Safeguarding Guidance

Last updated: 3rd February 2022

Background

The Disability Under Siege Network recognises that it is engage in undertaking research with vulnerable and marginalised populations internationally, predominantly in contexts of conflict. The project team identify the need to ensure an effective safeguarding approach for all those engaged in any Disability Under Siege commissioned research as critical. In order to deliver an ethical and robust project everyone involved in the research chain, from the project administrators to researchers, practitioners and local community members, have the right to be safe from harm.

The Disability Under Siege Network has adopted the UK Collaborative on Development Research (UKCDR) Guidance for Safeguarding in International Development Research (https://www.ukcdr.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/170420-UKCDR-Guidance-for-Safeguarding-in-International-Development-Research.pdf). This recognised framework supports the development of effective safeguarding approaches by creating a grid/matrix to ask questions which inform actions by all who are involved in the research processes to anticipate, mitigate and address potential and actual harms in the funding, design, delivery and dissemination of research.

Anticipate – as far as possible, working collaboratively with diverse partners/advisors, gather information on all the potential harms that your research/research call could inadvertently create or exacerbate

Mitigate – take actions and put processes in place to mitigate the harms you have identified

Address – take actions to ensure adequate processes to report, investigate and provide redress for any safeguarding harms which may arise.

Full details regarding the UKCDR Guidance on Safeguarding in international development research can be found here: https://www.ukcdr.org.uk/resource/guidance-on-safeguarding-in-international-development-research/.

Safeguarding Core Principles

The UKCDR Safeguarding Framework promotes the following core principles to inform good safeguarding practice in international development research:

Rights of victims/survivors and whistle-blowers

The rights of actual and potential victims/survivors of safeguarding incidents should be central, and there should be meaningful and effective pathways for support and redress.

Equity and fairness

Involvement of all research partners at the research design and planning stage is necessary to ensure that research questions and methodologies are contextually appropriate and do not pose an

unacceptable risk of harm to researchers, participants or communities. Responsibilities and rewards in the research process should also be clearly identified and fairly shared.

Transparency

Transparent practice, policy and procedures for safeguarding form a touchstone characteristic of good practice. Transparency requires clear and public safeguarding commitments and policies, as well as openness about incidents or breaches and the measures taken to address them, while upholding confidentiality to avoid secondary trauma or harm.

Accountability and good governance

Accountability is a significant feature of approaches to address and prevent harm and underpins good governance in the research process. In order for accountability to be proportionate and realistic, the expectations of all actors/partners in the research process must also reflect the distribution of legal responsibility, power and resources, as well as recognition of realities on the ground in often challenging contexts.

Key Questions for Principle Investigator and Research Team

To explore the challenges likely to arise during research projects and to inform the development of appropriate plans and mitigating actions to reduce those risks the UKCDR Safeguarding Guidance provides a series of questions for researchers to ask during the planning stage. In the course of designing any research project we strongly advise that the research lead undertake a planning exercise that asks the following questions of the activities they are proposing.

Rights of victims/survivors and whistleblowers

- What information do I have on the potential harms this research can address or exacerbate for researchers, participants and wider communities?
- How am I considering the rights of the wider community (of interest or geography) in relation to this research?
- How am I building the rights of potential or actual victims/ survivors of safeguarding incidents into the research design, including questions and methodology, to ensure respect, dignity and safety?
- How am I ensuring that access to community-based complaint mechanisms to raise safeguarding concerns are built into the programme design, and are discussed and explained with participants?
- If researching 'victim/survivor' groups, how am I led by their own definitions of safety and vulnerability?
- To what extent am I willing to modify or even cancel planned research if potential harm to researchers, participants or communities is too great?

Equity and fairness

- How am I ensuring that this research is collaborative rather than extractive in nature? e.g. how am I involving local stakeholders?
- How and at what stage am I involving potential partners in the formulation of research agendas and questions?
- How and at what stage am I involving partners in the formulation of bids and budgets?

- How am I ensuring that we and our research partners reach a shared understanding of safeguarding?
- How am I ensuring that my research team is representative of the diversity of the groups and communities we are researching?
- How am I ensuring fairness in compensating and acknowledging all parties' contributions to this research?

Transparency

- What measures am I taking to provide financial transparency and avoid financial exploitation, e.g. sharing full details of the overall budget with all partners?
- What budget have I allocated for safeguarding per annum for this programme?
- Have we got a shared understanding in our team of how researchers should conduct themselves in the field? Is this formalised through written protocols? Has this been openly discussed with partners and researchers prior to the research taking place?
- How are we ensuring transparency on ownership and publication of data, so that participants are given sufficient assurance that their contributions are recognised, not only financially, but in the ownership of those contributions?

Accountability and governance

- How am I, as a leader, modelling best practice in terms of personal conduct and setting the tone for acceptable behaviour?
- Are we including SEAH-related questions when hiring research staff?
- Do we have an adequate process for safeguarding concerns to be raised that is developed, understood and fairly shared across the research partners?
- How will the research team feedback to research participants and communities on the use of their data? How are we consulting them on whether and how they want this to happen?
- What is our agreed process for how safeguarding concerns will be reported and escalated across research partnerships?
- How will lessons be learned and shared?

Support

If you have any questions regarding developing effective safeguarding frameworks please do not hesitate to contact the Disability Under Siege Project Team (disabilityundersiege@contacts.bham.ac.uk). Funds to support safeguarding activities are also available to be included in any grant award and a drop in session on safeguarding will be facilitated for all those that are interested.