

PREVENTING SEXUAL EXPLOITATION AND ABUSE OF BENEFICIARIES AND COMMUNITY MEMBERS

A Guide to Understanding Mercy Corps Sexual Exploitation Policy

This document provides additional guidance around Mercy Corps policy concerning sexual exploitation and abuse. This guide is not a replacement for the stated policy but instead highlights key issues that team members may encounter in their roles. Mercy Corps is committed to ensuring that all individuals are treated with respect and dignity and that our organization never engages in conduct that could be perceived as abusive, exploitative or harassing.

Mercy Corps works to create better opportunities for people and communities but first we must do no harm. Sexual exploitation, abuse or human-trafficking harms those we serve and it is critical that no team member or partner ever engage in any of these activities.



View the PSEA Policy in the Digital Library.



View the eLearning course in Talent Development at Talent.MercyCorps.org



Mercy Corps requires all team members and partners to immediately report suspicions of sexual exploitation or abuse. Mercy Corps encourages all **beneficiaries** and **community members** to report suspicions of possible sexual exploitation or abuse of or by any team member, partner or visitor. Report your suspicions to the **Integrity Hotline, Human Resources, or a trusted leader.**



Anonymous reports to the Integrity Hotline are allowed and anyone may request to stay anonymous. **As a witness it is not your role to investigate**, that will be done through an established process.



Mercy Corps **will not tolerate** any form of **retaliation** against team members, partners or beneficiaries who report sexual exploitation or abuse if the report is done in good faith.



These types of allegations are very sensitive and Mercy Corps treats all information with the greatest respect for **confidentiality**. The safety, security and well-being of survivors is our first and foremost concern along with the safety and security of the witnesses and accused.



Mercy Corps **will** take allegations of this kind **seriously and is committed to the support of survivors**. If a survivor or witness desires assistance, Mercy Corps will provide medical, psychosocial and/or legal support.

THE FOLLOWING DEFINITIONS ARE IMPORTANT TO UNDERSTAND:



Sexual Exploitation includes any actual or attempted abuse of position of vulnerability, power differential, or trust, for sexual purposes.

- Sexual exploitation can include but is not limited to: profiting monetarily, socially, or politically from the exploitation.
- Sexual exploitation can include but is not limited to: exchange or attempting to exchange money, employment, goods or services for sex. **Exchange of assistance for sexual or romantic relations is considered exploitative conduct.**



Sexual abuse includes any actual or threatened physical intrusion of a sexual nature, whether by force or under unequal or coercive conditions.



Sexual or romantic activity with children (under the age of 18) is prohibited **regardless of the legal age of consent in the country**. Mistaken belief in age is not a defense.

REMEMBER!

mercycorps.org/integrity-hotline
or
integrityhotline@mercycorps.org



Policy Talk

QUESTIONS*

What does Mercy Corps base their standards and policies on when addressing sexual exploitation or abuse?

What happens once an allegation is made?

If a beneficiary who is exchanging money or employment for sex is doing so voluntarily, should I just ignore what is happening because it is something they want to do?

I have seen a man visiting the home of a female Mercy Corps beneficiary several times late in the evening. I know this man works for an aid organization other than Mercy Corps. The daughter of the beneficiary told a neighbor they get extra money for food and clothes whenever the man visits. What should I do?

A community member told me he has observed on several occasions a Mercy Corps team member visiting an establishment that is only known as a place to pay for sex. The community member has attended some Mercy Corps functions and is familiar with our staff. What should I do?

*All questions are hypothetical situations and are used as learning points.

...AND ANSWERS

The UN Secretary General has authorized measures around sexual exploitation and/or abuse and almost all humanitarian aid organizations, **including Mercy Corps**, have adopted these measures.

Mercy Corps will first determine the safety of everyone involved. The Ethics Team will examine the situation and ensure that an investigation is conducted if warranted. Once the facts are uncovered, Human Resources and the Ethics Team will determine next steps in accordance with the policy. **Throughout the process, Mercy Corps will take into account the needs of any survivors or witnesses.**

No, it does not matter if the person is consenting, it is still exploitive and we have a duty of care. Exploitation takes into account the power relationship between staff and beneficiaries who do consent but only because they feel they have no choice. **Our policies are very clear about the requirement to report these types of situations.**

Even though your concerns do not involve our organization, you still need to report this to the Integrity Hotline, Human Resources or tell a trusted leader. There may be an explanation for what you are witnessing but the conduct seems suspicious. **You do not need to do any further investigating yourself.** Other aid organizations have agreed to a zero tolerance policy of PSEA and Mercy Corps will notify the involved organization of the situation.

This incident needs to be reported to the Integrity Hotline, Human Resources or a trusted leader because the team member may be involved in sexual exploitation. Thank the community member for alerting you to the situation. Let him know you will report the concern and even though there may be an explanation for what he observed, Mercy Corps takes this kind of information seriously and will investigate to find out what the facts are.

