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MYANMAR

Women & Girl's Safe Spaces

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"I am 22 years old and currently living in one of the Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps in Myitkyina. When I was 17, I got pregnant. My boyfriend didn't want to take responsibility and left me. At that time, I felt hopeless, my parents blamed me, my friends stayed away from me and my life was very difficult.

When my child was one, I married a man who loved me, understood me and supported me. Now, my first child is 4 years old and I have one more child from my marriage. Every day, I care and cook for my children. One day my ex-boyfriend appeared and told me he wanted to get his child back. I felt so distressed; it was like reliving a nightmare. He came to see me several times and scared me, which was very depressing. I was also afraid that my current husband would become involved, which might lead to unnecessary violence and he might leave me because of these problems. I could not sleep at night; I was afraid and was totally powerless as I was staying in an Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camp, with no job and with no contact with my family, who are ashamed of me.

I participated in the Gender-based violence (GBV) awareness session inside the camp led by the staff of the Women and Girl's centre (WGC). There I had the space to discuss my problems in confidence and seek necessary information and help. Thanks to the discussions and support from the WGC staff, I now know that we have a law protecting women and girls from this kind of situation in our country and I feel I have the power to defend myself and try and solve my problems."

Lu Nan, Kachin women living in a Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camp in Myitkyina, Kachin State

Content

1. What are women and girls safe spaces?

A safe space is a formal or informal, static or mobile place, where women and girls feel physically and emotionally safe. 'Safe' means that women and girls meet in these spaces without fear of trauma, excessive stress, violence (or fear of violence), or abuse. It is a space where women and girls feel comfortable and can enjoy the freedom to express themselves without the fear of judgment or harm.

The key objectives of a safe space are to provide an area where women and girls can:

• Socialise and re-build their social networks;
• Receive social support;
• Acquire contextually relevant skills;
• Access safe and non-stigmatising multi-sectorial Gender-Based Violence (GBV) response services (psychosocial, legal, medical or referral and support to access any of these services);
• Receive information on issues relating to women's rights, health, and services.

These spaces may take different names such as women and girls centres, women community centres, women friendly spaces or women's wellbeing centres. Women's safe spaces are not the same as shelters. Shelters are places where women go to seek refuge from an immediate threat of violence.

Women and Girls Safe Spaces (WGSS) can be a permanent structure, such as a house or a tent, or it can be a place under a tree or in a health clinic, for example, as long as it is a space which is private and safe. It can also be a space which is only created once a week or a space which functions 24 hours per day, 7 days per week. Most importantly, it is a space which is owned by the women and girls of the community it seeks to serve. What matters most, is that the space is safe and is a place where women and girls can come together to discuss their issues in confidence.

Community engagement, with men and boys, women and girls and community/religious leaders must start before the safe space is established as well as during the period of its operations and the phasing out.. This ensures that the community, as well as men and boys, are supportive of the safe space, ensure safe access to it and engage communities in the prevention of GBV.

2. What are the guiding principles?

The following basic principles must be applied when establishing and managing a safe space:
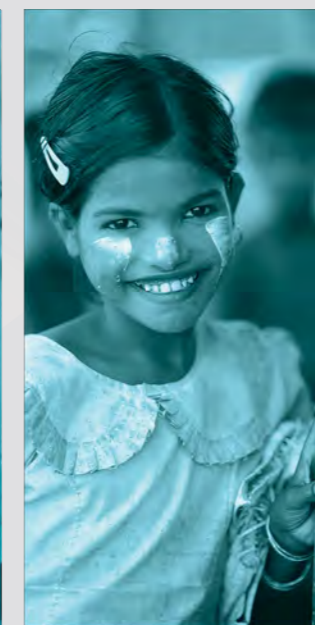
SAFE SPACE

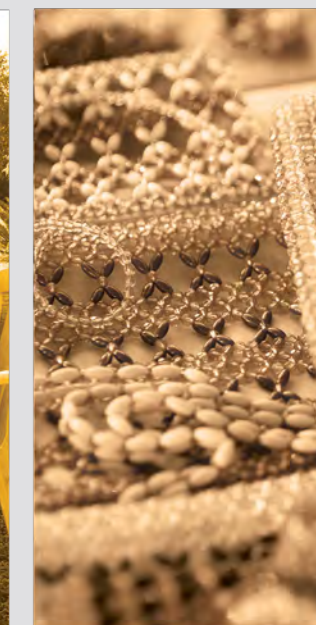| Leadership and empowerment of women and girls	Client/survivor centered	Safe and accessible	Community involvement	Coordinated and multi-sectorial	Tailored

Leadership and empowerment of women and girls

A safe space should be women and girl-led and offer an inclusive and empowering environment for them. Women and girls should be included in project planning, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation of the space to ensure relevance and ownership. There should be regular exchanges with and among them about how the space is to be run and managed. Women and girls should decide on the opening hours or when to meet in the case of mobile or informal spaces, as well as the types of activities to be undertaken. In order for a space to feel safe, it must be one which the women themselves own as well as run and manage to meet their needs.

Client/survivor centered

The design of the safe space, activities and services it offers, and the discussions it organises should prioritise the safety and confidentiality of women and girls. Any case files, documentation of services, and client data kept , whether it is a static or mobile safe space, should be properly secured. The space must be open and accessible to all women and girls, and their wishes, choices, rights, and dignity should be respected. They should be provided with information about available services including those which form part of a referral pathway. The staff should be extensively trained on the principle of non-discrimination.

Safe and accessible

The safe space should be located in an area that is conveniently accessible to all women and girls, without discrimination, and assures safety and privacy. The decision on where to locate the safe space, whether static or mobile, should be led by women and girls. If this is not feasible, they should at minimum be consulted. Accessibility should also consider timings and days that work best for women, especially given their responsibilities for the care of their children. Where necessary, child care should be provided to enable women to access the services of the safe space or any referral services. If possible, consideration should also be given to support the transportation costs to and from the safe space as well as to any referral services. A Code of Conduct should be adopted in the safe space and any staff working with the women and girls in the safe spaces should receiving training on this.

Community involvement

While the safe space should be run and focused on women and girls, its sustainability requires   the input and support of many stakeholders. Husbands, parents, and community leaders should   be engaged to enable women and girls to safely access and participate in safe space programmes. It is therefore essential to understand community and gender dynamics when setting up a safe space, and to mobilise from the outset support for safe spaces. Ultimately, women and girls spaces should not be isolated units, but an extension of broader community life. Men and boys have an important role in ensuring the success of safe spaces. Engaging them so that they understand the purpose, location and benefits of the safe spaces will enable the participation of a larger number of women and girls. Ensuring the involvement of and buy-in from the community for sustainability of the initiative is vital to the success of the safe space.

Coordinated and multi-sectorial

The safe space should take into consideration the varying needs and experiences of women and girls. It should deliver services that respond to particular stages in their life cycle, including issues related to GBV prevention and response. The range of possible activities should be determined with the involvement of women and girls according to their specific situation. In some cases, a safe space may host a range of services including information on and access to sexual and reproductive health centres, psychosocial support and recourse to legal services, while at other safe spaces these services will be available elsewhere.

A clear internal and external referral system should be in place and staff and volunteers should be able to activate it safely and confidentially, as part of the wider GBV coordination network and standard operating procedure process for effective referral mechanisms.

Tailored

A safe space should welcome and engage women and girls. It is important to maintain a balance between structured activities, services, and times to socialise. Activities and approaches need to be culturally and age appropriate as the needs and interests of a 16 year-old girl are bound to be different from those of a 35 year-old woman. A safe space should also take into consideration, the special needs of women and girls living with disabilities as well as older people.

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I am Ah Sar Mee and I am 33 years old. I have now been living in one of the Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps in Waingmaw since the conflict started in 2011. My husband is a farmer and our whole farm became a battle ground because of the conflict. My husband and I have three children. Previously, my family survived with the help of national and international aid as we didn't know where or how to work in a new place. Now, my husband is working in jade mines as a manual worker and comes back occasionally. He sends a little money for us but it is not sufficient to cover all the necessary expenses, especially for the schooling of my eldest daughter.

I have nothing to do in the camp apart from caring for my children and cooking for the family. So, I spend most of my time at the women and girls centre, enjoying entertainment and educational activities. I have learnt how to make liquid soap and do crystal needling in the centre. Now I can make purses and different key chains. I sell these in the camp and communities around the camp to make money. The money I earn is not a lot, but it helps to support my family.
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3. How to establish and run women and girls safe spaces?

Initial Assessment	Staffing	Activities and Services	Monitoring and Evaluation	Phase-out
• Safety and security • Location • Time • Activities and services • Partnership	• Roles • Capacity development	• Support to GBV survivors • Psychosocial and recreational activities • Information and awareness raising • Outreach and prevention	• Plan from the beginning • Ongoing monitoring • Engage women and girls	• Be prepared • Involve the community

3.1 Initial assessment

• Should be participatory and non-discriminatory;

• Should actively engage women and girls, as well as other groups such as men and boys, religious and community leaders, etc;

• Should disaggregate data on the basis of gender, age, and other relevant factors to ensure inclusivity and efficient programming/ establishment of effective centres.

3.2 Assessment questions

Topic	Questions	To whom
Safety and Security	• Did women and girls have a place to meet before the crisis? Where did they meet? What did these meeting places look like? If not, what would they like these meeting places to look like? • Did women and girls meet at health clinics or schools or as part of a regular religious group for example? • Is there anything that women and girls fear or anywhere that they don't feel safe? • What are the main physical and psychosocial threats to women and girls? How do they vary by diverse groups, e.g., by age, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability, etc.? • Would a safe space help to prevent or diminish these threats, or could it increase them (e.g., are there risks to women and girls in accessing the safe spaces)? • Would a WGSS strengthen existing support systems, or would it duplicate existing activities and systems? • What is the level of acceptance of families and communities for this type of intervention? • How does the community view the establishment of a WGSS? Is it likely to build a sense of ownership in a community if a WGSS is developed? • Who are the key gatekeepers in the community or camp who support women and girls? Who do women and girls currently go to when they need help or advice? • Who are the key people in the community or camp who should be involved when setting up a WGSS? • Which women and girls are most vulnerable and need additional support to participate in WGSS activities? • Have appropriate steps been taken to set up complaints and feedback mechanisms through the use of women's committees, complaints boxes, etc., to ensure accountability to beneficiaries? • How many safe spaces are needed in the location/community in question? How many women and girls are likely to access them?	Women, girls, men and boys.
GBV coordination mechanisms, partners, women, girls, men and boys	• What places are considered acceptable for women and girls to go to? Under what conditions? • Do they have to be accompanied to these places? If so, by whom? • Are there specific places women and girls can go (e.g., shopping, running errands for the family, taking siblings or other family members to a health clinic)? • Are there restrictions on the time of the day when a girl may go to certain places? • Who within the family decides whether, when, and where women and girls may go? • How do girls move around the community (e.g., by foot or bus)? • Are girls subjected to harassment, teasing, or verbal abuse while traveling? • Does the safe space have accessible clean water and child and gender-friendly toilets or latrines? • Is the location easily accessible to women and girls nearby if not, how can women and girls access a centre? • Is the site accessible for girls and women with disabilities? What routes do they have to take to get there? • How will the safe space change over seasons and the calendar year? • Is it close to or far from any police or military installation? • Is it close to other services such as a health centre or a hospital? Are there any child-friendly services nearby? • Is it near places where boys usually gather (e.g., a football field or a place where boys play sport)? More guidance on safety and community mapping can be found at **www.gbvresponders.org**	Women, girls, men and boys.

Topic	Questions								To whom
Time and Commitment	**Acitivity**	**Midnight to sunrise**	**Sunrise to mid-morning**	**Mid-morning to noon**	**Noon to mid-after-noon**	**Mid afternoon to sunset**	**Sunset to late evening**	**Late evening to midnight**	Women and girls
	When is the best time for you to access a WGSS?								
	How long would you be able to stay there?								
Activities and Services	• How do you like to spend your time? • What would you like to learn? • Is there any particular kind of information you are interested in? • Are you interested in physical activities? • Do you like crafts? What kind? • What type of activities did you do back home? • What kind of support services do you think you or women and girls in your community need?								Women and girls

3.3 Staffing

A possible combination of staff and their roles is outlined below. All staff should understand the Code of Conduct and sign it. Staffing will change depending on whether the service is a formal and static centre or a temporary/mobile and informal space, created to support women and girls. The staff below reflects best practice for static and formal WGSSs.

Formal WGSS:

Centre manager
• Provides overall supervision of and support to staff;
• Represents the WGSS;
• Liaises with Project Coordinator and/or Assistant Project Coordinator;
• Consolidates monthly reports;
• Monitors activities in the WGSS; and
• Coordinates with other relevant sectors, as needed.

Case manager(s)/Social worker(s)/Psychologist
• Case management services;
• Referral to any other service (health, specialised Psychosocial support (PSS), legal, etc.), when requested by a survivor;
• Provision of one-on-one counselling services (by technically trained staff);
• Accompaniment to support services, police, or family as requested by survivor;
• Safety planning services; and
• Participation in outreach services.

Response officer(s)/Psychosocial worker(s)
• Emotional support groups and activities;
• Peer support groups;
• Life skills;
• Refers clients to case workers, as relevant; and
• Participates in outreach services.

Prevention officer/community mobiliser
• Conducts safety audits; follows-up with other relevant sectors;
• Conducts safety mapping with women and girls;
• Supports volunteer outreach team;
• Holds GBV information and awareness sessions in activities; and
• Establishes and supports community-based safety groups, as needed.

A peer-based outreach team (volunteer or incentive-based workers)
• Decide on the size of the outreach team according to the size and geographical scope of the community. The outreach team should be of mixed gender and age (younger adolescent and older adolescent girls, and adult women). Since the outreach team is volunteer-based, its responsibilities should not conflict with any other home-or income-based responsibilities;
• Conduct home-based information sessions/activities for those who cannot come to the centre;
• Raise awareness among women and girls in the community about the Women and Girl's Safe Spaces (WGSS) and available services and activities;
• Link staff with women and girls in the communities;
• Link staff with men and boys in the communities for awareness raising; and
• Build relationships with other community groups.

Activity volunteer or child minder
• Guides recreational activities; and
• Organises activities for children.

Centre Upkeep/Support Staff
• A guard at night depending on the needs of the women and girls as well as their sense of safety in accessing the centre; and
• 1-2 cleaners to support with coffee/tea sessions or other large events.