

How to manage risks in the conduct of SEA/sexual harassment investigations?

Lennart Hernander
LWF World Service

First some challenges... often;

1. The reporter is not the survivor/victim, nor someone very close.
Approaching them may increase risk. Community support “already provided”. Willing?
2. The reporter doesn’t know who the perpetrator is. But they think they do.
Person not involved being accused, attacked. Investigator attacked for ‘no action’.
3. Time between the abuse/harassment and report.
Community sees case as “handled” and “closed”. To “re-open” may increase risk.
4. Culture, religion, language (and interpreters)
Understand what investigation enters into. Not look for “the magic word”.



Risk management starts with a plan

- *“Plans are worthless, but planning is everything.”* Dwight D Eisenhower
- Physical risks; Threats; Blackmail
- Self blame; Secondary victimization; Victim blaming
- Acknowledge that everyone is potentially at risk during an investigation;
 - Survivor, Investigator, Witnesses, Family, Accused, Interpreters, Perpetrator,...
- Identify potential risks and causes; context specific, high stakes
 - E.g. relating to resettlement, job, integration in community, marriage, education



Some risk management points

- Be prepared before there is a case
- Capacity for physical and psychosocial support for survivor/victim
- See it from the victim/survivor and community perspective
- Support to survivor/victim family
- Recognize community based protection mechanisms
- Relocation; Witness protection programs – easier said than done
- Recognize the (very) dangerous power of shame

