



SEXUAL HARASSMENT, EXPLOITATION AND ABUSE, A COLLECTIVE WAKE UP CALL

Humanitalents gives the floor
to humanitarian workers





HUMANITALENTS

HR Consultancy for the humanitarian sector

Managing human resources in the humanitarian sector can be a real headache: stress, emergencies, diverse cultural contexts, lack of resources and training, high turn-over etc. These issues have serious repercussions on programmes, which is why we created Humanitalents, the HR consultancy firm for the humanitarian sector. Humanitalents supports NGOs by offering recruitment, technical guidance and capacity building services, and helps them transform their Human Resources into strategic partners!

A DISTURBING REALITY

Building a healthy working environment that discourages abuse is the first step in managing human resources, so Humanitalents' consultants are naturally interested in tackling the issues of sexual harassment, exploitation and abuse in the sector. Beyond their individual professional experience – which has involved dealing with sexual abuse cases – Humanitalents' consultants realise that humanitarian workers seem to be increasingly concerned by Prevention of Sexual Harassment Exploitation and Abuse (PSHEA). Furthermore, scandals and reports on sexual harassment, exploitation and abuse in the humanitarian sector have been hitting media headlines regularly since the beginning of 2018.

ASKING SO AS TO UNDERSTAND BETTER

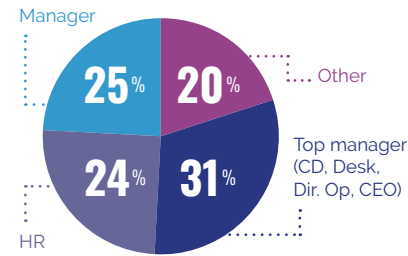
For all these reasons, Humanitalents decided to carry out a survey amongst French-speaking* humanitarian aid workers. The aim of the survey was to gain a better understanding of the workers' concerns about PSHEA. One hundred and six people answered 10 questions on the subject in a qualitative questionnaire between the 12th and 31st December 2018. A link to the questionnaire was shared by email and on social networks. The answers were processed anonymously, and participation was voluntary.

* Humanitalents had limited resources to conduct this survey and therefore chose to limit the scope.

BUILDING A CLEAR PICTURE AN UNACCEPTABLE SITUATION

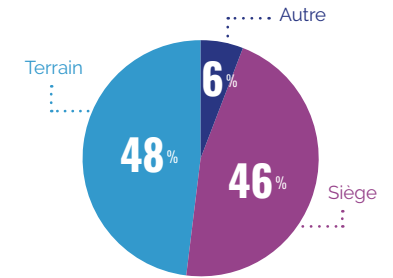
THE PROFILES OF THE PEOPLE SURVEYED

What is your position?



Most of the respondents have managerial responsibilities or work in human resources management.

Where do you work?



Around half of them were based in the field when they answered the survey and the other half were working at an NGO's headquarters.

A VERY SERIOUS MATTER

77%
of respondents

said they were deeply preoccupied by the issue of sexual harassment, exploitation and abuse in the humanitarian sector.

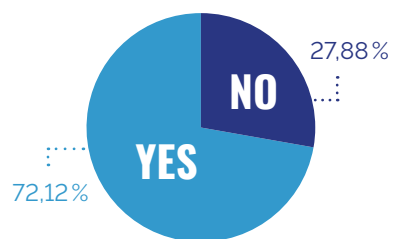
3 AREAS

respondents are most preoccupied by



EVERYONE IS CONCERNED AND EVERYONE IS EXPOSED

Have you ever encountered situations involving sexual harassment, exploitation or abuse?



OVER 70% OF THOSE SURVEYED

have encountered situations involving sexual harassment, exploitation or abuse.

- 40% said they had never been sensitized or trained on the issue
- Barely 23% felt they had sufficient tools or support to deal with these situations
- The proportion of those sensitized or trained on the issue is higher in the field, amounting to 69% of respondents compared to 52% in headquarters.

Given these telling figures, how can we move towards a situation where 100% of staff are sensitized?

Existing tools are not well-known

When we asked humanitarian workers if they knew of existing tools within their NGO, two points emerged:

- There are some existing tools: 90% of respondents said that their organisation had a code of conduct, 73% said that there was a specific policy on prevention of abuse of

power and prevention of sexual abuse and 67% said there was a complaints mechanism.

- But they are not widely-known: 30% to 42% of respondents replied "I do not know" when asked about the existing tools within their organisation.

How effective can policies and tools be if the members of an organisation are not even aware of their existence?

Organisational cultures that enable abuse and impede effective case management

Many of the comments described an NGO culture that enables abuse, discredits victims/survivors and hampers effective case management. The need for a change of organisational culture was raised repeatedly, one comment stating that: "A profound change in paradigms seems needed."

This culture makes itself felt in many different ways.

FEAR

“ Fear really needs to change sides.

One of the obstacles mentioned repeatedly in the survey was the fear felt by victims/survivors. It appears that in many cases victims/survivors are not taken seriously, confidentiality is not respected, and victims/survivors are sometimes subjected to intimidation from their management or from the abuser.

IMPUNITY

“ The complaints procedures may be well-established and respected, but the system seems to lose its effectiveness towards the end of the process, and the “perpetrator” is allowed to resign before the enquiry’s conclusions or consequences. This means that the person [the abuser] avoids dismissal for gross misconduct and there is no trace of this in his/her file.

Victims/survivors, already discouraged by the potential repercussions of making a complaint and the lack of consideration of what they say, are not encouraged to denounce abuse because the sanctions are rarely proportionate to the acts, when they are applied.

MANAGERIAL STYLE

“ More horizontal leadership

The management style in the field is usually prescriptive, based on the pretext of emergencies, high workloads and/or a cultural context in which that style is deemed more appropriate. However, the ability to listen and empathise are major factors in allowing victims/survivors to speak out. The hierarchical link between an abuser and the victims/survivors may be a further obstacle to the victims/survivors telling their story.

TABOO

“ The taboo is still very real and is strengthened by how limited case management is in practice.

The taboo is probably rooted in the sexual nature of the issue and strengthened by a fear of damaging the NGO’s image. The situation is beginning to change, but the taboo is still very present.

SEXIST CULTURE AND THE PATRIARCHAL SYSTEM

“ There is still a long way to go in promoting a tolerant working environment and gender equality in the workplace

Sexual harassment, assault or abuse is rooted in sexism. Tolerating sexism - which creates a power struggle - encourages sexual violence. In the vast majority of cases, the victims/survivors are women.

The fact that top managers are often men also has an impact on PSHEA issues. Just like sexism, the question of the patriarchal culture in NGOs is considered an important factor that has been tackled by many studies on SHEA cases in the humanitarian sector.

Sexist culture, managerial culture, fear, and taboo – so much is holding us back. A challenge of this scale requires everyone’s input, but where do we start?

AGGRAVATING FACTORS

working and living conditions



Aggravating factors - specific living and working conditions

Working and living conditions were cited by respondents as facilitating factors in cases of sexual harassment exploitation and abuse.

These conditions in no way excuse abusive behaviour but should be taken into consideration when preventing abuse and providing care and case management to victims/survivors.

“ *Having alerted my HR advisor about the sexual harassment the HoM was subjecting me to during a mission in an active conflict zone, I was told that he must feel lonely, that there*

were not many expatriate women on mission X.

However, even if stress can foster excessive behaviour (alcohol consumption, unprotected sex etc.) it can never excuse abusive behaviour.

Preventing sexual harassment, exploitation and abuse cases and improving living conditions to create better quality of life at work - how can we do it, when we do not have the resources?

Everybody's problem and nobody's problem

According to those who took part in the survey, NGOs do not allocate specific human or financial resources to PSHEA and when resources are allocated, there are insufficient. It often means extra work, on top of the one's usual tasks, and taking on responsibilities that are rarely mentioned in the job description.

Managers and HR staff are under-trained, not necessarily aware of their responsibilities and/or ill-equipped to deal with the cases of abuse they encounter.

How can we address inappropriate behaviours and prevent SHEA cases without the necessary human and financial resources?

Intercultural contexts used as an excuse

“ *Adapting a policy to fit all contexts and every country's legislation is complex*

It is true that the diversity of the various cultural contexts involved makes the situation more complicated, however, it has become a common excuse for putting off policy implementation and sanctioning inappropriate behaviour.

“ *Is a case of abuse as serious in all countries*

The question of cultural specificities is sometimes a pretext for failing to put in place certain preventative measures and is even used as an excuse for some incidents of abusive behaviour. For example, prostitution has long been qualified as a complex issue because in some countries it is considered acceptable and is legally permitted.

National staff – convenient perpetrators*

Most of the training and awareness-raising messages seem to target national staff, however, statistics and first-hand accounts show that abusers are also expatriates. Some of the persons surveyed stated that cases of sexual violence between NGO staff and the local or beneficiary populations are more frequently tackled by policies and trainings than internal cases and this situation is not necessarily representative of reality.

The vast majority of the first-hand accounts provided by our survey referred to acts committed by expatriates. Studies on PSHEA in the humanitarian sector have also noted that prevention policies turn a blind eye to expatriates, while some of the them are certainly guilty of sexual violence.

* This expression was first used in SPENCER, Danielle, Sexual Harassment, Abuse and Exploitation in the AID sector, Cowboys and Conquering Kings, www.changingaid.org/cowboysandkings.html

PRIORITY

PREVENTION AND CASE MANAGEMENT

Developing an effective prevention policy

“ I believe it is essential to work on avoiding these situations rather than on managing them...”

Prevention was one of the topics on which the respondents to the survey made specific practical suggestions:

- Involve teams in creating tools
- Define and clarify certain terms
- Circulate the tools, policies and guides more
- Increase training
- Improve communication

Provide professional case management and support to victims/survivors

“ The main problem remains how we support victims.

57% respondents said that they are greatly preoccupied by care and support to victims/survivors, it was even the topic that concerned them the most.

The first stages in case management are essential but are often poorly handled.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE INITIAL RESPONSE

“ Learn to believe the person and to respond, even if it is hard to deal with, not a good time etc.

One of the first stages in victim/survivor support is welcoming their testimony and providing protection. Not accepting a victim/survivor's testimony constitutes an additional violence.

THE FIRST 3 STEPS

in case management



1

Make sure the person is

SAFE



2

Meet any potential

MEDICAL NEEDS



3

Let the victim/survivor know that

YOU BELIEVE THEM



THREE PRINCIPLES

underpinning case management



PROFESSIONALISM



CONFIDENTIALITY



TRANSPARENCY

COMMUNICATE IN A RESPONSIBLE WAY

“ *Case management has to be discreet, so the victim or potential victim is not exposed.* ”

The need for training in carrying out investigations was mentioned several times by respondents to the questionnaire. The three key principles must be adhered to in any case of sexual abuse when investigating the facts.

SYSTEMATICALLY OFFER PSYCHOLOGICAL SUPPORT

“ *We are insufficiently equipped for psychological support* ”

Many respondents to the survey discussed the relevance of training in Psychological First Aid (PFA). It would allow everyone to know how to deal with a victim/survivor as a

If perpetrators of sexual violence are not supported so as to help them understand what they have done, how can we hope that they will not do it again?

first responder and avoid inappropriate responses. The respondents believe that victims/survivors should then systematically be referred to a psychologist. Psychological support should be free, confidential, offered in the person's mother tongue and neutral, i.e. external to the organisation.

The alleged perpetrators also fall under the NGOs' responsibility and may also need psychological support. In at least half of the accounts collected in the various studies on SHEA issues in NGOs, the alleged perpetrators did not admit their responsibility or did not consider the acts in question as reprehensible.

Higher standards for the humanitarian sector

BEHAVIOUR MUST BE EXEMPLARY

The respondents said that this kind of behaviour is not acceptable in the humanitarian sector.

“ *It is even more unacceptable in the humanitarian sector which promotes values of protection, respect, gender equality etc.* ”

ZERO TOLERANCE



Strict sanctions and zero tolerance are needed in order to change the current culture around SHEA. Allowing the resignation of an alleged perpetrator is not a sanction.

Respondents to the survey expect:

“ *disciplinary measures which reflect the gravity of the assault.* ”

The prevention of repeat offenses, in particular through more effective practices in reference taking, was addressed in the survey:

“ *The current system for taking references does not allow cases of misconduct to be clearly identified and does not stop them [the abusers] from being re-employed or allow for appropriate monitoring when they are employed.* ”

CONCLUSION

No NGO is exempt. If no cases have ever been reported in an organisation it probably means that the reporting mechanism is not efficient. The number of reported cases is both an indication of the number of SHEA cases and of the level of trust in the organisation. Transparency concerning the cases of sexual violence handled is also important to raise awareness on violence and improve behaviour.

The situation has begun to change, but the resources which have been allocated are insufficient. Some elements are in place, but the existence of tools does not guarantee an effective system. The organisational culture must change to ensure that we better listen and protect people. Leaders within organisations should be driving the change and each person should participate at his or her level.

Professional support is required to put an end to these unacceptable situations. Solutions cannot be improvised - they require expertise, methodology and tools. The stakes are too high to allow us to cut corners and dispense with professional support when dealing with this issue.

ANY QUESTIONS?
WANT TO DISCUSS THE SUBJECT?
NEED SUPPORT?

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Read the whole report on our survey about humanitarian workers' perceptions of the issues of harassment, exploitation and sexual abuse, and download the digital version of this booklet at:

www.humanitalents.com