



African Population and Health Research Center

SAFEGUARDING POLICY

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

The African Population and Health Research Center (APHRC) is an international non-profit organization that implements policy-relevant research on population, health and wellbeing in sub-Saharan Africa. Our goal is to transform lives on the continent by generating evidence for meaningful action.

1.1 Purpose of the Policy

- a. To encourage the reporting of suspected or actual abuse and related misconduct involving employees at all levels in a confidential manner and without fear of retaliation, harassment, intimidation or victimisation;
- b. To ensure that any abuse of vulnerable persons that occurs in the context of APHRC's projects and programmes is addressed; and
- c. To ensure consistent and timely response to reported issues, by APHRC.

APHRC is committed to promoting and protecting its employees and all vulnerable persons including children, adolescents whose human rights, health and wellbeing are at risk. APHRC embraces values of integrity, fairness and excellence and works to improve health and wellbeing in Africa.

This policy provides guidance on the procedures and practices to be adhered to by all APHRC representatives¹ (regular or temporary staff, consultants, partners, volunteers, fellows, Board members, interns, funders and guests) in safeguarding people and outlines actions to be taken in case of violation of the policy. APHRC representatives are expected to ensure emotional, physical, psychological, mental, and sexual safety for all by preventing discrimination, sexual and other forms of harassment, abuse, exploitation and harm of all people. The policy provides a framework for implementing activities in a way that minimizes the risk of harm, exploitation and abuse, both verbal and physical, to everyone both at our offices and in the communities where we work. Through this policy, APHRC seeks to ensure that peoples' basic human rights are not violated in the workplace or while carrying out APHRC assignments.

1.2 Policy Statement

APHRC has zero tolerance to any form of abuse, harassment, discrimination, or exploitation of any person.

¹ See Appendix 1 for definitions

Every APHRC representative must uphold professional work ethics that allow for mutual treatment with dignity and respect within the workplace and in the context of work performed on behalf of the Center.

2.0 PRINCIPLES OF SAFEGUARDING

To protect children, adolescents or adults at risk, this policy is founded on the six principles adopted from the UK Care Act 2014 below:

- Empowerment – Adults at risk will be supported and encouraged to make their own decisions and informed consent without coercion.
- Protection – APHRC will provide support and representation for those in greatest need.
- Prevention – Where possible, action will be taken before harm occurs.
- Proportionality - The least intrusive response appropriate to the risk presented will be made.
- Partnership – APHRC will partner with local services and communities to help prevent, detect, and report suspected cases of neglect and abuse.
- Accountability – APHRC will be accountable and transparent in ensuring safeguarding.

Whereas it is recognized that local legislation may vary from country to country, this policy identifies APHRC's minimum standards and may exceed the requirements of local legislation.

3.0 APPLICATION / SCOPE

This policy applies to all regular and temporary staff, consultants, partners, interns, contractors, volunteers, fellows, Board members, funders and guests.

It extends to situations that occur at or away from the workplace; during or outside working hours, if such situations have a negative effect on our study participants, people living within the communities we work, or any representative, work effectiveness and/or job security of an APHRC staff member, or if the situation reflects negatively on APHRC.

This policy shall be adapted as required to the local context of the countries where APHRC has offices as well as in countries where APHRC programs are implemented, subject to local law and custom. This includes the political, cultural, faith, humanitarian and / or development situations. For countries and partners whose policies are inconsistent with this policy, the policy that is more stringent will apply.

All representatives of APHRC will have access to copies of this policy so that they know what to do should any concern about safeguarding arise. It will be shared with all visitors by email and will be available on our website.

4.0 ENFORCEMENT

APHRC shall not engage and shall review its engagement with individuals that the Center has been made aware of their conviction for offences against a child or any adult at risk.

When planning for projects, consideration should be made on safeguarding issues at the time of undertaking risk assessment especially for projects where staff or other representatives will come into contact with children or adults at risk. Periodic reviews will also be necessary for any emerging or new safeguarding risks.

Safeguarding is embedded in and enforced through the following APHRC policies and guidelines:

- i) Policy on Working with Person's at Risk
- ii) Policy on Harassment
- iii) Whistle Blowing Policy
- iv) Human Resources Policies and Procedures Manual
- v) Conflict of Interest Policy
- vi) Research Ethics and Data Protection Guidelines
- vii) Guidelines on Safety and Security of Staff Working on Contentious Issues

In case of a conflict between the provisions of this Safeguarding Policy and any safeguarding provisions set out in other APHRC policies and guidelines, the provisions of this Policy shall prevail but only to the extent of such conflict.

5.0 RESPONSIBILITIES

All APHRC representatives have a responsibility and should act on concerns relating to any risk.

5.1 Board Responsibilities

APHRC's Board shall:

- Ensure this policy is reviewed and updated periodically in line with legislative and organizational development.

- Receive and act on complaints and reports about the Executive Director.
- Receive and act on annual reports on safeguarding incidents and actions taken.

5.2 APHRC Executive Leadership Team (ELT) Responsibilities

APHRCs Executive Leadership Team (ELT) holds overall responsibility for this policy and its implementation. APHRC must ensure that its employees and representatives do no harm to all persons, that they do not expose them to the risk of harassment, bias, discrimination, neglect, exploitation, harm and abuse. Management should promptly deal with any concerns reported about the safety of employees and persons at risk within the communities in which we work, and where necessary report to appropriate statutory authorities.

APHRC, as an employer, also has a responsibility to ensure that its work environment is free from all forms of discrimination, bias, harassment, or any other unprofessional conduct that is offensive or unwelcome by employees.

5.3 Safeguarding Manager Responsibilities

The Director of Operations will be the Safeguarding Manager for the headquarters while the head of the West Africa Regional Office (WARO) will be the safeguarding focal point for that office.

The Safeguarding Manager or Focal Point shall:

- Ensure implementation of the policy by providing advice and guidance on the application of this policy and monitoring its application.
- Keep records of any concerns expressed and actions taken about safeguarding issues. The report should be provided to the board annually.
- Notify the Executive Director of safeguarding concerns.
- Provide assistance in the complaint resolution process by designating an internal investigatory committee to review the complaint, or obtaining, where necessary, the services of an external investigator, establishing the terms of reference for the investigation, and advising the parties of the outcome of the investigation. Where necessary, refer concerns to other agencies.
- Ensure that each complaint is addressed responsibly and impartially, facilitating a just and fair inquiry process without retribution (for complainants or witnesses).

5.4 Unit Heads and Line Managers Responsibilities

They shall:

- Ensure safeguarding measures are implemented within their area of responsibility.
- Ensure adherence to this policy by any APHRC representative working in or supporting their units.
- Ensure a positive working environment in which harassment does not occur.
- Assure prompt attention to any reports made to them; at the minimum they should report to the Safeguarding Manager.
- Maintain confidentiality and an attitude of empathy at all times towards both the accused and the complainant.

5.5 Human Resource Office Responsibilities

The HR office shall:

- Ensure all staff and consultants receive a copy of this policy and sign a declaration that they have received and understood and commit to adhere to it.
- Ensure staff are trained on the contents of the policy as part of their onboarding.
- Provide mandatory refresher training for staff on an annual basis.
- Implement the necessary protective procedures when recruiting new staff.

5.6 Employees and APHRC Representatives' Responsibilities

APHRC staff and representatives shall:

- Adhere to this policy.
- Report concerns using the Whistleblowing policy and procedures set out in related APHRC policies.

6.0 REPORTING PROCESS

All safeguarding incidents and concerns will be reported through existing channels and in line with the provisions of the policies and guidelines listed above as appropriate. The reporting process is illustrated in Figure 1. More details on reporting channels are provided in the *Whistleblowing Policy*.

Management will present a report on safeguarding to the Board once a year. The report will include all incidents reported in the preceding year and measures taken by management to address them.



The malpractice incident reporting form is [here](#).

6.1 Investigation to substantiate any reported allegations

The key steps of investigation will include:

- a. Assessment of the claim(s)
- b. Importance of maintaining confidentiality during the investigation period
- c. Evidence collection and validation process
- d. Report on findings to confirm whether a safeguarding violation occurred based on the concern(s) raised, and if so, the extent and impact (financial/reputational) of such violation.
- e. Appropriate action to be taken and in line with the approved policies.
- f. The Safeguarding Manager, Focal Point or Designated Contacts may at their own joint discretion provide feedback to a whistleblower/complainant on the findings.

7.0 TRAINING AND AWARENESS

Staff will receive training as part of their induction on how to identify, prevent, respond to and report risks. The training content will include but is not limited to:

- An overview of the concepts of safeguarding children, adolescents and adults at risk.
- A discussion of risks to children adolescents and adults in different contexts – national/political, cultural, religious.
- A discussion of the entire policy and related policies and guidelines in order for staff to understand its contents and seek clarification where necessary.

APHRC shall periodically implement activities to create awareness of Safeguarding to staff and other relevant stakeholders. The approach to awareness shall be at the discretion of APHRC and may include in-person training, online training and placement of posters across the places of business.

On an annual basis, employees of APHRC may be required to confirm that:

- a) They are aware of the existence and operation of the Safeguarding procedures provided by APHRC to prevent, detect and respond to discrimination, sexual and other forms of harassment, abuse, exploitation and harm of all people.
- b) They are aware of the need to report relevant safeguarding concerns to their supervisor, the unit leader, head of Human Resources, the Executive Director, safeguarding manager, the safeguarding committee or through the whistleblowing facilities. Such concerns include any contraventions of ethics, integrity and compliance.

c) They have attended periodic refresher training and/or received and understand whistleblowing awareness material.

8.0 MONITORING AND REVIEW OF POLICY

There will be continuous monitoring, annual reporting of the risks and review of the effectiveness of safeguarding measures. This policy will be reviewed by the Board every three years or earlier when deemed necessary.

APPENDIX 1: DEFINITION OF TERMS

Abuse - can be in a number of ways and it is not easy to categorize harm. We therefore broadly categorize abuse as taking many forms such as the following:

- Physical (including hitting, shaking, slapping, pinching, pushing, kicking, injuring, restraint or inappropriate sanctions).
- Sexual abuse - It involves forcing, enticing or coercing someone to take part in sexual activities, whether or not the vulnerable person is aware of what is happening. The activities may involve physical contact, including assault by penetration (for example, rape or oral sex) or non-penetrative acts such as masturbation, groping, kissing, rubbing and touching outside of clothing. They may also include non-contact activities, such as involving a person in viewing, production and distribution of sexual images, watching sexual acts, encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways, or grooming a child in preparation for abuse (including via the internet). Sexual abuse can be carried out by adults or other children.
- Psychological (including emotional abuse, degrading punishments, threats of harm or sanction, verbal abuse, isolation, intimidation, humiliation).
- Financial or material (including theft, fraud, exploitation, misappropriation of property).
- Discrimination – it is the unfair or prejudicial treatment of people based on characteristics such as race, gender, age, or sexual orientation, religion, disability). It includes isolation and making tribal or sexist remarks.
- Bullying (includes physical or verbal intimidation, emotional intimidation for example, excluding or isolating someone).

Adolescents – A person aged 10-19 years.

An adult at risk - is someone older than 18 years who requires care and support due to their gender (or sexual identity), or disabilities that are physical, mental or emotional, or who cannot reasonably protect his/her/their self from abuse, harm or exploitation.

APHRC representative - regular or temporary staff, consultants, partners, interns, fellows, contractors, volunteers, Board members, funders, visitors and guests.

Child / Children - Children are defined by the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child, as being individuals under the age of 18 years of age. Mistaken belief in the age of the child is not a defense for abuse.

Funder – Is a main grantee where APHRC is a sub-grantee or an individual, organization or government institution financing a part or all of a project's cost as a grant or financing APHRC's operational costs.

Neglect - the persistent failure to meet a child, adolescent or adult at risk's basic physical and/or psychological needs, likely to result in the serious impairment of his/her health or development. Examples include failure to provide adequate food, clothing and shelter, failure to protect them from physical or psychological harm or danger; failure to ensure adequate supervision (including the use of inadequate care-givers); or failure to ensure access to appropriate medical care or treatment as a result of carelessness, indifference, or unwillingness.

Other forms of harassment – means engaging in unwanted and unwarranted conduct which has the purpose or effect of: (a) violating another's dignity; or (b) creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for another person. Harassing conduct may include offensive jokes, slurs, name-calling, physical assaults or threats, intimidation, ridicule, insults, offensive pictures, and more.

Professional Ethics – means principles that govern behaviour in a business environment such as honesty, transparency, accountability, confidentiality, objectivity, respect, obedience to the law, and loyalty. This refers to how a person acts towards colleagues as well members of the communities and organizations we engage with.

Safeguarding – means promoting and protecting people's human rights, health and wellbeing and enabling them to live free from harm, exploitation, neglect and abuse, both verbally and physically.

Sexual Harassment - is any unwelcome sexual advance; request for sexual favors; or other verbal, non-verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature which a) interferes with an individual's work performance, or their general sense of well-being by creating an intimidating, hostile, and humiliating environment; or b) which is made a condition for employment or promotion.

Unit Leader - refers to unit head within divisions and division directors at APHRC.

AFRICAN POPULATION AND HEALTH RESEARCH CENTER

SAFEGUARDING POLICY

I, _____ (Name), have received a copy of the safeguarding policy dated November 2023. I have read and understood it and agree to adhere, at all times, to the stipulated terms. I acknowledge that this policy forms part of my contract with APHRC and is subject to change. I also understand that I shall be subjected to the stipulated consequences, if I fail to adhere to the terms.

Signed: _____

Date: _____
