

tool 41 Security while Collecting Information

Group exercise

Your organization runs a health clinic in an IDP camp and your colleague who manages the clinic tells you that soldiers have been raping girls and that two girls have agreed to report their case. You are the only person in your organization trained to interview children, so you plan to meet the girls at the clinic in the camp. In order to avoid duplicating interviews, you have asked the MRM focal point to accompany you so the case can be verified. To get to the camp you have to pass several army checkpoints. The soldiers know your organization and your colleagues from the health clinic, and they usually let the vehicle pass without any questions or searches. However, they don't know you, as you don't often go into the camp.

Handouts: Tool 32 – Factsheet 'Information gathering' and Tool 39 – Self-assessment exercise 'Security risks when gathering information on grave violations'

Group discussion:

1) **What potential risks can you identify in this situation (think of risks for the victim, for yourself/your organization and for the information itself)? What issues would you need to clarify to better determine those risks?**

- **Clarifications needed:**
 - **Visibility:** are the colleagues at the clinic national staff or international staff? Are you and the MRM focal point national or international staff? Would the soldiers be more likely to be suspicious of national or international staff?
 - Has the MRM focal point ever visited the camp? Do the soldiers know him/her and what he/she does?
 - Do the soldiers stop other organizations at the checkpoints or do they usually let everyone pass without questions?
 - Do many other organizations work in the camp, in the same area as yours or is your organization the only one active in that particular sector?

- **Potential risks:**

- **Seizure of information:** soldiers could stop the car, search it and seize your notebook, laptop or documents which could contain sensitive information.
- **Retaliation against the victim:** depending on what information is collected during the interview, it could expose who the victim is and soldiers may retaliate against him/her.
- **Damage to organization's relationship with the soldiers:** soldiers could become suspicious of your organization as a whole, which could affect access to the camp and the continuation of other activities like the health clinic. Depending on who else works in the camp, your NGO could be later identified by the soldiers as the source of information about the rapes.

2) **What steps would you take to minimize these risks?**

- **Protecting the information:**
 - If you know that you risk being stopped/searched, how would you record information during the interview? For example printed data collection forms may be too sensitive to carry with you.
 - What precautions would you take to ensure that information is not seized by the soldiers and that the girls' identity is not exposed?

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● **Protecting the victim:**

- Is it safe to interview the girls at the camp or is it better to interview them somewhere else?
- Could the girls meet you and the MRM focal point somewhere else without raising security risks for themselves? Can the girls leave the camp and go through checkpoints safely? Where would be a safe place for you to meet?
- Do no harm: do the security risks outweigh the benefits of conducting the interview? Is it perhaps better not to interview the girls and instead to document the case only based on information provided by colleagues at the clinic? In case the presence of the MRM focal point creates more risk, could there be an alternative method of verification that would not require his/her presence?

● **Protecting your organization:**

- What would you tell the soldiers at the checkpoint if they stopped your vehicle and asked questions? Would you lie to them? Would this risk affecting the relationship of confidence that your other colleagues have established with the soldiers?
- Do no harm: do the security risks outweigh the benefits of conducting the interview?
- Would you need to discuss specific confidentiality precautions with the UN to prevent exposing your NGO as the potential source of the information on those rapes?

related tools/handouts

- 🔗 [tool 32 – Factsheet ‘Information gathering’](#)
- 🔗 [tool 33 – Checklist ‘Interviewing techniques’](#)
- 🔗 [tool 40 – Self-assessment exercise ‘Security risks when gathering information on grave violations’](#)