



# **FACTORS INFLUENCING MISCONDUCT REPORTING IN SALADIN AND NINEVEH, IRAQ**

## OXFAM CASE STUDY – JANUARY 2020

The purpose of this document is to provide a summary of the critical factors that influence decision-making behaviour related to misconduct reporting in Iraq, based on a human-centred approach.

The intended primary audience includes the accountability, safeguarding and technology teams from Oxfam Great Britain (Oxfam GB) and members of the Oxfam in Iraq country offices. This document is also intended for other humanitarian audiences interested in understanding the critical factors that influence misconduct reporting in Iraq.

There are four sections to this document. The first section provides some background information on this initiative and the approach guiding this work. The second section provides specific details on the research process, ethical considerations and limitations. The third section presents a summary of the key findings and themes. The fourth and final section offers some high-level recommendations for moving forward.

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This case study is part of a series of papers written to inform public debate on development and humanitarian policy issues.

For further information on the issues raised in this paper, please email [etomkysvalteri@oxfam.org.uk](mailto:etomkysvalteri@oxfam.org.uk)

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Cover photo: An Oxfam MEAL staff member explains how to use the Help Line to an Iraqi woman. Credit: Ahmed Mahdi/Oxfam GB

# 1. STRATEGIC CONTEXT

## BACKGROUND: THE 'YOUR WORD COUNTS' PROGRAMME

Oxfam GB is committed to improving accountability to the people with whom it works and has made significant strides in programming efforts to do so in the past several years. This includes collecting, managing and responding to feedback from community members and the individuals who work directly with them. Despite such improvements, there remains a gap in understanding the barriers and other influencing factors people experience when it comes to reporting issues such as sexual exploitation, abuse and fraud.

Oxfam GB therefore, as part of the 'Your Word Counts' programme, initiated a year-long research process in multiple countries to understand the barriers and preferences related to reporting, with the long-term goal of designing community-led, context-specific feedback mechanisms. The broader vision and purpose of the programme is to deliver better feedback options for misconduct reporting which are safe and confidential, and for Oxfam GB to strengthen its accountability to affected people on a global scale.

## THE RESEARCH TEAM: A COLLABORATION

Oxfam GB engaged Sonder Collective<sup>1</sup> to incorporate human-centred design (HCD) principles in the research process. This document outlines the findings from this second phase of immersive research, which took place in Saladi and Nineveh, Iraq, in September-October 2019. In-country research was conducted by Oxfam's Global Safeguarding Advisor, in collaboration with the Oxfam in Iraq team and the Oxfam MENA Regional Platform. Translation expertise, which was a highly critical component of this process, was provided by Oxfam staff working in related fields, who have an excellent command of English and Arabic. The process built on the knowledge and insight gained from the first phase of the research process, in Myanmar.<sup>2</sup> During the second research phase, similar human-centred research was also carried out in Ghana.

# THE PURPOSE: TO UNDERSTAND INFLUENCING FACTORS

Prior to the first stage of the research, Oxfam GB and Sonder Collective held an Intent Workshop, which was attended by individuals from four separate Oxfam teams (Safeguarding, Anti-corruption and Fraud, Protection, and Information Communication Technology (ICT) in Programme). Collectively, these teams explored the current state of the system and why this work is necessary, identified the key user groups and walked through the various pathways that an individual may or may not take to report misconduct.

Based on previous global findings and in-country observation, two important aspects of Oxfam-related misconduct reporting were used as a starting point:

- Members of the community do not speak with Oxfam representatives about misconduct experiences.
- When members of the community do speak up, they usually talk to field staff, who often do not report these experiences appropriately or use formal systems.

To better understand the factors influencing the above, it was determined that the first step would be to map the decision-making process that occurs 'on the ground', at the community level.

We then collectively identified the following **research themes for exploration**:

- **Understanding the context:** Reporting mechanisms can be designed more effectively if we gain deeper insight into norms and customs in day-to-day life, and how they may influence what community members want to report and what they do not feel is appropriate or necessary to report.
- **Building trust:** People are more likely to report if they can use existing routes or trusted lines of reporting.
- **Creating an enabling environment:** Being human-centred means creating a safe and enabling environment to really listen, before acting. The priority focus should be on real consent, confidentiality and community understanding – so people know what will happen to their data and feel that they can make an informed choice about sharing it.
- **Ensuring safety of community members:** To create effective feedback mechanisms, as well as keep community members safe, we need to first understand the specific risks associated with various types of reporting.
- **Closing the feedback loop:** To build more trust, Oxfam needs to be in communication with communities not only after matters have been 'addressed', but throughout the process when they are being managed. This also includes referrals and feedback to services beyond Oxfam.

Ultimately, the following question was agreed to guide the research: How might we increase the likelihood that people will come forward and report through multiple, integrated channels?

## THE CONTEXT: IRAQ

The research took place in two governorates of Iraq: Saladin (صلاح الدين) and Nineveh (نينوى). In Saladin, the research took place in Tikrit and Baiji, while in Nineveh interviews were conducted in Mosul. Interviews were conducted in a variety of contextual locations, including camp settings, cities and villages.

In recent years, the population and infrastructure of Iraq have been hugely impacted by armed conflict. This includes the 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq, the 2013 sectarian war, and 2014–17 control of various locations within Iraq by ISIS.<sup>3</sup> Each of the locations chosen for this phase of the research project have been controlled by ISIS in recent years. Political instability and conflict have significantly impacted physical infrastructure and the lives of communities in Tikrit, Mosul and Baiji. These two factors and their impact on daily life were consistently referred to by participants throughout the research process.

Tikrit is the capital of the Saladin governorate and the birthplace of Saddam Hussein. It was captured by ISIS in 2015, some years after Saddam Hussein's capture in a nearby town. Baiji lies approximately 60km north of Tikrit. In June 2014, ISIS seized control of Baiji and its nearby oil field, the functioning of which Baiji's economy has largely depended on.<sup>4</sup> Currently, the Iraqi security forces, police and Popular Mobilization Units (PMUs) control the area.<sup>5</sup> Baiji has suffered huge damage to its infrastructure, including families' homes.

ISIS occupied Mosul for approximately two to three years, between 2014 and 2017.<sup>6</sup> During the nine-month battle to recapture the city by federal Iraqi, US-coalition and Kurdish forces, there were many civilian deaths and sustained damage to infrastructure throughout the city.<sup>7</sup> Since the recapture of the city, recovery is said to be slow.<sup>8</sup> Camps outside of Mosul, originally built by the international community to support displaced families, are now home to families who are seen to be affiliated with extremist groups. Many families perceived as such have been told that they are not welcome to return home. Much of the research conducted in Mosul was carried out in such camps.



Destruction of infrastructure, including family homes, is visible in Baiji. Photo: Hannah Fisher Jones

# THE FOCUS: COMMUNITY MEMBERS AND FIELD STAFF

The purpose of this research was to better understand the perceptions of community members and field staff around reporting misconduct. This included seeking views on what the desired effect of reporting misconduct would be, how communities and staff would most want to report misconduct, and what barriers prevent them from doing so. Field staff refers to any individual who has contact with members of the community on a regular basis, whether in a full-time, part-time, volunteer, partner staff or Oxfam capacity. Community members within this research include those receiving support from NGOs within the context of camps or education facilities, and those living in communities where NGOs are present.

From an accountability perspective, we were also dedicated to understanding the decision making and behavioural determinants influencing programme partners, who work alongside Oxfam to deliver community-based programming. Specifically, the scope of this work focused on experiences related to safeguarding and anti-corruption, such as sexual harassment, sexual exploitation and abuse, fraud and corruption. This included community members' and field staff members' understandings of these concepts, and how responses to each might differ depending on context and community preference.



## 2. RESEARCH SPECIFICS

### THE RECRUITMENT

Oxfam in Iraq staff members possessed the greatest knowledge and potential for facilitating the research in a way that would effectively capture the voices of community members and field staff. They were best positioned to steer the research team, especially when it came to identifying the specific participants whose voices we hoped to hear from and understand.

The project team travelled to various sites within Tikrit, Baiji and Mosul. In order to do so, the necessary authorization to travel to and from each site was requested and obtained in advance from local authorities. This authorization is necessary for any travel by NGO staff throughout federal Iraq. Research interviews took place in Oxfam offices and/or local facilities, such as a school and community centre. Privacy for the interviewees was assured prior to interviews taking place, and efforts were made to ensure confidentiality and comfort of participants throughout the process.

It was clear during some interviews that these topics were difficult for some participants to discuss, and some were concerned about the information shared. This echoes the barriers faced in reporting misconduct. While it is important to speak to a number of participants without formal 'pre-selection', as this is vital for a fair research process, it may be beneficial in future research to consider how best to locate interviews to help ensure that participants feel comfortable to speak openly.

### THE PARTICIPANTS

The team met with individuals living in camps, cities and villages across Saladin and Nineveh. In total, we spoke with 63 community members and six programme staff on an individual or two-person basis (including interpreters). We conducted five focus group discussions with female community members and three with male community members, in camp and school settings. Our focus was on the *human experience* of reporting misconduct. Each individual with whom we spoke brought their own history and context to this human experience, and we have endeavoured to shed light on how these different contexts can impact reporting and barriers to reporting.

## THE METHODS

Utilizing principles of HCD, the research team approached conversations with participants with the exclusive purpose of understanding the ways in which *they* experience their world. Given that the best way to understand an individual's decision making is to speak with them about it directly, we engaged in semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions which were centred around the research themes listed above.

Participants were not asked directly to describe in detail personal experiences with misconduct. Instead, they were prompted to think about how they would respond in specific instances, or how they know others have responded. Once participants had shared insight into how, why or when they would respond, interviews focused on participants' own experiences to further explore their personal motivations and ideas around reporting. Overall, participants presented as willing and able to speak about these issues and offered valuable insight for the research.

## THE ETHICS

In keeping with Oxfam's accountability policy as well as basic principles of ethical research practice, the names of specific camps, programmes and organizations have been removed and/or modified in order to ensure confidentiality for the research participants as well as for the organizations they spoke about. During the research process, participants were not asked to provide their full names, and all data collected was anonymized to protect the privacy of those involved. The quotes in this summary are mostly verbatim and were captured through audio-recording after obtaining written and verbal consent from participants. Some quotes have been modified with the addition of occasional filler words in instances when the literal translation may be confusing to the reader. Disclosures were directly reported to Oxfam's Global Safeguarding team in Oxford via the Safeguarding Advisor. Any issues and/or concerns were then dealt with as per Oxfam GB's standard operating procedure on receiving, logging and managing safeguarding cases.

## THE LIMITATIONS

There were several limitations to the research process which ought to be taken into consideration.

***Gender norms within Iraq*** are not necessarily a limitation to the research, but played an important part in how the research was conducted. While women in Iraq have been entitled to vote since 1980,<sup>9</sup> it is difficult for women to enter political spaces and therefore to have influence. Women's reputation is extremely sensitive and is seen to need to be protected for their own safety. Domestic violence and sexual harassment are prevalent within Iraq,<sup>10</sup> and armed conflict has increased women and girls' vulnerability and decreased their access to services.<sup>11</sup>



Men and boys' vulnerabilities have also been impacted by armed conflict. Throughout our research in Iraq, it was clear that women's reputation and 'honour' had a huge impact on views on reporting, as discussed later in this paper.

***Reaching the 'right' people*** was one of the most significant limitations to the findings.

Some participants had much higher exposure to international and national NGOs and their staff than others. For example, some participants living within towns had limited exposure to NGO staff, or had had regular contact with them only in the past. Other participants, particularly those in camp settings, had much higher exposure. While it was important to hear from individuals across a spectrum of exposure to NGOs, it did mean that at times participants found it more difficult to envisage how they would respond to misconduct. It may be beneficial for this to be further considered in future research.

***Interpreters*** were required throughout the research interviews. While the research team chose the interpreters carefully, there are always limitations in ensuring full understanding between researcher and participant. Interpretation was conducted principally in Arabic and English. Some members of the research team had knowledge of both languages, but an interpreter was used in most interviews. When the meaning was unclear, the research team endeavoured to ensure a common understanding between the researcher and participant.

Despite these limitations to the research process, the initiative has resulted in an increased understanding of the specific dynamics that influence the decision making and behaviour of community members and field staff when it comes to safeguarding and misconduct reporting.

# 3. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

This section summarizes the key findings based on what the research team heard during both individual and group conversations.

This summary should be utilized as a starting point, or a tool that can help guide subsequent efforts that are dedicated to understanding the community-level experience of misconduct reporting.

## THE INFLUENCING FACTORS

In Iraq, there are a host of factors that influence an individual's ability to 'speak up'.

Throughout this summary, we use 'influencing factors' to refer to the specific variables which influence the way people make decisions when it comes to reporting, problem-solving and sharing information related to misconduct.

After analysing the data from individual and group conversations, and distilling down larger themes into patterns, it became evident that barriers to reporting can be best understood as falling into three main categories. The figure below illustrates these categories, and was used as a framework for summarizing the various influencing factors that emerged during the research.

1. Personal	2. Interactional	3. Structural
E.g. I react based on what is expected, and accept that this is the way things are.	E.g. I am afraid of losing status, privileges or access to services.	E.g. I make decisions based on my immediate environment.

**Personal factors** are most closely tied to how someone innately thinks and feels. They include factors that can be seen as intrinsic, or belonging naturally to an individual, and are most strongly tied to their sense of self. Personal factors can be thought of as intangible characteristics, such as a person's belief system, the values that they hold and the lived experiences that they carry with them.

**Interactional factors** are more identifiable and are more visibly the result of an interaction between a person and their social network or environment. Interactional factors include the negative consequences in relation to *other* people and/or organizations that can occur as a result of speaking up.

**Structural factors** refer to the tangible elements or the formal systems and structures in an individual's immediate environment that shape the choices that are and are not available to them.

Decision-making behaviour in any environment is dynamic, and can never be fully distilled down to its individual components. Similarly, behaviour relating to safeguarding and misconduct reporting in the Iraqi social environment cannot be deconstructed in its entirety. For that reason, the above framework was utilized as a guide to orient thinking, with the understanding that the various influencing factors overlap and can strengthen or diminish the weight of each other.

## 1. PERSONAL FACTORS

These are the factors that are most closely tied to how someone innately thinks and feels.

### 1.1 Reputation and honour

The way I am viewed by people and by my community is important for me and my family.

### 1.2 Confidentiality

I do not know who to trust, talk to or confide in as this issue is so sensitive.

### 1.3 Resignation

I can't change my situation, this is the way things are here and now.

## 1.1 Reputation and honour

*The way I am viewed by people and by my community is important for me and my family.*

*'Once a reputation is stained, it follows you around.'* Community member

The notion that disclosing misconduct results in immediate, long-lasting damage to the survivor and his/her families' reputation and honour was discussed in nearly all interviews. Societies that are tribal-based have a strong affinity, usually in the form of localized kinship groups, and tribal values are an everyday part of culture and tradition in Iraq.<sup>12</sup> Additionally, when someone commits a wrongful act or is directly affected by this act, this brings dishonour and shame to them, their family and their kinship group, *regardless of whether they were the perpetrator or the survivor*. In Iraq, reputation in general is described by the word '*ard*', while women's positive reputation and honour in relation to sexual conduct has its own word: '*ird*'.

The belief that a woman is born with '*ird*' but can bring shame and dishonour to her family and her kin through her behaviour or sexual conduct, which at any point could be deemed inappropriate by the community or run counter to traditional expectations of a woman's behaviour, was a key personal factor in the interviews regarding decisions on reporting misconduct.<sup>13</sup> Reporting a sexual harassment, exploitation and abuse (SHEA) concern was seen as much more likely to

damage someone's reputation than reporting corruption. Many participants stated that reporting SHEA could directly or indirectly, consciously or unconsciously, tarnish the reputation and honour of the survivor and that of her family and tribe.

An additional point that emerged from conversations with participants was the different channels that disclosure would take depending on whether the perpetrator was a national or a foreign worker, as the impact of misconduct by international staff would not have the same impact on reputation. Many explained that if the perpetrator was from abroad then the incident would ideally be reported through an external channel such as the PSEA (prevention against sexual exploitation and abuse) network, or to a manager within the staff member's organization. Several participants mentioned that – depending on the severity of the incident – international perpetrators would either face a 'short-term marriage' arrangement (*nikah mut'ah*, an ancient Islamic practice that unites a man and woman as husband and wife for a limited time), or death.

If the perpetrator was a national, then the 'normal' disclosure procedure would be followed, which would involve the Mukhtar (the 'head' of the village or neighbourhood), members of the tribe, the survivor and perpetrator. Again, depending on the severity of the incident, the perpetrator would have to pay a fee, face expulsion from the town for a minimum of six months, or face execution. Short-term marriage arrangements were discussed in nearly all interviews and focus group discussions. Coincidentally, at the time the team were conducting the research, BBC News published an article that shone further light on short-term marriage, highlighting the Mukhtar's involvement and just how common the practice is.<sup>14</sup>

## 1.2 Confidentiality

*I do not know who to trust, talk to or confide in as this issue is so sensitive.*

*'Confidentiality and respect need to be preserved.'* Community member

When it comes to referring cases of misconduct, the Mukhtar is highly influential. The Mukhtar (meaning 'chosen' in Arabic) arranges meetings to resolve issues within the community and manages relationships with the armed forces that control and manage the checkpoints in the area. When SHEA was brought up during the interviews, many participants stated that this topic was not only incredibly sensitive in their society, but also that the cultural customs and conservative nature of their country means that it cannot be reported to anyone other than the Mukhtar and their tribal group. Tribal affinity is very strong across the country and in nearly all interviews, the Mukhtar was described as the figure in the community who would decide to whom the concern will be taken and how it will be handled. Participants in various interviews said that anything related to SHEA cannot be reported through NGO channels because of its sensitivity.

*The woman's family need to deal with this, and her tribe – no one else.* 'Community member

Linked to confidentiality was the idea of consent, stemming from participants' comments on how SHEA is a highly sensitive topic in the community, with the risk of a person's reputation (*'ard, 'ird*) and honour (*sharaf*) being damaged by reporting. Participants expressed the need to ensure that consent from a survivor is sought first and foremost before an incident of SHEA is reported. They stressed that the information could potentially cause lifelong damage to the survivor, their family and tribe, and in several interviews, participants said that death could be the consequence of misconduct for both the survivor and perpetrator. As such, obtaining consent from the survivor before reporting was paramount.

Personal influencing factors also have a strong connection with the culture of gossip (and rumours) in Iraq; gossip is prevalent within daily life and can be seen as a form of social control, especially to regulate and control women.<sup>15</sup>

As a result of these sensitivities and the importance of maintaining reputation within the community, participants stated that SHEA issues would be addressed and reported locally through their kinship group and would not involve an external channel of support (including local/national police, as they were not trusted). It would not even be reported via an anonymous hotline number. However, participants explained that if the issues were about fraud, bribery, extortion etc. (corruption), then people would be happy to report these (if they knew how to/if reporting channels existed). The vast majority of participants explained that an external channel would be the best and most appropriate method of reporting. Suggestions for reporting these types of misconduct included placing an (I)NGO hotline number on posters around the village or on cards for distribution.

## 1.3 Resignation

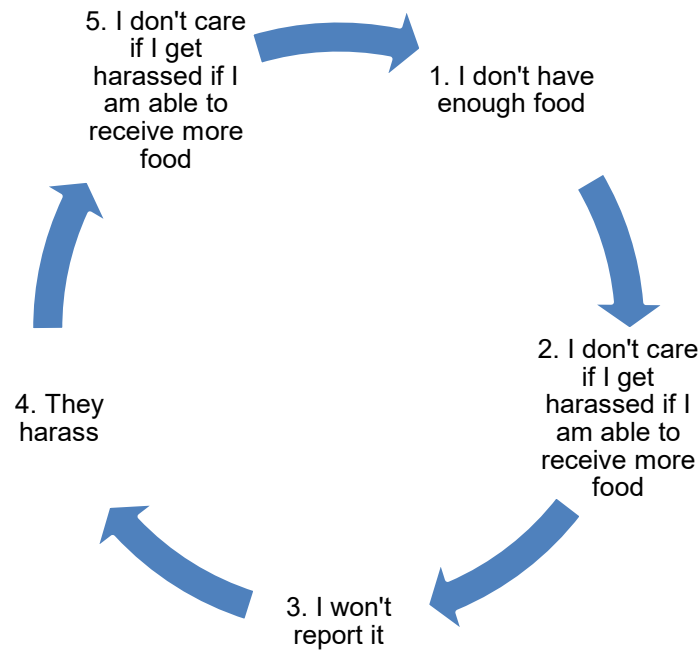
*I can't change my situation, this is the way things are here and now.*

*'Self-exploitation is high due to levels of desperation in this community.'* Community member/school manager

'Resignation' in this context largely stems from the desperation and powerlessness that community members feel within their immediate environment, which can then result in increased probability of self-exploitation. Being financially and resource dependent on humanitarian and development programming means that community members are often exposed to situations in which they have very little choice; as such, when their basic needs are not sufficiently met, they are forced to accept and/or initiate inappropriate and unfair treatment (see the 'Circle of abuse', below). This is likely to be due to a multitude of factors, including

imbalances in power and inability to make active changes in immediate circumstances.

**Figure 1 The Circle of Abuse**



The circle of abuse explores power dynamics between aid worker and community member receiving support but also draws parallels from Maslow's hierarchy of needs (A Theory of Human Motivation). According to Maslow, 'it is a strange characteristic of the human organism to change the whole perspective of their future when dominated by a certain basic need, such as food and shelter.'<sup>16</sup>

## 2. INTERACTIONAL FACTORS

These are the factors which are more visibly the result of an interaction between a person and their social network or environment.

### 2.1 Gender

Reporting is a man's role, and a woman's role is to be supported.

### 2.2 Attitude

I cannot approach the staff as they are impatient, harsh and disrespectful.

### 2.3 Loss

I am afraid of losing my life, job and/or access to services and privileges that I rely on.

### 2.4 Normalization

Corruption and misconduct are normal to us.



## 2.1 Gender

*Reporting is a man's role, and a woman's role is to be supported.*

*'Men can keep secrets and women gossip.'* Community member

Throughout the interviews and focus group discussions, women typically described men as being the ones that can maintain confidentiality, and that reporting any kind of misconduct is seen as a protective aspect of a man's role in society. Even when a hypothetical situation regarding a concern about child rape was discussed, many women said that reporting of this type of incident would typically start with the child informing the mother, and the mother informing the father. If the mother was a widow, she would inform the Mukhtar or, if he was unavailable, the Mukhtar's wife.

*'I will report firstly as my duty as a man and then as my responsibility as a Mukhtar.'* Mukhtar

The need to ensure that reporting is done with utmost confidentiality, which is seen as something better done by men, combined with a deeply patriarchal system, provides an understanding of the chain of communication regarding who discloses to whom, and why.

Interestingly, however, GBV leads in Iraq stated that the majority of their referrals were made directly by the women affected, with the exception of a few referrals made by NGOs. Yet when discussing reporting misconduct (including both SHEA and corruption), many women stated that they would almost always report to a male figure rather than directly to a pre-existing 'channel'. This may be because women referring themselves directly to GBV services are looking to receive known, immediate and specific support, whereas reporting to an official channel to disclose a misconduct issue or concern may be at odds with a woman's perception of her role in society.

## 2.2 Attitude

*I cannot approach the staff as they are impatient, harsh and disrespectful.*

*'I remember I would get physically pushed and verbally insulted'* Community Member/Community volunteer

Many participants spoke of their mistrust of NGO staff and explained why they would be unlikely to approach or disclose to a staff member, particularly during aid distributions. Participants spoke generally of physical and verbal harassment being common during aid distribution by NGO workers, who used it as a method of crowd control because of the large numbers of people that gather. It was discussed during male and female focus group discussions that women are most at risk in these situations and described how it was not uncommon to witness this 'bad behaviour'.

Additionally, other participants spoke about the way they are viewed and treated due to their status as families perceived as having affiliations with ISIS and expressed the mistreatment and marginalization they experience from communities including NGO staff. These families feel ostracized and reintegration efforts is a challenging prospect as without civil documentation family members are left unable to find employment, inherit property or dissolve a marriage.<sup>17</sup>

## 2.3 Loss

*I am afraid of losing access to my life, job and/or access to services and privileges that I rely on.*

*'I could lose my life, my job and my support if I am shamed.'* Community member

Due to the fragile nature of Iraq, many participants spoke about loss as an influencing factor in reporting misconduct. Three different types of loss were described; with equal emphasis given to each type of loss:

- Loss of life: Death was a much talked-about concern when reporting of SHEA misconduct was discussed. All participants spoke of the possibility and probability a woman losing her life as a result of cultural norms around the issue, and said that reporting to an NGO channel would not protect them from the fear and retribution they would face from their tribe and the community.
- Loss of livelihood: This concern was expressed predominantly by women who were interviewed, as one of the possible consequences for women if they were to report misconduct. Women who work are at much greater risk if they report, due to the fact that they could lose their job and therefore their livelihood. The men of the household would prohibit the women from working or returning to work, so they would become housebound.

*'Organizations are so respected and needed here that no community member would want to put their support at risk by reporting.'* Community member

- Loss of services: Many participants explained that as they have no or very little trust in government, community members are very reliant on NGOs for services, which in turn makes them less likely to report misconduct.

## 2.4 Normalization

*Corruption and misconduct are normal to us.*

*'Corruption and misconduct in all its forms is so normal here – why would we report it?'*

Community member

Many participants (female) explained that there is normalization of harassment because it is so prevalent within the community; participants spoke of daily 'cat-calling' and heckling, verbal abuse and constant fear for their safety. In the interviews, women who have sons explained that

they bring them wherever they go so that they feel protected. This daily occurrence of harassment creates a view that it is 'normal' to expect this in society, thus NGO staff members are expected to behave in the same way, or at the very least not to challenge this behaviour from others towards community members and beneficiaries.

Additionally, when participants were asked to identify types of misconduct that are common in their community, nearly all mentioned bribery, nepotism, fraud and extortion as everyday practices. The most recurrent and universal form of misconduct was nepotism. Many explained that although not accepted, it was not unusual for NGO workers to distribute aid only to families they knew or had tribal affiliation with, or for NGO workers in a camp setting to give jobs only to relatives or friends, even though the jobs are supposed to go to IDPs.

### **3. STRUCTURAL FACTORS**

These are the tangible elements or the formal systems and structures in an individual's immediate environment that shape the choices that are and are not available to them.

#### **3.1 Visibility**

We don't know who works for which NGO, and we don't know the difference between all the different NGOs.

#### **3.2 Awareness**

I don't know what should be done or how to do it.

#### **3.3 Quality of service**

Issues with services we receive come first, before we can discuss misconduct.

#### **3.4 Community resolution**

My challenges will be resolved by appointed community members, through a collective decision-making process.

#### **3.5 No perceived action**

Nothing is ever done when we report, so we are left hopeless.

### **3.1 Visibility**

*We don't know who works for which NGO, and we don't know the difference between all the different NGOs.*

*'We know Oxfam as "the green one" but we don't know the name Oxfam.'* Community member

During the course of the research it became evident that as national security is still volatile, many international and local NGOs do not carry or show anything that identifies them as they travel from one location to another to support communities. This has resulted in three key issues, which will be discussed below:

1. Community members do not know who the perpetrator(s) work(s) for as they do not wear official clothes from their organization and/or it is not made clear to the community who is responsible for which areas of work.
2. Lack of visibility gives perpetrators more opportunity for misconduct as it is not clear who they work for, or even if they work for any organization, as they travel 'unmarked'.
3. Community members do not know which organizational reporting mechanism to use.

*'Before, we would take pictures of the logo and then when there was an issue or concern, we would find that logo and name on Facebook and report in this way, but now no one is wearing logos so we can't do this.'* Community member

In a country where communities are receiving a range of support from a number of different organizations, it can be quite difficult to know which organization is which, especially if staff do not wear t-shirts with logos and vehicles are not branded.

## 3.2 Awareness

*I don't know what should be done or how to do it.*

*'We don't know how to report and whether any mechanisms exist.'* Community member

Communities expressed very little awareness regarding what to do if they witnessed an incident or experienced any type of misconduct. When story completion was used as a participatory method of interviewing on this topic (researchers present participants with half a story and then ask them to continue it, based on what they would do next), nearly all participants stated that they simply would not know what to do, as no reporting channel exists or no information has been provided with regards to how to respond.

Preferred reporting channels mentioned by the community were posters and information around their villages with a helpline for reporting corruption concerns, and an ombudsman's team to deal with SHEA issues in a fast, sensitive and appropriate manner.

### 3.3 Quality of service

*Issues with services we receive come first, before we can discuss misconduct.*

*'There is no trust in reporting because our basic needs are not met.'* Community member

This influencing factor became one of the most prominent and recurrent themes that the research team came across. When speaking with the community, it became evident how important it is to make organizational representatives available so that the community can give feedback on the services that are provided. Although it is not unexpected that the needs of the community will always surpass organizations' capacity to meet them, issues regarding inadequacy of services clouded conversations on misconduct. Concerns were also raised about how information on services is communicated.

*'We do not know if anti-corruption or any of these other types of misconduct you explain are happening, because we do not all read or write Arabic, so when organizations send us information on services in English, it is even worse.'* Community member expressing concern about receiving information on services from NGOs

Such comments were common throughout the interviews, and led to an understanding that if the quality of NGO work is seen and perceived to be 'good', and we respond to all types of concerns in a timely and confidential manner, then these organizations will gain enough trust from communities for them to report misconduct. Some participants noted that they built a picture of how much they could trust an NGO over a period of time, and would refer to this when considering whether or not to report any misconduct. This may also mean that they would report misconduct of one NGO to another NGO if they trusted the second organization more.

### 3.4 Community resolution

*My challenges will be resolved by appointed community members, through a collective decision-making process.*

*'Oxfam gave me a hotline number for reporting and for general support, but I wouldn't use this for SHEA because I would go to the tribe to agree the marriage.'* Mukhtar

The Mukhtar is a respected person in the community and, most importantly, is trusted. Community members, both men and women, therefore stated that this would be the person who would 'triage' an issue or concern and then direct it either to the tribe or a reporting channel. As mentioned previously, it is more likely for corruption issues to be reported through an NGO channel, which is seen by the community as a positive method of reporting these issues, whereas – at least in a non-camp context – SHEA concerns would almost always be brought to the Mukhtar or to his wife, and then to the tribe. When participants were given the scenario of what might they do if the Mukhtar wasn't available

or present, many then opted for calling the manager of the NGO in-country, or using the complaints box as a final resort.

*'SHEA issues are solved by tribe, not the police, according to our community culture. Women have no freedom and we need to keep it confidential.'* Community member

Speed was also frequently mentioned as a factor in deciding who and which channel to report to. Many participants said that whichever method was 'the quickest' would be the best, which, unsurprisingly, resulted in the Mukhtar being the best option. Other methods – such as a hotline, complaints box, calling the camp or NGO, line manager or reporting on a website – were all regarded as channels which would take much more time to resolve the issue, would create more problems, and would not be rooted in the values of the community and/or would not provide acceptable results.

It is important to also note that the preferred form of resolution also depends on the context in which communities are living. For example, many participants who lived in a camp setting did not mention local resolution as a preferred route of reporting, and instead confirmed that camp management or a hotline would be the best reporting option for them. One explanation for this could be that because the community have been displaced and are now living in the camp which they do not call 'home', they may not have the same feeling of belonging to a community and do not trust the Mukhtars in the same way as those participants who have returned to their villages and towns and are rebuilding their lives. An additional factor to note is that reporting within the community could be dangerous for the people affected; many stated that the community elders may decide that death would be the appropriate punishment for whoever was implicated.

### 3.5 No perceived action

***Nothing is ever done when we report, so we are left hopeless.***

*'Nothing happens when we report – it is useless.'* Community member

The experiences participants shared with regards to lack of action once a concern has been raised also differed depending on their context. For instance, all participants who lived in a village explained how and why a complaints box (one of the most common methods, and in some locations the only available method, of reporting in this context) was not popular with the community. Reasons given included:

- There is no trust in this channel, as community members do not know who is reading the concerns and confidentiality is not respected; once the box is opened, community members are unsure as to what happens with the information.
- From their experience, no action is ever taken in response to concerns put into the complaints box.



- Other people can tamper with the information inside the box once it has been opened, either by destroying, changing or manipulating it.

One community member explained in an interview that he once called a hotline number (further questioning revealed that this was the national number for IDPs for general reporting of service complaints or misconduct concerns). He reported that this had been a negative experience, as the person who answered spoke a lot and didn't understand what he told them. Because they never called back, this in turn influenced the community to not use the number, as rumours had spread that it was not a suitable reporting channel.

Participants who lived in a camp setting also stated that camp management did not take action after concerns had been reported, and in focus group discussions all agreed with a participant who said that the complaints box in the camp 'takes too long and nothing happens'. As a result, community members living in the camp reported that they currently inform Oxfam staff in the camp of their concerns; when the research team asked what made this route a trusted channel, as was not an 'official' method of reporting in the camp, participants said it is because Oxfam staff handle matters confidentially and take action quickly. The researchers were aware that participants knew they were associated with Oxfam (and were therefore perhaps more likely to give a favourable response to this question), but explored this further and concluded that the opinion seemed to be genuine.

As suggested by the findings above (and as also discussed in the Community resolution section), speed of resolution was a factor of high importance. When participants were presented with a list of different mechanisms to rank, establish which mechanism was least favoured and which was the most popular, nearly all stated that whichever mechanism solved the issue the fastest was the preferred route. (The options given, depending on the context of the participants, were: complaints box, hotline number, whistleblowing website, face to face with a representative from organization, email, camp management or police.)

## 4. MOVING FORWARD

Based on this research, below are a list of considerations and potential areas for further exploration.

### 4.1 Personal factors

#### **Understand and take into account the cultural barriers to reporting**

Research findings highlight the need for further exploration at the community level, specifically when it comes to how intrinsic, personal factors influence community members' tendency to *actively* seek support. Factors such as reputation ('*ard*), honour (*sharaf*), women's reputation based on sexual conduct ('*ird*), the importance of shame, and how rumours and gossip are seen in society in Iraq, all play a part in the reporting (or not) of misconduct concerns, particularly those related to SHEA.

## **Monitor level of needs in the community**

Organizations can do more to manage the power dynamics between community members and staff to ensure that SHEA risks are minimized. More awareness sessions and deeper understanding among staff on topics such as the 'Circle of Abuse' (see 'Resignation' in Personal factors) may help redress the power imbalance between community members and the organizations they rely on. Greater understanding among staff of what power they hold, and how abuse of power has happened in the past, may help them to recognize and address these abuses. Better awareness of rights at a community level would also be hugely beneficial, and efforts to empower communities to report are much needed; informed communities would be able to set up community committees with the Mukhtar and influential elders.

An additional recommendation would be for senior staff/line managers to conduct more frequent monitoring visits to the field and to encourage ongoing feedback and evaluation from communities, to ensure that their humanitarian work takes a truly participatory approach.

## **4.2 Interactional factors**

### **Consider gender**

Both community members and field staff need to trust that accountability mechanisms will keep their information private and secure. Trust in the respect for privacy could help decrease fear of social stigma, especially among women, and make individuals feel that it is safe to share their experiences.

Additionally, working closely with men in the community, in particular influential men such as the Mukhtars, would help advocate and raise awareness of the need for greater sensitivity in reporting, and well as improving understanding of how and when to report. It would also potentially encourage women (as well as men) to report to NGO channels and to question the status quo, which sees reporting misconduct as part of a 'man's protective role'.

### **Provide training for staff on expected behaviour when engaging with the local community**

It is advised that senior managers conduct field visits on a regular basis, rather than such visits only being carried out by field staff. This would help to monitor the situation, act as a deterrent to misconduct and would also allow senior managers to stay informed on the organization's response. In addition, simple reminders in team meetings before staff visit field sites – on behaviour, conduct and expectations from staff as individuals and as part of the organization – would help to encourage a culture where humanitarian principles are talked about openly and frequently.

Some of the verbal abuse discussed in interviews was due to some community members being perceived by NGO staff as affiliated to

extremist groups. Therefore, it might also be worth ‘unpacking’ this within the organization, to understand the cultural and political context and stigma that exists when staff, particularly (but not limited to) national staff, are distributing to communities.

Training could also be provided for staff who visit the field frequently; this could include simulations and/or roleplay scenarios which could help with aspects such as crowd management, techniques for appropriate communication with community members, and suitable responses to community members’ requests or concerns.

## **4.3 Structural factors**

### **Work with the community to establish better reporting mechanisms**

To address the issue of communities not knowing how or where to report, many participants suggested that organizations should involve community members and influential figures such as Mukhtars and tribal members to design reporting mechanisms that work for them, are understood and accessible in their context. This would also help to foster a participatory and transparent relationship between the organization and the people it serves to support.

### **Ensure visibility of NGO staff and transparency**

A simple solution to one of the most-voiced concerns by the community regarding lack of visibility of organizations would be to ensure all staff to wear branded t-shirts or jackets with their organization’s logo, and to have their vehicles display the logo if it is safe to do so.

Field staff should introduce themselves by name but should also explain the organization they work for and its purpose. If possible, they should distribute cards with the organization’s name and logo so that communities are aware of who is who, and what support each organization is (and is not) providing.

### **Improve referrals and coordination between agencies**

Communities expressed how organisations are judged on how quickly and efficiently NGO’s respond to concerns and if general feedback and/or issues are dealt with in a timely and efficient manner. If people have a positive experience with an NGO, communities would feel more able to report SEA and Corruption concerns to them. This may also mean that they would report misconduct of one NGO to another NGO if they trusted the second organization more. This highlights the need to prioritise referrals and coordination between agencies to build trust and confidence in the community enough to report.

### **Address the power imbalance where possible**

Some practical suggestions were made during the focus group discussions about this sector-wide issue. When distributing aid, for example, whether in a camp context or in a village, where possible organizations should try to ensure that women distribute aid to women

(as women community members are most often the ones who go to distribution points) and men distribute to men.

Frequent discussions, workshops, awareness days and external consultant sessions could also be established with staff to ensure that conversations around understanding what power is, and how organizations/staff have and use this power, would encourage a less top-down approach than is currently taken.

# CONCLUSION

The findings from the research highlight the profound impact and influence that personal and interactional factors have on communities with regards to reporting misconduct in Iraq. Deeply rooted societal beliefs, such as reputation and honour to name a few, in addition to the gender norms that exist in the country, have a powerful effect on behaviour and attitudes, creating barriers to reporting.<sup>18</sup> At the same time, the structural factors highlighted in the report show what tangible actions we as organizations can take to gain further trust from the community and ensure transparency.

To be successful in breaking down these barriers to reporting for the communities in Iraq, it is essential that we continue to collaborate with national NGOs and communities to continue conversations on gender, reporting, trust and hierarchy, and to heighten awareness on the sensitivity of SHEA in this region and the challenges and opportunities it brings when establishing reporting mechanisms.

Corruption concerns, although rife and normalized in society, seemed more conducive to the use of NGO reporting channels (hotlines, complaints boxes, etc.) and do not carry the same risks as reporting SHEA. As a result, the research team had more success in raising awareness on the need to report corruption issues at community level, to improve current mechanisms and ensure accountability is discussed so that community members trust and understand an organization's responsibility in handling these concerns.

To conclude, in order to move forward it is imperative that we explore more of the personal and interactional factors with the communities Oxfam seeks to support when addressing misconduct reporting, particularly in a country with history of political instability and which remains volatile.

# NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Sonder Collective. <https://www.sonderdesign.org>

<sup>2</sup> Semler, M., (2019). *Factors Influencing Misconduct Reporting in Myanmar*. Oxfam. Available at: <https://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/publications/factors-influencing-misconduct-reporting-in-kachin-myanmar-620893>

<sup>3</sup> ISIS means the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria. The group is also referred to as IS, ISIL and Daesh. Please see this article for further clarification on naming the group: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-27994277>

<sup>4</sup> Cash Consortium for Iraq (CCI) (2019). *The Impact of Cash Transfers on Local Markets in Iraq: Lessons from Baiji and Rawa*, available at: <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/1571898130.The%20Impact%20of%20Cash%20Transfer%20of%20Local%20Markets%20in%20Iraq%20-%20Lessons%20from%20Baiji%20and%20Rawa%20%5BDigital%5D.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> John Bryant for the Humanitarian Policy Group and ODI (2019). *The humanitarian response in Iraq: Support beyond international assistance in Mosul*, available at: <https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/resource-documents/12782.pdf>; BBC (2014, June 10) 'Militants seize Iraq's second city of Mosul', available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-27778112>

<sup>7</sup> John Bryant for the Humanitarian Policy Group and ODI (2019). Op. cit., page 5

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., page 6

<sup>9</sup> Valeria Vilardo and Sara Bittar (2018). *Gender Profile – Iraq*, Oxfam International, page 20, available at: <https://oxfamlibrary.openrepository.com/bitstream/handle/10546/620602/rr-gender-profile-iraq-131218-en.pdf?sequence=1>

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., page 24

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., page 35

<sup>12</sup> Judith Yaphe (2000). *Tribalism in Iraq: The Old and the New*. Middle East Policy Council, VII (3), available at: [www.mepc.org/journal/tribalism-iraq-old-and-new-0](http://www.mepc.org/journal/tribalism-iraq-old-and-new-0)

<sup>13</sup> Sana Al-Khayyat (1990). *Honour and Shame: Women in Modern Iraq*. Saqi Books

<sup>14</sup> BBC News (2019). 'The teenager married too many times to count'. [https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/extra/iuKTEGjKqS/teenage\\_iraq\\_brides](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/extra/iuKTEGjKqS/teenage_iraq_brides)

<sup>15</sup> Sana Al-Khayyat (1990). *Honour and Shame: Women in Modern Iraq*. Saqi Books

<sup>16</sup> *The Paradox of the EU-Turkey deal and Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs applied to the Syrian Refugee Crisis* (2018). [https://essay.utwente.nl/76734/1/imrak\\_BA\\_BMS.pdf](https://essay.utwente.nl/76734/1/imrak_BA_BMS.pdf)

<sup>17</sup> Iraq's So-Called "ISIS Families: Rounded up, Vilified, Forgotten." (2018). <https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/11/14/iraqs-so-called-isis-families-rounded-vilified-forgotten>. 2018

<sup>18</sup> Oxfam Policy & Practice (2019). 'What really influences our behaviour?' <https://views-voices.oxfam.org.uk/2019/10/wash-your-hands-why-influencing-behaviours-is-more-complicated-than-we-think/>



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