

# Ethics in Research and Programming with Adolescents

*Capturing the Perspectives of International Organizations*

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April 08, 2022

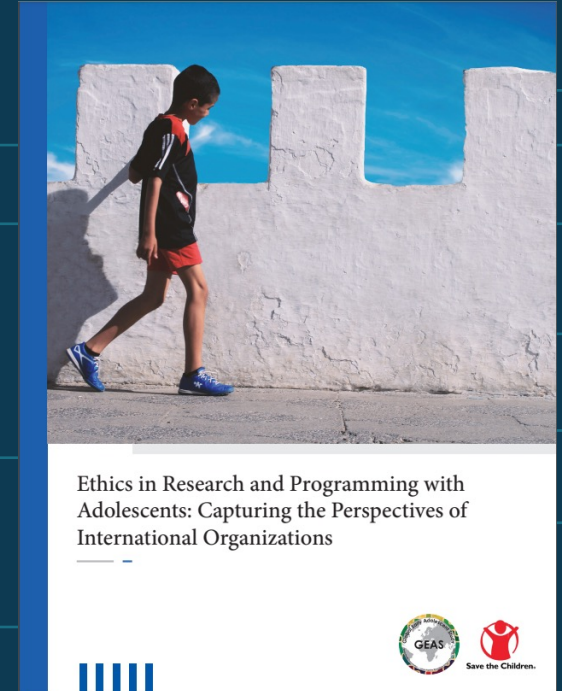


Population, Family and Reproductive Health



# Presentation Outline

- About the Scan
- Key Findings
- Recommendations



# About the Scan

## Purpose of the scan:

To understand the ethical issues faced by program specialists as well as researchers and the guidance provided by international non-governmental (INGO) and donor organizations working with adolescents globally.

## Individuals interviewed:

- INGOs: 17
- Donors: 3



# Framing Ethical Work with Adolescents

## ■ Two types of protocols:

- **Safeguarding:** “The responsibility that organisations have to ensure their staff, operations and programmes ‘do no harm’ to children and that any concerns the organisation has about children’s safety within the communities in which they work are reported to the appropriate authorities.”<sup>1</sup>
- **Protection:** “Measures and structures to prevent and respond to abuse, neglect, exploitation and violence affecting children.”<sup>2</sup>

1 Save the Children. 2014. [https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/node/8560/pdf/kcs\\_understanding\\_2014.pdf](https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/node/8560/pdf/kcs_understanding_2014.pdf)

2 Save the Children. 2007. [https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/node/7586/pdf/sc\\_child\\_protection\\_definition\\_20071.pdf](https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/node/7586/pdf/sc_child_protection_definition_20071.pdf)

# Primary Ethical Considerations & Challenges

- Adolescent understanding of assent and consent
- Adolescent understanding of their choices
  - Including refusing participation
- Balancing the organizations' needs with the protection needs of participating youth
- Referrals: making them and obligations to follow up
- Addressing the diversity of needs across adolescence
- Special adolescent populations are under-addressed

# Partnerships in Practice

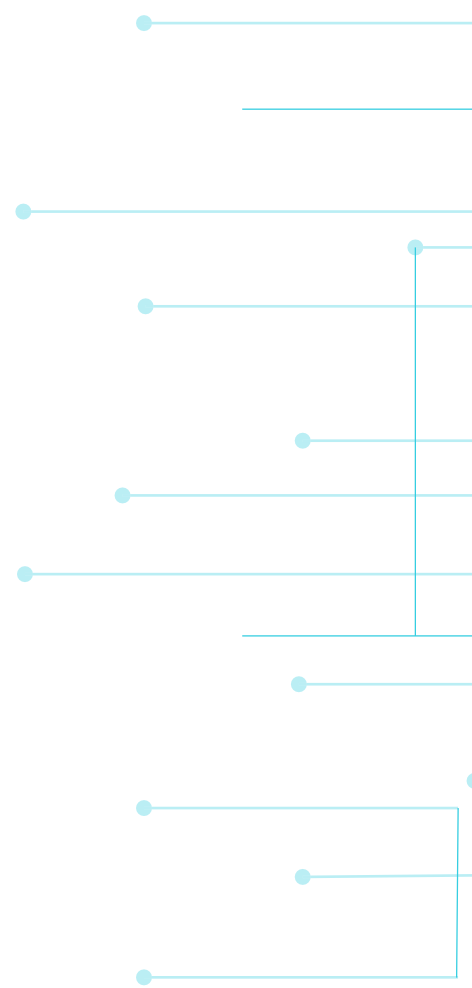
- INGO staff guidance is often developed internally
- INGOs often depend on local partners (IPOs) for training/implementation
  - IPOs are first responders to issues, INGOs provide support
    - Sharing of incidents with INGOs depends on severity
    - INGO responses depend on case details, contexts, donors, type of research/services.

# Recognizing Ethical Issues & Making Referrals

- **Step #1: Before the study or program begins**
  - Mapping local services
- **Step #2: Training**
  - Vignettes, role-play & discussion; Established online training
  - Emphasize adolescents as unique age group with distinct rights
  - Develop staff soft skills; provide resources/ways to make referrals
- **Step #3: During research and programming**
  - Several referral delivery strategies
  - Referrals to various local providers and for types of services
  - Widespread strategies to elicit field issues

# Challenges with Making Referrals

- **Barriers to following up on referrals**  
(e.g. confidentiality, funding/timeline)
- **Defining responsibility is not always clear**
  - Who is making and/or paying for the referral
  - Who follows up on a referral
- **Effectiveness of referrals is hard to assess**





# Legal Constraints to Best Ethical Practices

- **We may be limited by...**
  - Parental consent requirements
  - Consent laws
  - Laws mandating the reporting of confidential behaviors
- **Contextual tensions may pose concerns...**
  - Legal requirements vs. assuring confidentiality
  - Legal requirements vs. youth autonomy
  - Defining violence vs. cultural practices



# Ethics is a Continuous Process

# General Recommendations

1. **Meaningfully engage youth in planning**
2. **Overcome the “culture of silence” in working with adolescents and discussing ethics**
3. **Reconcile ethical protocols with contextual realities; laws with best practices**
4. **Consider organization-provided support and referral services**
  1. **For example, hiring psychosocial professionals into projects’ teams**



# Research Recommendations

1. View parental consent as a vehicle for dialogue
2. Craft appropriate instruments and measures for age, development, culture/context
3. Sample thoughtfully for the topic, representative of age, sex, geography
4. Shift views on ethical protocols
  - a. They facilitate, rather than impede, quality research

# Organizational Recommendations

1. Encourage internal conversations to make ethics discussions less taboo
2. Provide field staff with psychosocial support for dealing with ethical challenges
3. Look towards the development of universal guidance and/or a resource center
4. Educate donors on costs associated with implementing ethical best practices

# Donor Reflections and Recommendations

1. Ensure program officers are trained on ethical issues and protocols
2. Actively support grantee capacity-building
3. Emphasize organization-wide efforts to build trust and limit micro-managing with grantees
4. Establish more of a shared understanding among donors of their responsibilities in ensuring ethical best practices

# Conclusions

- 1 Organizations must affirm commitments to ethical standards, and value training, capacity-building, and open dialogue.
- 2 There is a need to affirm *both child safeguarding and child protection*, which requires clear definitions of organization responsibility and accountability.
- 3 There is value for developing universal standards for ethics training and protocols.

# Acknowledgements



**Global Early  
Adolescent Study**

**Robert Blum MD, MPH, PhD**

Principal Investigator, Global Early Adolescent Study  
Professor, Department of Population, Family and Reproductive Health  
Bloomberg School of Public Health  
Johns Hopkins University



**Save the Children®**

**Shana Peiffer**

International Consultant  
Former Director, Child Protection at Save the Children US



# Thank You

*FHI 360*

*Gender and Adolescence: Global Evidence  
(GAGE)*

*International Center for Research on Women  
Jhpiego*

*Marie Stopes International*

*PATH*

*Pathfinder International*

*Plan International*

*Performance Monitoring for Action (PMA)  
2020*

*Population Council*

*Promundo*

*Refugee Support Network*

*Rutgers International*

*The Challenge Initiative*

*Together for Girls (VACS)*

*World Vision*

*Young Lives*

*The Children's Investment Fund  
Foundation*

*The Oak Foundation*

*The Packard Foundation*

# Thank You



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