

Case Follow-Up: Supporting Survivors with Adverse Judgement from Others

In what circumstances are survivors judged?

In the patriarchal world in which we live, you can assume that a survivor will be judged at some point, always negatively. They will be judged for what happened to them- accused of letting it happen, asking for it, of not having avoided it, or not fighting enough as just some examples. They will be judged for getting help (if they do), they will be judged for not getting help (if they don't). They will be judged for being scared, and also judged for not being scared enough. They will be judged for bringing shame to their families, and judged for any consequences they may have as a result of the violence they survived. In some places, they are even judged for surviving!

As case workers, we must assume that judgment will come from different directions, and so it is paramount that we do NOT judge them at any time.

It is especially difficult for survivors when judgment comes from people or groups that they hold dear or on whom they are dependent- whether for their shelter, protection, livelihood or social acceptance. For example, judgment from families, spouses, friends, service providers and key social networks can have particularly serious effects on a survivor's wellbeing and ability to heal.

What to do when typical supportive social structures are weakened/ineffective

There are several things you can do when a survivor's typical supportive social structures are not working.

- Be supportive! This is the first and most important thing you as a case worker can do. That means listening, not judging, and validating a survivor's experience.
- Together with the survivor, map out her social interactions both inside and outside the home, and inside and outside the family. Providing a survivor with a visual of possible or existing social interactions can be helpful, and will also provide the case worker with a basis to discuss who is potentially an ally in a survivor's life, and who is not.

- Once this is done, it is also useful to discuss other people or activities happening in the community that a survivor may not be a part of, but that could be new opportunities. Imagine it as a spider web of connections. Identify with the survivor who has influence in her spider web, and how can they be influenced (both inside the family and in the broader community).
- Together with the survivor, identify allies - known or potential - that she can use for support. Is the eldest uncle with whom she never speaks potentially an ally that others will listen to? Is there a matriarch in the community that she can build a relationship with? Is there a religious leader who is empathetic?
- Strategize with the survivor on how best to get these allies on board if they are not already, and what she may need specifically from them. Remember that each situation will be different! One survivor may want the influential person to speak to their family, and another may just want to be able to speak to someone in the community who will not judge. Some survivors may just want to find alternative friends or social groups to attend, or may just want to discuss it with you without any action. Remember: never judge what a survivor decides is best for her.
- Finally, if the lack of support a survivor is receiving is impacting her safety, livelihood or ability to care for her children for example, it may be necessary to look into emergency support (in-kind, cash, shelter, etc.) if that is what a survivor wants. Remember: she is the one guiding the process.

Sample Script

- *"I am so glad to see you today, and so sorry you are not feeling supported. I believe you and think you are so strong for being here today. What happened to you is not your fault."*
- *"Your feelings are real and valid, and I hear how this lack of support is affecting you."*
- *"Who has influence in your family/community?"* (e.g. if a survivor's spouse is judging, ask her who he listens to, or who he respects. Make sure to always think inside and outside the family.

Key Takeaways and Helpful Tips

As a case worker, always assume that a survivor will receive negative feedback, lack support or suffer judgment from people close to or around her.

GBV case management works from a strengths-based approach so from the beginning of the case management process, it is important to identify with the survivor what these are including allies or potential allies around her. This will help throughout the process!

Support and non-judgment starts with YOU, the case worker. That is your primary role in the case management relationship.

Support the survivor to think out of the box. Often, there may be a family or community member they may not have thought of because they may

not have regular interactions with them or perhaps because they are perceived as more senior.

It is rare not to find someone in a survivor's environment who will be supportive, at the very least in private. But it may take time to both identify this person, and support the survivor to tap into them.

