

## All Survivors Project Ethical Research and Advocacy Policy

### 1. Purpose and scope of Ethical Research and Advocacy Policy (Ethics Policy)

This Ethics Policy is intended to support the design and delivery of responsible research and advocacy by All Survivors Project (ASP). The Policy applies to all research and advocacy activities undertaken by ASP staff, consultants and volunteers, as well as to local partners or international organisations involved in or supporting research and advocacy on behalf of or in collaboration with ASP.<sup>1</sup>

Responsibility for implementing the Ethics Policy lies with all ASP staff and consultants when they design, implement, host, manage and/or disseminate research and/or engage in advocacy activities. Responsibility for monitoring and oversight lies with ASP's Director and UCLA.

The Ethics Policy sits within a set of Core Values which inform all of ASP's work and within which it operates. The Policy should also be read in conjunction with: ASP's Code of Conduct, ASP Child Protection Policy, ASP Security Protocols and ASP Guide for Researchers.

### 2. ASP's Core Values

ASP is committed to the following core values:

- **Committed to upholding human rights:** Our work is guided by international human rights and humanitarian laws and norms, and by the best interests, dignity and safety of survivors of sexual and gender-based violence.
- **Empowering:** We aim to empower survivors to work directly with service providers and policymakers.
- **Transparent:** We are committed to being transparent while respecting the privacy of survivors.
- **Accountable and accurate:** We wish to be accountable for using ethical approaches in our fact finding and for maintaining the highest standards of factual accuracy.
- **Independent:** We are impartial and independent of any partisan or religious affiliation and neutral in situations of armed conflict.

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<sup>1</sup> When working with partner organisations it is anticipated that ASP's Ethics Policy will take precedence. If partner organisations have well-articulated policies there will be consultation on how ASP and partner policies and guidelines can best be applied in a coherent and ethical manner.

### 3. Ethical research and advocacy

The primary aim of ASP's research is to support advocacy for change, in particular for stronger global and national action to prevent and end sexual violence against males in situations of armed conflict and displacement and to ensure better responses for male survivors. ASP's research typically involves documentation of patterns of conflict-related sexual violence against men and boys; recording individual survivor case histories; conducting assessments of the adequacy of medical, psychosocial, protection and legal responses for survivors; and analysis of the effectiveness of protection and prevention frameworks and actions. Research will result in practical recommendations directed at specific stakeholders on how to strengthen responses and support national and international advocacy by ASP.

#### 3.1 Risk/benefits analysis

As part of the research planning process, a risks/benefits analysis will be undertaken to identify possible harms to participants arising from the research versus the benefits of it. This will examine issues of safety and security of victims/survivors, witnesses and communities and other research participants during and after research. It will consider, among other things, the general security situation and security in the locations to be visited and how this will be managed, the conditions in which research will be carried out, the availability of medical facilities or access to other support services, and the possibility of post-interview follow-up to check on the security and wellbeing of research participants. **The benefits to respondents or communities of documenting sexual violence must be greater than the risks.**<sup>2</sup>

### 4. Participation in research

Participation in ASP research is voluntary. The selection of potential participants is informed primarily by how they will contribute to achieving the objectives of the study, and individual participation will be sought based on direct relevance and appropriateness to these objectives. ASP will strive to use participant selection methods that are non-discriminatory and that offer the possibility of the benefits of participation to all those meeting the selection criteria outlined in the research proposal, and are not only based on whether certain groups or individuals are more readily available.

Personal interviews with survivors of sexual violence will only be used to obtain information after all other options have been considered. The case for direct interviewing must demonstrate: that the desired outcome cannot be achieved without gathering information in this way; that the information is needed and is not otherwise available; that information cannot be obtained in a less invasive manner (e.g. by using other methods, or by involving a different community, at a different time, or a different context with lower risk); and that the welfare of respondents can be properly protected.

Clear inclusion and exclusion criteria for participants will be developed as part of the research plan. As part of the criteria, careful consideration will be given to risks and benefits

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<sup>2</sup> Any benefits deriving from ASP's research are more likely to accrue over the longer term and to a broader group than that to which research participants belong, rather than providing direct and immediate benefits to the participants themselves.

to all individuals and in particular to children, including consideration of the possibility that a limited pool of potential participants can lead to repeated intrusions into their lives by different research or advocacy agencies, without direct benefit to them, in a way that cannot be ethically justified. Separate criteria have been drawn up regarding the participation of children in research and advocacy.

No payment will be made for participation in the research. However, research participants will be reimbursed for travel costs and provided with a per diem to cover the cost of meals and other refreshments.

## 5. Safeguarding the privacy and confidentiality of research participants

ASP will seek to protect privacy of research participants and confidentiality of data at all times.

**With regard to privacy**, careful consideration will be given to how participants are identified and selected, and by whom; where interviews take place and under what conditions; and how data will be recorded and stored so that individual participants are not identified. Where necessary, advice on how to ensure privacy will be sought from local partners, including in identifying suitable locations for interviews, focus group discussions or other information collection activities.

**With regard to confidentiality**, any information that an individual discloses during the course of the research will be considered to be confidential and will not be shared with others in ways that are inconsistent with the understanding of the original disclosure, unless the person concerned gives explicit and informed consent to do so.

When using focus groups or other group discussions as a means of collecting information about sexual violence, participants will be briefed about the need for confidentiality and the safeguards that will be adopted to protect their privacy. This will be done at the beginning of the meeting and repeated at the end and include acknowledgement that confidentiality is the responsibility of all group members. Focus group participants will be instructed not to share personal experiences on sensitive issues, but rather to present the experience of unnamed others or impressions of trends in the community. Confidentiality should relate to both the nature of the discussion (i.e. what was discussed) as well as to what was said and who was present.

All persons involved in research for ASP will receive training in the need for strict confidentiality and supported work through the practical applications of confidentiality principles in the setting in which they will be working. All team members will be required to sign confidentiality agreements.

### 5.1 Security of research data

ASP will take the following precautions to ensure that research data is securely stored and to safeguard participant identities and confidentiality:

- Names of potential participants will be maintained electronically in the personal notes of the researchers on their laptops until direct contact is established with individuals in the recruited population. Information provided during interviews will be documented by the researcher or, in the case of focus groups, by the documenter using a laptop (in which case information will be stored in password-protected files) and/or on audio tape or digital files.

- For data storage purposes, records of interview will only refer to the participant using non-identifying terms and the following procedures will be used:
  - Study codes will be used to record identifying information;
  - All identifiable data will be encrypted;
  - Data documents will be stored securely within locked locations in the ASP office in Vaduz;
  - Electronic and digital records will be kept in a password-protected file folder on the password-protected laptop of the interviewer.

## **6. Referrals**

ASP is committed to taking all necessary measures to avoid harms to research participants including distress and re-traumatisation, and building these measures into the design and implementation of research projects (see above). However, it also recognises there is still a potential risk of emotional and psychological distress to participants and, particularly in the case of survivors, information may be disclosed that indicates that they are in need of medical care or mental health and psychosocial support services. ASP will:

- Ensure that researchers are trained to discuss sensitive issues in an empathetic manner and to identify signs of distress/trauma;
- Ensure that referrals to appropriate support services are available if participants display signs of distress, express a need or desire for support, or disclose an experience of violence;
- Debrief researchers at the end of the project and refer them or other members of the research team to appropriate services if this is requested or considered necessary.

## **7. Dissemination of findings and research follow-up**

ASP will ensure that both the dissemination of research findings as well as advocacy based on findings takes place and that this is done in an ethical manner, guided by the overriding aims of doing *no harm* and providing *benefit* wherever possible. Specific consideration will be taken of local issues and how, and in what way, disseminated information could reach the local level and the implications for participants if this occurs. Any relevant information that has arisen during the research process will be taken into account, as well as other pertinent developments at a local, national or international level.