Tip sheet

Workplace wellbeing and safeguarding

For CSOs in developing and humanitarian settings

RESOURCE & SUPPORT HUB

UKaid
from the British people

This tip sheet has been developed to help civil society organisations (CSOs) define and understand what wellbeing is and to connect staff wellbeing to work relating to Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Sexual Harassment (SEAH) and other harms. It also aims to help CSOs identify wellbeing risks and mitigating actions for staff, including survivors.

Click here for a note on holding supportive conversations relating to wellbeing. See below for some self-care tools.

This tip sheet will be especially useful for leadership and for staff working on safeguarding, human resources and diversity and inclusion.

Note: This tip sheet focuses on staff wellbeing. We recognise that wellbeing is one aspect of mental health. Please **click here** to read more about safeguarding staff with mental health conditions or psychosocial disabilities in the workplace.

What is wellbeing?

Wellbeing is the combination of a person's physical, mental, emotional and social health attributes which shapes their happiness and life satisfaction. Wellbeing is more than the absence of illness or disease. Wellbeing can be described as life satisfaction, positive experiences, and negative experiences which shape everyday life.

Wellbeing in your context

Interpretations of wellbeing vary between organisations, practitioners, cultures and languages. Different languages and cultures may use different term(s) for and approaches to wellbeing. Some organisations may have wellbeing embedded into their culture and way of working and others may have limited or no experience with wellbeing and mental health activities. When developing policies and procedures relating to wellbeing, or integrating wellbeing into existing policies and procedures, liaise with local services and professionals. Use terms and create an approach that is appropriate for your organisation and location.

The following general factors can contribute to a person's wellbeing:

Physical: Build a healthy body, for example through exercise, good nutrition and sleep.

Mental: Build your ability to engage with the world. Use different strategies, such as problem-solving, creativity, and personal resilience through self-care.

Emotional: Make sure that you are aware of, accept and are able to express your feelings. And make sure that you can keep in touch with other people's feelings.

Spiritual: Educate, share, reflect and search for meaning and purpose in human existence. This does not have to be tied to a formal religion.

Social: Connect, interact with, and contribute to other people and the communities around you.

Environmental: Contribute to a healthy physical environment.

Economic: have enough money and/or resources to live without impact on other factors.

It is important to note that factors which contribute to someone's wellbeing will vary from person to person.

Wellbeing and safeguarding

Many working environments can change regularly, for example due to the funding environment or the operating context. This can affect staff wellbeing. Also, due to the nature of CSO missions and operations, many staff may experience or witness traumatic and/or challenging scenarios.

Broadly, understanding and prioritising wellbeing for everyone in your organisation can, amongst other things:

- Lead to increased staff resilience
- Generate better staff engagement
- Contribute to a positive work environment
- Reduce numbers of leavers
- Reduce sickness absence
- Entice new employees
- Create higher performance and productivity

Also, understanding and prioritising the wellbeing of individual survivors of SEAH and other harms and abuses can play an important role in their recovery and is key to an effective organisational response. For example, it can:

- Help survivors feel that your organisation cares about them and understands their unique risks, challenges and opportunities
- Support or improve wellbeing before, during and after the case
- Provide structure and routine
- Contribute to a sense of meaning and purpose
- Build resilience through acknowledging, reassuring and validating lived experiences
- Promote opportunity for social inclusion and social support
- Promote recovery

Organisations and leaders that actively create and promote a safe, positive working environment can: (1) better prevent Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Sexual Harassment (SEAH) and other harms and abuses, (2) improve how reports of abuse are received and responded to, and (3) more effectively achieve organisational aims and objectives. Wellbeing is one key consideration in this.

Remember! Every individual will experience working in your organisation differently, and every individual's wellbeing will be shaped differently.

Click here for more information on how to understand intersectional safeguarding risks and appropriate ways to respond.

Click here to understand more about a survivor-centred approach and how to respond to a report.

Factors that can affect wellbeing in the workplace

In CSOs, the below factors can contribute to general staff wellbeing and to the wellbeing of survivors of SEAH and other harms and abuses:

1. Job design: Demands of the job, how much control employees have of their role, resources provided, the level of work engagement, potential exposure to unsafe or traumatic situations, whether the job is in a humanitarian or protracted emergency.

For example, job design can increase the risk of: being caught in a community dispute; developing post-traumatic stress responses; workplace SEAH; workplace bullying and harassment; having to utilise unsafe accommodation in order to work in a specific location and/or for a specific organisation.

2. Team factors: Support from colleagues and managers, quality of interpersonal relationships, effective leadership, ability to uphold confidentiality, new team created for an emergency, and availability of appropriate staff training. For example, are there regular check ins to observe how team members are coping with workload and managing tasks effectively.

3. Organisational culture: Changes to the organisation, support from the CSO as a whole, recognising and rewarding work, values and beliefs, autonomy of all staff, transparency, existence of and trust in reporting channels, case handling procedures and investigation procedures, existence of a survivor-centered understanding and approach, how justice is perceived in the workplace.

Also, an organisation's culture may reinforce established structural inequalities, such as patriarchy (and a 'macho' culture), white-supremacy, discrimination of persons with disabilities and homophobia. In such workplaces, there may be limited or no recognition or value placed on wellbeing and safeguarding against SEAH.

Work environments that take wellbeing into account are also more likely to plan and adjust the return to work after an unsafe event. Being mindful of experiences can avoid making existing stress, distress or trauma worse.

4. Situational factors: Conflicting demands from home, including significant life events and how they impact our work. For example, breakdown of personal relationships, illness with direct family members or birth/adoption, conflict in the country/region, natural disaster or pandemic.

5. Individual factors: Genetics, personality, life events, cognitive and behavioural patterns, mental health history, lifestyle factors, disability status and coping style to stressful events.

There may also be a lack of adaptive ways of working in place, resulting in individual's feeling that they are unable to manage the demands of their roles and are at a disadvantage. For example, where a staff member discloses a mental health condition or disability, but the organisation does not provide any support to adapt their role to their condition.

Understanding the CSO's responsibility

Individual and situational factors may appear not be an employer's responsibility. However, they relate to equality and equity in the workplace as much as job design, team factors, and organisational culture.

"Staff often work long hours in risky and stressful conditions. An agency's duty of care to its...staff includes actions to promote mental and physical well-being and avoid long-term exhaustion, burnout, injury or illness."[1]

Psychological safety

Psychological safety means that all staff feel comfortable speaking out, asking questions, challenging others and making mistakes without the fear of being punished or humiliated.

You can understand psychological safety by asking if staff feel comfortable sharing ideas, speaking out or challenging others and if they feel accepted. You can also ask if leaders are approachable, respect all colleagues and listen to different opinions.

Considering psychological safety within an organisation can contribute to staff wellbeing. It can also increase the accessibility, trust and use of reporting mechanisms.

Steps to take to include wellbeing in your workplace

Before you start

It is preferable that initiatives on wellbeing are informed by professional, local advice. If this is not possible, you can still understand and include wellbeing in your organisation by adapting the below actions to existing resources and initiatives.

To support the wellbeing of staff, including survivors, and strengthen the quality of your

---

[1] Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability, **Updated Guidance Notes and Indicators 2018**

organisation's safeguarding measures, wellbeing can be considered:

- In safeguarding reporting and case-handling procedures and in investigations.
- In initiatives relating to your organisation's culture, leadership, diversity and inclusion, and human resources / performance management.

Tip! Identify a wellbeing champion who can lead wellbeing initiatives and help to make accessible, promote and share information about wellbeing. Ideally this individual would sit in a staff advisory group. It could be your safeguarding focal point or someone else.

1: Identify, assess, and manage the risks to survivor wellbeing throughout the case handling process, including investigations

- Engage local professionals and/or diverse staff groups to review if and how survivor wellbeing is considered in (1) case-handling procedures and investigations, and (2) staff safeguarding training on how to receive and respond to a report.
- Review common themes and isolated incidents in previous (anonymous) case and investigation records.
- After assessing and prioritising the risks, put in place mitigation measures. Consult with staff.
- Example risks: wellbeing is not included in case handling flow chart; wellbeing is not explained in staff safeguarding training; staff and leaders unaware how to receive a report and consider wellbeing; a survivor-centred approach is not taken in the case handling process (**click here** for more).

2: Identify, assess and manage the risks across the organisation to all staff wellbeing

- Identify and assess the wellbeing risks related to the factors listed above: job design, team factors and organisational culture, and individual and situational. For example, review workplace features including workload,

diversity and inclusion, leadership and culture, social factors and how the work is organised.

- Seek staff feedback through anonymous survey(s) and/or staff consultations (individual/group, formal/informal).
- Observe interactions between staff and between staff and managers.
- Observe how work is carried out, note the speed, delay and double up of tasks and work backlogs. Observe if individuals or teams are experiencing burn out or compassion fatigue from their workload.
- Review if performance management procedures give any space to discuss wellbeing, where desired.
- Review common themes and isolated incidents. This may include data on absenteeism, productivity levels, staff turnover and exit interviews.
- After assessing and prioritising the risks, put in place mitigation measures. For example:

  - High job demand: Consult with staff to determine goals and targets, develop timeframes for activities, implement a process where staff check in and check out of the workday to reduce staff overworking.
  - Workplace Conditions: A traffic light reporting system where staff can notify leaders how they're feeling (anonymously or not), e.g. red- not well, orange-okay and green- doing great. This can also be used for workload capacity and to ensure staff feel supported within the workplace.
  - Reporting: Consult with staff to see if they trust and would use the reporting mechanism(s) in place. Gather diverse input and consider staff in their full diversity when analysing the findings.

- Offer safe spaces within an organisation for particularly at-risk groups (e.g., women, LGBTI+ people, people who experience inequality based on white-supremacy) to reflect and self-organise.
- Monitor the mitigating actions and adapt where necessary.

Remember! Measures considered by leaders as minor, such as organisational changes, new supervisor, new workers, new policies / procedures, pandemic containment measures can have unexpected effects on different staff wellbeing.

Holding conversations on wellbeing

The main aim of holding conversations with other staff members is to "check in" to see if staff are OK and to show they are cared for.

As a part of wellbeing initiatives staff members should not interview, investigate or to try to identify a survivor of SEAH.

If you have promoted wellbeing in your organisation, staff may show interest in talking about wellbeing issues. The wellbeing champion or safeguarding focal point may hold conversations with staff. Alternatively, and only where appropriate, conversations on wellbeing can be included in performance management procedures.

Click here to read a short note to guide your conversations.

Before you initiate any conversations or initiatives on wellbeing, ensure that you have a list of relevant local professional services, community services or support groups that are available if you need to refer someone for support.

Click here for a service mapping document that you can adapt and use in your setting.

Promoting self-care

In addition to conversations, promoting self-care and resilience can help staff wellbeing.

Click here for a practical wellbeing diary that you can share with all staff and encourage them to complete should they require.

Access some motivating posters and materials from the **FRIDA Happiness Manifesto**.

Further reading:

- If you are a leader reflecting on your role, have a look at the ten illustrated behaviours to support staff wellbeing and supportive organisation cultures on pages 14 - 17 of **Leading Well**.
- If you work for an NGO with limited resources, check out some support options on pages 12 - 15 of **Working Well.**
- Get some inspiration on the importance of wellbeing from these two resources! **Strategies for Building an Organisation with a Soul.**
- **Resourcing Ourselves** is a publicly available resource repository created as part of the CHS Alliance initiative to Cultivate Caring, Compassionate Aid Organisations.