

Confidentiality

Sharing data or trends on gender-based violence can help: ensure that services are responsive to needs, aid in targeting resources efficiently, and enable better coordination that will support quality care. Although the sharing of GBV data is important because it can help improve programs, push for needed do advocacy or policy change and mobilize resources, there are also unique challenges. The survivors we serve have entrusted us, as service providers, with sensitive data that requires special protections and procedures. When this data is gathered, how it is stored and secured, and how and why it is shared with other actors, demands thoughtful and careful practices.

Data is not a just a bunch of numbers. It's a representation of survivors, of their experiences, their stories.

In working in protection, these are often the traumatic, alarming or daunting experiences survivors share with service providers to receive care. This model of care is most effective when survivor receiving services can be open and honest and know what they share will be kept confidential. Indeed, this is one of the first questions beneficiaries and survivors often ask,

“Will the things I discuss be kept private?”

Confidentiality is the right of every survivor receiving services to have their identity kept private and unidentifiable. There is an implicit understanding and obligation on those providing services that any information disclosed by a survivor or beneficiary will not be shared with others, unless the person concerned gives explicit and informed consent to do so. This is part of the code of ethics we operate by. This is crucial to build and develop trust with clients, allowing for open disclosures. Trust between service providers and clients is essential to providing effective support, and typically depends on assurances of privacy. Disclosures are a function of confidence that the service provider will not share this information with others without consent.

For survivor to feel comfortable talking about intimate, private or revealing information or experiences, they need a safe space to talk without fear that this information will be revealed.

These standards for confidentiality and client privacy were formally endorsed in the Inter-Agency Standing Committee's *Guidelines for Gender-Based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Settings*, the World Health Organization's *Ethical and Safety Recommendations for Researching, Documenting and Monitoring Sexual Violence in Emergencies* and the *Inter-Agency Gender-Based Violence Case Management Guidelines*. Collecting and sharing GBV information can be dangerous to the survivors reporting, communities, and those involved in collecting the information. It's



important this process is followed closely with attention to our safety and ethical requirements to maintain confidentiality.

Even if pressured by a donor to share identifiable or potentially identifiable information about a survivor, our allegiance is to the international standards that govern our work and keep survivors safe. When requests are received, one helpful question to ask is, “Will this bring harm to the survivor?”

Then, consider why are we sharing this information? This can help you determine: what is the most effective way to share information, considering the ultimate intended use: is it to show donors what has been accomplished? Is it to make a case for governmental partners so they can provide a service or improve access to a service that is in demand? Is it to show trends and patterns to potential partners and donors to mobilize resources? Data can help achieve those aims; however, practitioners have a great responsibility and accountability toward the survivors who have provided their information with consent, to treat it with sensitivity and act ethically.

Services are provided to survivors with their explicit consent to engage in the case management process, and personal information is shared, also with consent, for the purpose of making referrals to other service providers, or for anonymous, aggregate sharing for program improvement purposes. Considering the survivors that make up the data, the individuals that bravely sought services, it is our responsibility to ensure their rights to confidentiality are maintained and protected.