



**Researching
Sexual Violence**

Ethical concerns

Range of concerns

- o Researchers and their 'subjects'-
power, knowledge and consent
- o The value of breaking the silence.
- o Bearing Witness: The responsibility of
researcher
- o Ethics of use of Oral Testimonies
- o Code of conduct for researcher

Majlis Project Brief

- o 1. Develop policy protocols for each institutional stakeholder that responds to victims of sexual abuse
- o 2. Provide Socio-Legal Support to Survivors of Sexual Abuse.

Pilot project in 3 districts in Maharashtra
Mumbai City, Mumbai Suburbs and Pune.

Two aspects of the Project

1. Document and analyze gaps and challenges faced during a rape trial **at every stage** from the time a complaint is lodged to the final judgment

Involves analyzing 200 trial court judgments, observing 150 ongoing cases through various stages of investigation and trial

2. Provide Socio-Legal Support to Survivors of Sexual Abuse, after a survivor reports the incident of Sexual Abuse to the police

Ethics Guideline for both aspects

Part 1: Ethical And Safety
Recommendations For Research,
Documenting and Monitoring Sexual
Violence

PART 2: Socio-legal Support Ethical
Standards For Majlis Social Workers

Recommendations for Research by the Ethics Committee

Adapted largely from WHO guidelines on ethical and safety issues for planning and information collection on sexual violence in emergencies as well as those associated with the uses of that information.

1. The benefits to respondents or communities of documenting sexual violence must be greater than the risks to respondents and communities.

- This research presents no risks to participants; Majlis intervention begins after the violence is reported to the Police by the victim/her relatives.
- The potential benefits of Majlis work include improving the functioning of institutional response to sexual assault at the national level and hence its impact will be wide and will benefit thousands of victims who access the system.

2. Information gathering and documentation must be done in a manner that presents least risk to respondents, is methodologically sound, and builds on current experience and good practice.

Majlis team will be using a combination of interviews with stakeholders, observations of processes, reviewing data and documentation available with state agencies.

After carefully examining available best practices, Majlis will devise a research methodology that is both sound and effective.

3. Basic care and support for survivors/victims must be available locally before commencing any activity that may involve individuals disclosing information about their experiences of sexual violence.

There are number of state - notified agencies for support for survivors. Majlis maintains affiliations with support providers and will provide participants with the information and access on their request.

4. The safety and security of all those involved in information gathering is of paramount concern and should be continuously monitored.

Majlis takes care to ensure the protection of researchers. For the purpose of this project, however, a written safety plan for Majlis staff will be prepared.

5. Confidentiality of individuals who provide information must be protected at all times.

All researchers will be required to sign nondisclosure agreements.

Majlis will also devise a confidentiality system of protecting data using best protocols from other organizations.

6. Anyone providing information about sexual violence must give informed consent before participating in the data gathering activity.

Majlis will ensure that all participants are aware of the purpose of the research. A written statement will be evolved to explain the same.

Majlis will follow steps set forth by the World Health Organization to gather consent.

7. All members of the data collection team must be carefully selected and receive relevant and sufficient specialized training and ongoing support.

Members of Majlis' team receive training as per their roles led by the project director.

Reporting and monitoring is done on a daily basis. Should a staff member be deemed unfit for the role they have undertaken, they will be removed from their post and reassigned to a more suitable task.

8. Additional safeguards must be put into place if children are to be the subject of information gathering.

Since Majlis' work pertains to victims' experiences within the institutional system, children will not commonly serve as subjects. However, in case a child is able to provide useful feedback, guidelines for interviews will be evolved.

PART 2:

Socio-legal Support

Ethical Standards For Majlis Social Workers

Follow these general standards:

- Do no harm. Keep your word. Avoid conflicts of interest.
- Promote the good of the survivor. Be fair to all parties involved.
- Maintain confidentiality of survivor disclosures and records (unless required).
- Respect the survivor's right to information and to make decisions based on the information (e.g., informed consent).
- Avoid dual roles in relation to the survivor or his/her family.
- Represent accurately your own abilities, authority and power.