A reflection on the 'understanding of safeguarding' regional safeguarding webinar

Susan Kathayat is a master's student in the Department of Conflict Peace & Development Studies at Tribhuvan University in Kathmandu, Nepal.

Susan participated in a webinar with Rajib Timalsina, our Regional Lead for Asia, and reflects here on how it led them to recall an experience that has particular resonance in our age of pandemic.

Namaste! I'm very thankful that I got a chance to attend a webinar discussion on contextual understanding of safeguarding in Asia. This was a new topic for me, and I was not very aware of it before the discussion. I think safeguarding implementation is very necessary in our country, but at the same time, I see it's difficult to implement.

I am working as well as studying. For me, a safeguarding policy should be implemented because I have continuously faced subtle disparities, and a bully in my organization where I work. I have also heard from my some of friends that they have faced major problems, too. It is not always easy to identify, but it can be a serious threat. It might not be easy to recognize unless the problem becomes critical. In most cases, I don't speak up because I'm not sure to whom I can explain our problem. When I started working in an organization, I was handed HR policy but that was all about working policy, and more like a contract. But I'm surprised that it does not cover a safeguarding policy that actually ensures our safety and well-being.

I want to share my own experiences of how I felt bullied in my organization. It was of 2019 summer when Dengue fever was spreading for the first time in Kathmandu and other parts of Nepal. People around my office were so scared that they might be infected by Dengue. I told everyone in my office not to be scared of it, and tried to make them calm. Back in 2017 when I was in India, I caught Dengue, and recovered from it. When I shared this experience, one of my senior colleagues said in front of everyone that the virus would still be in my body. I tried to convince them that I had recovered two years earlier, but instead of being calm, everyone started getting scared to come near me. I felt disheartened by statements such as "you should not be roaming around here like this. Dengue can affect anyone at any time" or "You should be locked up, because if the same mosquito will bite us then we will be infected". I used to feel insecure, and I was praying so badly that my colleagues and friends wouldn't catch Dengue. Because I knew that the allegation would be that I am the one who transmitted it.

And now with the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak, the same fear and trauma comes over me. The same fear again started rising up. I have started fearing even to have common cold or fever – not because I might be a coronavirus carrier, but because I might be bullied. That statement was actually made by the head of the department. Also, I'm not sure whom I could approach, and don't feel comfortable with my senior colleagues. I feel power imbalances and inferiority are the major reason that it has been tough for me to address my/our problems.

And talking about the national level and in research practices, there is a lack of awareness and literacy around how people might benefit from safeguarding policy. Nepal is a culturally diverse country with multiple languages and ethnicities. It will be very hard to convince people to follow a safeguarding policy since they have preconceptions, and different traditional values or belief systems.

https://changingthestory.leeds.ac.uk/2020/06/01/a-reflection-on-the-understanding-of-safeguarding-regional-safeguarding-webinar/

Besides that, there will be difficulties in the implementation of a safeguarding policy without the consent of local government, agencies, and concerned local stakeholders.

If you have experienced discrimination or harassment, and would like to write a short blog like this, then contact a.cegielka@leeds.ac.uk at Changing the Story's 'Safeguarding in International Development Research' project. We can discuss how a more rigorous and transparent approach to safeguarding could help, and how you might be the first step in creating change in your society.

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