

WHO Ethical and Safety Recommendations for Researching, Documenting and Monitoring Sexual Violence in Emergencies

Information about sexual violence in emergency settings may be collected for a number of reasons and/or to support various activities including:

- a. needs assessments and situation analyses;
- b. to provide testimonies for human rights documentation or for criminal justice purposes;
- c. human rights monitoring and protection;
- d. research on sexual violence in emergencies;
- e. to document incidence of sexual violence in the context of providing direct services;
- f. monitoring and evaluation of interventions; and
- g. health surveys (especially those focusing on reproductive health or HIV/AIDS).

There are a number of established codes of practice that offer guidance in matters relating to the ethics and safety of research that involves human subjects. Ethical and safety guidelines specific to the particular issues that arise during collection of information about sexual violence in emergencies, however, are lacking.

These recommendations have been developed in order to address this gap. They are meant to complement existing internationally-agreed ethical guidelines for research and to inform ethics review processes.

The recommendations apply specifically to collection of information on sexual violence in emergencies. They set out ethical and safety issues associated with planning and conducting information collection activities as well as those associated with use of information.

The eight safety and ethical recommendations addressed are:

1. The benefits to respondents or communities of documenting sexual violence must be greater than the risks to respondents and communities.
2. Information gathering and documentation must be done in a manner that presents the least risk to respondents, is methodologically sound, and builds on current experience and good practice.
3. Basic care and support for survivors/victims must be available locally before commencing any activity that involves individuals disclosing information about experiences of sexual violence.
4. The safety and security of all those involved in information gathering about sexual violence is of paramount concern and in emergency settings in particular should be continuously monitored.
5. The confidentiality of individuals who provide information about sexual violence must be protected at all times.
6. Anyone providing information about sexual violence must give informed consent before participating in the data gathering activity.
7. All members of the data collection team must be carefully selected and receive relevant and sufficient specialized training and ongoing support.
8. Additional safeguards must be put into place if children (i.e. those under 18 years) are to be the subject of information gathering.

See the full guidelines: ***WHO Ethical and Safety Recommendations for Researching, Documenting and Monitoring Sexual Violence in Emergencies*** (WHO, 2007). Available in [English](#) and [French](#).