



LEPRA Society
healthinaction

Child Protection Policy



TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Introduction

2. Definition

3. Purpose

4. Policy

5. Practices to Communicate and Maintain the Policy

6. Policy Guidelines

7. Procedure

8. Code of Conduct

9. Conclusion

Child Protection Policy

Introduction:

Children are at risk of abuse and exploitation not only from individuals in the communities in which they live but also from aid workers and volunteers. Children in emergencies are especially vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. LEPRASOCIETY believes that:

- ❖ Children have the right to a happy, healthy and secure childhood
- ❖ The abuse of children is an abuse of their rights as set out in the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child
- ❖ Child abuse is never acceptable

Children in emergencies are especially vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. Protection systems in the different countries in which the implementing NGOs work are often weak or non-existent and leave agencies and staff facing complex child protection dilemmas. There are huge difficulties in applying child protection principles in the different legal, social and cultural contexts in which international agencies work, which gets further complicated when working with partners.

Definitions

Child: A child, as defined under the Indian laws is anyone till the age of 14

Child abuse: As per the definition given by World Health Organization (W.H.O.), “child abuse” includes all forms of physical and/or emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect or negligent treatment or commercial or other exploitation, resulting in actual or potential harm to the child’s health, survival, development or dignity in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust or power. Child abuse is categorized under four main forms – physical, sexual, emotional and neglect and is a global phenomenon.

Child Protection is a term that describes policies, standards, systems, programmes, guidelines and procedures that seek to protect children from harm which can be physical, emotional, psychological, or sexual or any form of neglect. Harm can be caused by primary or secondary caretakers, aid workers and others who come into contact with children in their line of work.

Signs of Child Abuse

Before any form of behavior or act is reported as child abuse, it is important that people get familiar with basic signs of child abuse. However, it is crucial to note that child abuse is not an easy act to identify and care should be taken to put facts together and understand the context as well as talk to the child where possible before making conclusions at face value. The HR Officers of LEPRASOCIETY will spread awareness in the staff regarding the signs of child abuse. The list below can act as a guide that can be useful in identifying child abuse.

Physical abuse

Physical abuse is actual or likely physical injury to a child, such as hitting, kicking or shaking, where there is definite knowledge, or reasonable suspicion, that the injury was inflicted or knowingly not prevented.

Possible signs of physical abuse

- ❖ Bruises, burns, bites, cuts and dislocations
- ❖ Excuses given to explain injuries
- ❖ Refusal to discuss injuries
- ❖ Aggressive behaviour towards others
- ❖ Withdrawal from physical contact
- ❖ Fear of returning home or of having parents contacted
- ❖ Self-destructive tendencies
- ❖ Afraid to go home
- ❖ Inappropriate clothing e.g. long sleeved coverage on hot days

Emotional abuse

Emotional abuse is harm done by persistent or severe emotional ill treatment or rejection, such as degrading punishments, threats, not giving care and affection and bullying, resulting in adverse affects on the behaviour and emotional development of a child.

Possible signs of emotional abuse

- ❖ Delayed physical, mental & emotional development
- ❖ Increased anxiety
- ❖ Low self-esteem
- ❖ Inappropriate emotional response to painful situations
- ❖ Drug or alcohol abuse
- ❖ Fear of new situations
- ❖ Aggressive behaviour

Neglect

Neglect occurs when basic needs such as food, warmth and medical care are not met, or when there is failure to protect a child from exposure to any kind of danger, resulting in serious impairment of a child's health or development.

Possible signs of neglect

- ❖ Poor social relations
- ❖ Low self-esteem
- ❖ Frequent hunger
- ❖ Non-attendance at school
- ❖ Unattended physical problems or medical needs
- ❖ Poor personal hygiene
- ❖ Stealing

Sexual abuse

Sexual abuse is any kind of sexual activity involving a child, whether or not the child is aware of or consents to what is happening, or if the child initiates the activity. Sexual abuse includes incest, rape, penetration and fondling. It may also include non-contact activities such as showing pornography or internet-based activity. Sexual abuse may involve siblings or other family members, or persons outside the family.

Possible signs of sexual abuse

- ❖ Physical indicators on a child's genital areas
- ❖ Sexualised behaviour inappropriate to a child's age

- ❖ Sexually-transmitted infections
- ❖ Pregnancy (depending on child's age)
- ❖ Sleep disorders
- ❖ Serious difficulties relating to peers and/or adults
- ❖ Constant complaints of headache and/or abdominal pains
- ❖ Change in level of performance at school

Exploitation

Exploitation of a child refers to the use of a child in work or other activities for the benefit of others. This includes, but is not limited to, child labour and child prostitution. These activities are to the detriment of the child's physical or mental health, education, or spiritual, moral or social-emotional development.

Purpose

The purpose of the policy is to provide a statement of intent that demonstrates a commitment to safeguard children from harm and to make clear to all what is required in relation to the protection of children. It helps to create a safe and positive environment for children and to show that the organisation is exercising its duty of care seriously.

LEPRA Society acknowledges the need to protect children and minimise the risk of them being abused. LEPRA Society expects the highest standards of professional conduct in all work involving contact with children in the projects in which it works.

Therefore, the policy is meant for staff members, volunteers, consultants and visitors at the Head Office/Regional Office and projects, whose positions bring them into regular contact with children. The above people are expected to show commitment to the policy and follow laid down guidelines and procedures of the child protection policy when working with, for and on behalf of LEPRA Society.

The broad objective of the policy is to set minimum standards and procedures on child protection, to ensure that that LEPRA Society and its partners work towards the creation of a safe environment for children.

Policy

The right to protection is a core principle that constitutes the foundation for the child protection policy. Using child protection as a core principle, the organisation strives to ensure that measures and systems are in place at LEPRA Society to protect children from all forms of abuse and maltreatment by staff members and anyone affiliated to or who may be required to work at LEPRA Society at both Head Office/Regional Office and field projects.

While the main purpose of the policy is to protect children from all forms of harm and exploitation, it is expected that the policy also works as a tool to protect staff and the organisation from risk associated with being in contact with children.

Children deserve to be respected in their own right and to be fully listened to, should they raise any issues related to abuse. LEPRA Society will include in its induction and training of staff, provision of information on appropriate behaviour with children.

Recruitment procedures for posts where contact with children is likely or possible will include checks on suitability for working with children. LEPRASociety will co-operate with other bodies should it be necessary to ensure protection of children or the investigation of concerns relating to child abuse. When we work through partners, they have a responsibility to meet the standards of protection for children in their programmes.

Specifically the policy seeks to protect children from abuse and exploitation by encouraging good practice among staff members and preventing behaviour that may be abusive to children.

Practices to Communicate and Maintain the Policy

Working by itself or with its partners, LEPRASociety will meet its commitment to conduct programmes that are safe for the children they serve, and to help protect children it comes into contact with, through the following means:

Awareness

Notifying all staff members and others associated with LEPRASociety including its partners of the Child Protection Policy, and making them aware that they are expected to comply with it. Providing any appropriate training and support to one and all associated with LEPRASociety, for strict compliance.

Prevention

LEPRASociety will take appropriate steps in minimising the risks to children, through awareness and good practice, and taking positive steps to help protect children who are or may become the subject of any concerns.

Reporting

Ensuring that all LEPRASociety members and Partners know what steps to take where concerns arise regarding the safety of children.

Responding

Engaging in action that supports and protects children when concerns arise regarding their safety; supporting and protecting those who raise such concerns; investigating or cooperating with any subsequent process of investigation; and taking appropriate responsive action.

Reviewing

Putting in place a process for discussing and resolving practical issues or questions arising under the policy – all issues should be referred to the Human Resources Department at Head office, Hyderabad, who will log them and ensure that they are followed up and dealt with.

Policy Guidelines

Staff Induction and placement

- ❖ The HR personnel will, at the time of induction ensure that all new joiners are made aware of policies and protocols, which are related to workplace harassment and ensure all such policies (Anti sexual harassment policy, Vulnerable Adult Policy, Child Protection Policy etc.) be made available for reference and reading at all times at Project/Regional/Divisional/Head office
- ❖ The HR personnel will make sure that relevant job descriptions will contain specific reference to the responsibilities of the post holder for implementing and safeguarding the LEPRAs Society's Policy and Procedures.
- ❖ It is essential to verify the qualifications required for the post to help detection of false employment histories or backgrounds. Original documents of qualification certificates should be viewed by the LEPRAs Society HR staff, copied and kept on file.
- ❖ Volunteers, consultants and trainees will be subject to checks if they do work that brings them into regular contact with children.

Procedure

- ❖ Any LEPRAs Society staff when notices or is informed of concerns relating to or about the exploitation or abuse of a child must inform his or her supervisor, the person in charge, or main contact in LEPRAs Society of his or her concerns. If the concerns involve such person, the concerns must be reported to the next most appropriate person, e.g. a senior manager, as soon as possible.
- ❖ Any LEPRAs Society staff having concerns or suspicions regarding child abuse by someone in another agency must report such concerns in order to enable LEPRAs Society to communicate them through appropriate agency reporting mechanisms.
- ❖ Concerns should be reported as soon as possible, and, if at all possible, within 24 hours.
- ❖ Take any suitable, appropriate and immediate action to protect the child
- ❖ The LEPRAs Society staff, to whom any concern has been reported, must take all appropriate and reasonable steps to protect the child or children involved. It is essential to avoid delay if any; inaction may place the child at further risk. In cases of possible abuse, every effort should be made to provide the child with appropriate assistance.

Informing HR and Investigating

The LEPRAs Society staff who has concerns will inform the focal officer (Head HR) in Hyderabad either verbally or in writing. The Head HR will prepare a written report that will include the nature of the concerns, the risks to the child/children, and the investigative process and submit it to the **CHILD ABUSE INVESTIGATION COMMITTEE (C.A.I.C.)**, which will comprise of LEPRAs Society staff and external experts (with known experience in working with children either in child psychology or in the development programmes involving children)

Once concerns are raised or allegations made relating to child abuse, the following procedures should be followed. Throughout the implementation of all procedures the best interests and support of the child will be paramount.

Once allegations related to child abuse are raised, the Child Abuse Investigation Committee will investigate the same. Head of Human Resources or any HR staff nominated as a focal person for complaints should be contacted for any concerns/allegations etc. Confidentiality must be observed at all times, in reporting such concerns/allegations.

- ❖ Any staff member against whom a serious allegation is made may be suspended from work pending enquiry.
- ❖ The child/children, the alleged perpetrator/abettor and any others closely involved need sensitive and skilled support.
- ❖ The child/children will not remain under the same roof with the alleged perpetrator of a serious offence.
- ❖ Where an allegation of child abuse is received, the legal framework will be followed.
- ❖ Where a case of child abuse is proven (including involvement in child pornography) this will constitute gross misconduct and the concerned individual would face legal action as per Indian laws and would be terminated from the services.
- ❖ In the event of an allegation or complaint not being proved, utmost support will be given to the individual(s) in order to enable them to continue working effectively for the organisation. The same would include a personal counselling by the concerned line manager (if required, by the Chief Executive), and an intent of regret from the Human Resources department.
- ❖ In the event if the allegation or complaint is not proved against the perpetrator/abettor although the individual concerned might be involved in the alleged child abuse, the Chief Executive would be at discretion to form another ad-hoc committee, to re-open the investigation process and to arrive at a final decision.
- ❖ The composition of **CHILD ABUSE INVESTIGATION COMMITTEE (C.A.I.C.)** is as follows;
 - Mr. Vijay Krishnan, Regional Director (AP & MP) – Chairman of the committee
 - Dr. Suman Jain, Sr. Research Medical Officer (BPRC) – Member
 - Ms. Mary Mamatha, Project Officer, HIV Division - Member
 - External Expert I - Member
 - External Expert II - Member

Concluding the Investigation and Consequences

Inappropriate behaviour towards children, including failure to follow the specific and general requirements of this policy, will warrant the following action:

a) Employees

Discipline, up to and including dismissal from employment;

If an employee has been brought under investigation by LEPRAS Society or by official law enforcement authorities for the abuse of a child, they will be subject to the relevant employee disciplinary procedures. Under these procedures they may be temporarily suspended.

b) Other LEPRAS Society Representatives and Partners

Appropriate action will be taken which may include termination of partnership, volunteering or service agreement.

In the case of very minor incidents where part of the Child Protection Policy is not being followed, or where there is a perceived danger of it not being followed, it may be appropriate for the LEPRA Society member or Partner to confront the issue directly there and then. If this resolves the issue, it may not be necessary to report the incident as per the above procedure. However, if the LEPRA Society or Partner has any doubts, they should follow the above procedure and report the incident.

Code of Conduct

All staff of LEPRA Society, volunteers and partners must abide by this Code of Conduct.

Staff and others are prohibited from:

- ❖ Striking or touching inappropriately or otherwise physically assaulting or physically abusing children
- ❖ Developing physical/sexual relationships with children
- ❖ Developing relationships with children which could in the view of LEPRA Society be deemed exploitative or abusive
- ❖ Acting in ways that may be abusive or may place a child at risk of abuse
- ❖ Using language, making suggestions or offering advice which is inappropriate, offensive, threatening or abusive to children
- ❖ Behaving physically in a manner which is inappropriate or sexually provocative to children
- ❖ Having a child/children with whom they are working to stay overnight at their home unsupervised
- ❖ Sleeping in the same room or bed as a child with whom they are working
- ❖ Assisting children with carrying out physical bodily functions unnecessarily when they are capable of doing it themselves
- ❖ Condoning or participating in behaviour of children which is illegal, unsafe or abusive
- ❖ Acting in ways intended to shame, humiliate, belittle or degrade children, or otherwise perpetrate any form of emotional abuse
- ❖ Discriminating against, showing differential treatment to, or favouring particular children to the exclusion of others

LEPRA Society staff and Partners should conduct their work so as to avoid placing themselves in compromising or vulnerable positions. They need to be aware that they may be in a situation of working with children who, because of the circumstances and abuses to which they may have been subjected, may use a relationship to obtain 'special attention'. The LEPRA Society Staff is always responsible for maintaining an appropriate relationship, even if a child behaves inappropriately.

The following instances are specific examples, though not exhaustive, of good practice to be followed, or situations to be avoided:

- ❖ LEPRA Society staff and Partners must not stay alone overnight with one or more children who are not part of their immediate or extended family, whether in their house, project premises or elsewhere.

- ❖ Where possible and practical, LEPRA Society staff and Partners should follow the 'two-adult' rule, wherein two or more adults supervise all activities where children are involved, and are present at all times

Conclusion:

This list is not exhaustive or exclusive and other acts not specifically referred to but generally characterised as above shall be regarded as falling within the scope of unacceptable conduct. The principle is that staff should avoid actions or behaviour which may constitute poor practice or potentially abusive behaviour. It is important for all staff and others in contact with children to:

- ❖ Be aware of situations which may present risks and manage them.
- ❖ Plan and organise the work and the workplace so as to minimise risks
- ❖ As far as possible, be visible in working with children
- ❖ Ensure that a culture of openness exists to enable any issues or concerns to be raised and discussed
- ❖ Ensure that a sense of accountability exists between staff so that poor practice of potentially abusive behaviour does not go unchallenged.

Annexure I – Child Abuse Report Format

Child Abuse Report Format

Please complete this form if you believe that a child's safety is in danger. All child protection concerns should be reported directly to the child protection focal officer immediately (The focal officer is Head – Human Resources). The form may be filled in before or after contacting the focal person and the report will be treated in strict confidence. **(Malicious reports or reports not made in good faith warrant strict disciplinary measures in line with HR manual). This report can also be emailed to childabusecomplaints@leprasociety.org** . Please attach extra sheets, if required but make sure to sign on the same.

A: Personal information

Your name:

Job Title:

Place of work:

Relationship to child:

Contact details:

B: Child information

Name of child:

Gender:

Address:

Child's guardians:

C: Child abuse concern

Is concern based on observation or suspicion?

If concern is based on secondary source, give name of information source

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Did child report incident to you?

Give the nature of alleged abuse:

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Date of alleged incident:

Time and place of incident:

.....

Name of alleged perpetrator:

Job title:

Describe your personal observations (factually):

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.....

Give actual record of what the child or source said to you:

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.....
.....

Provide names of witnesses if applicable:

.....

Any other comments:

.....

Action taken:

.....

Signed: Date: