrief on emotions and content of what they’re hearing, and to problem-solve unexpected problems.

Sample exercises for training interviewers on violence can be found in Appendix Two (p. 240) of the [WHO/PATH guide for Researching Violence Against Women](http://pqdl.care.org/Practice/Researching%20Violence%20against%20Women,%20A%20Practical%20Guide%20for%20Researchers%20and%20Activists.pdf).

**Tip #15: Once we have gathered the data on GBV, we have an ethical obligation to help ensure that findings are properly interpreted and used to advance policy and intervention development.**

If you have plans to collect evidence about GBV, do you have research and advocacy partners in the communities where you’re working to help you understand the meaning of your findings and what to do with the information? It’s helpful to have an implementation plan in place to ensure that the findings are applied appropriately. One way to improve the relevance of research is, from the onset, to involve advocacy and direct service groups either as full partners in the research or as members of an advisory committee.

**Tip #16: Be mindful of the power dynamics that may affect if people participate in data collection or project activities.**

Differences in power between recruiters (e.g., CARE staff, teachers, chiefs, government officials) and participants might make people feel obligated to participate in activities or research, even if you explain that participation is voluntary. Try to balance this out by talking to recruiters about how they will present the research or activity to the community, and avoid requesting a certain quota of participants. Make sure that participants understand that there are no penalties if they decide not to participate.

**Other Resources for GBV Research**

CARE’s Gender Toolkit Ethics page: <http://pqdl.care.org/gendertoolkit/Pages/ethics.aspx>

IASC, 2006, “Guidelines for Gender-Based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Settings: Focusing on Prevention of and Response to Sexual Violence in Emergencies.” <http://humanitarianinfo.org/iasc/pageloader.aspx?page=content-subsidi-tf_gender-gbv>

WHO, 2003, “Putting Women First: Ethical and Safety Recommendations for Research on Domestic Violence Against Women.” <http://www.who.int/gender/documents/violence/who_fch_gwh_01.1/en/index.html>

WHO and PATH, 2005, “Researching Violence Against Women: A Practical Guide for Researchers and Activists.” <http://www.path.org/files/GBV_rvaw_complete.pdf>

WHO, 2007, “WHO ethical and safety recommendations for researching, documenting and monitoring sexual violence in emergencies.” <http://www.who.int/gender/documents/OMS_Ethics&Safety10Aug07.pdf>