

Understanding SEAH and GBV

Sexual exploitation, abuse and sexual harassment (SEAH) and gender-based violence (GBV) are closely related but different areas of work, particularly within the development and humanitarian sector.

Civil society organisations (CSOs), Donors, Governments, International Financial Institutions and other organisations may all have different definitions of SEAH and GBV. However, it is important for practitioners to understand the theoretical and practical differences and similarities between the two areas of work. Ensuring our work as practitioners is based on a thorough understanding of this will ultimately lead to strengthened prevention, mitigation and response work within the sector.

Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Sexual Harassment (SEAH)

Gender-based Violence (GBV)

Definitions

SEAH is the term used to refer to sexual exploitation, abuse and sexual harassment. Although sexual exploitation, abuse and sexual harassment can happen anywhere in society, when used as an umbrella term within the development and humanitarian sector, the term refers to SEAH perpetrated by those working in, or with, development and humanitarian organisations and within Peacekeeping Missions.

The individual terms within SEAH are defined [on the RSH website](#).

SEAH always occurs in a work environment, or work-related environment, including in a programme setting or work travel.

“Gender-based violence” is an umbrella term for any harmful act that is perpetrated against a person’s will and that is based on socially ascribed (e.g. gender) differences between men and women. It includes acts that inflict physical, sexual or mental harm or suffering, threats of such acts, coercion and other deprivations of liberty. These acts can occur in public or in private.

The term “GBV” is most commonly used to underscore how systemic inequality between men and women, which exists in every society in the world, acts as a unifying and foundational characteristic of most forms of violence perpetrated against women and girls. The term “gender-based violence” also includes sexual violence committed with the explicit purpose of

Within the development and humanitarian sector, SEAH is part of an organisation’s code of conduct. The code of conduct covers conduct in professional as well as personal lives – staff are identified as part of the organisation and work-related environments can be as much outside of the office as in it.

People at risk of SEAH are an organisation’s service users, members of the community or staff.

reinforcing gender inequitable norms of masculinity and femininity.¹

It is important to acknowledge that men, women, boys and girls all can experience violence, but to date GBV research, policymaking and programming has largely focused on women and girls, as structural and systemic gender inequality privileges men with greater power and resources which renders women and girls at greater risk of harm.

GBV can occur anywhere.

SEAH

GBV

What are the causes?

SEAH can be driven by different forms of abuse of [power](#) and inequalities.

The more power a person has, the greater the opportunity to exploit, abuse and harass others. The less power a person has, the more they are likely to be targeted for exploitation, abuse and harassment. The degree of power someone has is closely linked to structural, hierarchical and situational factors:

- Structural inequalities linked to e.g. gender, race, ethnicity, disability status, gender identity, sexual orientation, class, caste.
- Hierarchies within organisations, e.g., between senior and junior staff and international and national staff.
- Situational factors, e.g., a humanitarian worker having the power to determine access to humanitarian assistance, such as food or cash or vouchers.

Women and girls are more likely to be targeted for SEAH because of structural and systemic gender inequality which privileges men with greater power and resources.

GBV is always based on gender inequality and socially ascribed differences between men and women. Being targeted for GBV can be exacerbated further where an individual faces multiple forms of inequality.

As SEAH is most often perpetrated against women and girls, it is most often a form of GBV. However, *it may not always be a form of GBV.*

Sexual violence can be perpetrated based on other issues of inequality. For example, where a woman who is an international member of staff sexually harasses a junior, national member of staff. Within this example, the harassment is not rooted in gender inequality and gender discrimination, but rather deep rooted harmful cultural norms related to nationality, race and colonialism. Sexual violence perpetrated against a man with a disability may be based on that individual’s disability as discrimination.

SEAH	GBV
Who are the main perpetrators?	
<p>SEAH is perpetrated by staff or representatives from CSOs.</p> <p>The majority of perpetrators are men, although this is not always the case. The majority of perpetrators are individuals with greater structural, hierarchical and/or situational power than survivors.</p>	<p>GBV is primarily, but not always, perpetrated by men.</p>
Who are the victims or survivors?	
<p>CSO staff members, representatives and any member of a society who interacts with a CSO, may be at risk of SEAH.</p> <p>Women and girls are most at risk. Gender inequality is not always the cause, however and children, people with disabilities and people who face other types of discrimination can also be targeted. People may be at greater risk of being targeted for SEAH because they experience intersecting inequalities. Girls, for example, are at increased risk due to age and gender related power differentials.</p>	<p>Women and girls are most at risk of GBV. GBV practitioners most often focus on women and girls in their response to GBV due to structural and systemic gender inequality and discrimination that lead to their documented higher risk of GBV.</p> <p>In some instances, men and boys can also be survivors of GBV. For example, in conflict situations, sexual violence is sometimes perpetrated by men against other men and boys with the view to emasculate and shame them.</p>
How do the risks intersect with each other?	

Anyone with one or more form of inequality = at higher risk of SEAH

Women/girl = at most risk of SEAH or GBV

Women/girl + other inequality(ies) = at higher risk of SEAH or GBV

How organisations address SEAH

⇒ All staff and representatives are responsible for preventing and responding to SEAH. It requires a whole organisational effort and is an aspect of organisational culture. Some staff have extra responsibilities, e.g. senior staff, HR staff, staff who visit programme sites.

⇒ SEAH measures focus on organisation-wide prevention and response; at a minimum they generally include:

- Developing and maintaining relevant policies and procedures
- SEAH risk management
- Safe recruitment and regular staff training
- Building an organisational culture that understands and challenges SEAH
- Building an organisational culture that understands and challenges gender inequality, race inequality and other diversity and inequality issues
- Creating a system for all to report abuse and for the organisation to respond
- Preparing for managing investigations where necessary
- Designing and delivering safe programmes

Safeguarding and Protection from Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Sexual Harassment (PSEAH) are terms which describe cross-organisation measures to address SEAH.

The term safeguarding generally includes other non-sexual harms and abuses.

The term **PSEA** (Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse) is also used to refer to measures taken to protect people from sexual exploitation and abuse by staff and programmes. Unlike SEAH, PSEA does not include sexual harassment.

How organisations address GBV

- ⇒ GBV prevention and response work is typically a programme and / or advocacy initiative. It should be led by GBV specialists and response work (in particular) should be led by women and girls.
- ⇒ GBV programmes are designed and delivered to protect people by addressing drivers and responding to incidents of GBV. Also, GBV objectives can be integrated into other programmes, e.g. education, nutrition or social protection programmes.
- ⇒ Amongst other things, effective GBV programmes or objectives include:
 - A cross-sector, multi-service approach responding to the range of individual or group needs, including of victims and survivors
 - Establishing systems for reporting abuse, response and referrals to necessary services
 - Programmes that are based on local contextual understanding and work closely with all members of a community
 - Multi-year, intensive community activism to shift harmful gender attitudes, roles and social norms
 - Staff and representatives who are selected for their equitable approach to gender and non-violent behaviour

[Read more here](#) for further information on what works to prevent violence against women and girls.

¹ IASC (Inter-agency Standing Committee), 2015a. Guidelines for Integrating Gender-Based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Action: Reducing risk, promoting resilience and aiding recovery, p. 3