

LNGB Child Protection Year 3 Report

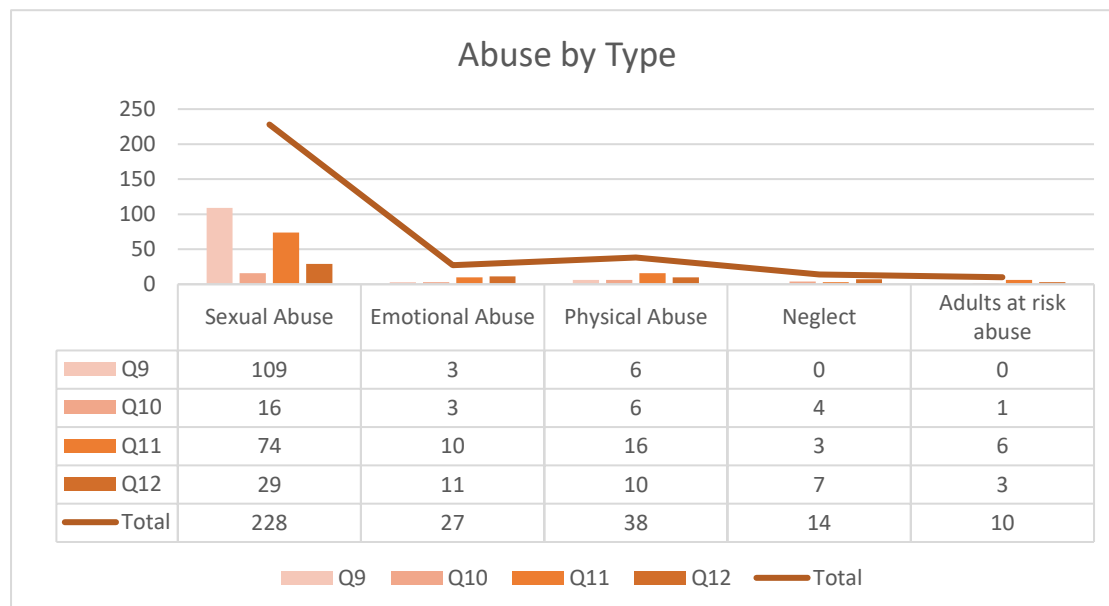
Period	August 2020 – July 2021
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Completed by/Position	Prisca M. Malunga, Safeguarding Manager

Summary of protection and safeguarding incidents

In year 3 of implementing the Transformational Empowerment for Adolescent and Marginalised (TEAM) Girl project, the project safeguarding team received:

- A total of 317 protection and safeguarding concerns from beneficiaries of the project
- 7 safeguarding incidents perpetrated by project staff/or project associates
- 281 reports from females
- 36 reports from males

Figure 1 below categorises the four main types of abuse reported in the four quarters. It also includes the number of reports received from adults at risk in the project.



Analysis of trends

As seen from the chart above, there was a fluctuation in the number of reports for protection concerns in the four quarters of this year. There was an increase in reports received in Q9 as a result of a learner contact assessment conducted during CBE centre closure related to COVID-19. The majority of the reports related to incidents that actually occurred in Q8 directly after the closure of CBE centres. This highlights the increased risk of concerns not being promptly addressed if children have reduced access to a network of trusted adults. In Q11, reports increased at the beginning of learning for Cohort 2 beneficiaries, as the learners, CBE management, facilitators and community stakeholders were made aware of abuse and reporting procedures through training and workshops.

It's concerning to see across the four quarters the high levels of child sexual abuse cases received this year, at 74% of all the reported child abuse cases. Prevalent forms of sexual abuse include child marriage (67% of the sexual abuse cases), sexual exploitation (32%) and rape (1%). This reflects the wider societal challenges in Malawi regarding child marriage, a practise that continues to be normalised. Nevertheless, the TEAM Girl project continued its efforts to reduce this harmful practise through activities such as interface meetings with chiefs, child protection trainings with different stakeholders and advocacy through Theatre for a Change's (TfaC) Interactive Radio Drama.

Another concerning factor in this year was the 7 incidents perpetrated by project staff and/or individuals working on behalf of staff. These cases mostly affected adults at risk in the project.

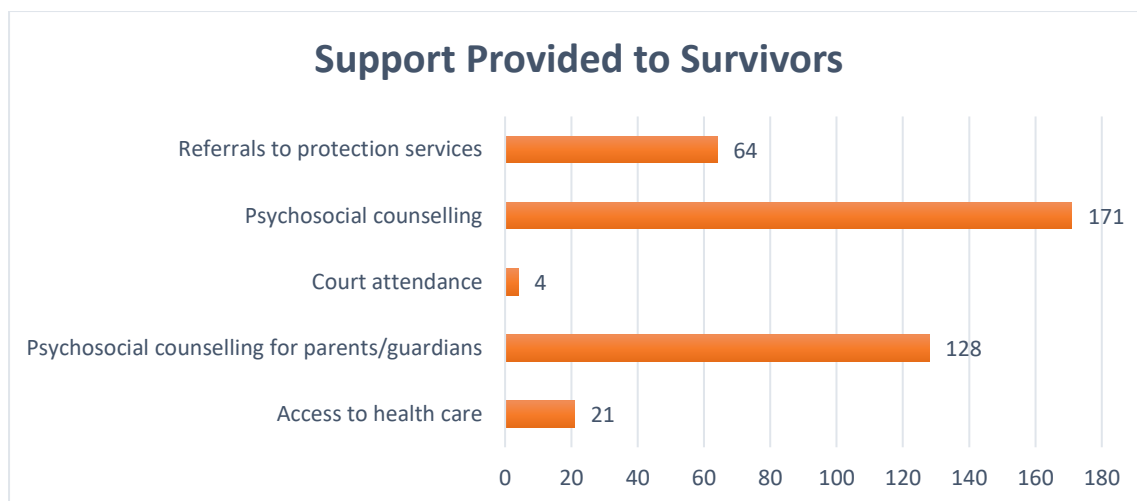
Response to reports and survivors of abuse

1. Responding to reports of child protection and safeguarding concerns

100% of the cases reported to the project were followed up by the safeguarding team by:

- Seeking consent from the survivor where appropriate and reporting cases to local authorities after assessing the risks
- Supporting survivors of sexual and physical violence to access emergency health care
- Making referrals to other stakeholders for protection service provision including psychosocial, legal and accommodation support
- Conducting home visits with the district Department of Social Welfare (DSW)
- Case management, including seeking updates or pressing for responses from local authorities
- Safeguarding incidents triggered internal investigation procedures and were escalated to the Fund Manager

Figure 2 provides a summary of different interventions provided to survivors of abuse.



i. Referral to protection services

While 100% of cases were reported to local authorities, further support services were sought from external protection stakeholders via referral for 20% of cases. Stakeholders included Health Surveillance Assistants for support to access health care, the Salvation army for temporary safe shelter, and both police and DSW staff for assistance in case management.

ii. Psychosocial counselling

This service was provided by TfaC’s Psychosocial Counsellors to survivors of abuse referred by the safeguarding team. Female survivors of sexual abuse were prioritised. While the figures show the number of individual beneficiaries supported with counselling, it must be highlighted that these individuals each received several counselling sessions depending on the severity of the issues presented. For those needing longer term counselling or hospital support, referrals were made wherever possible. However psychological services in Malawi are extremely scarce.

iii. Court attendance

Survivors whose abuse cases reached the court were supported with funds where necessary to attend the court sessions.

iv. Psychosocial counselling for parents/guardians

Parents and guardians of survivors of abuse received this support as part of case management process/actions for different individuals. With the parents, the focus has mostly been to support them with positive parenting skills, and how to create a conducive home environment where their children, can live free from abuse, exploitation or any harm and be supported well with their goals.

v. Access to health care

Of the 228 reports of sexual abuse, only 9% (21) survivors accessed health care. This is because the majority of sexual abuse cases reported this year were historical. In addition, while information was provided to the survivors on the benefits of accessing health care and how to access it, a majority of the survivors chose not to. During follow ups, some of the reasons survivors shared for not accessing health care included concerns that they would be turned back if they did not present tangible health problems, as well feeling they didn’t need

to access health services. It must be noted however that 100% of survivors of rape cases accessed health care within 72 hours of the incident.

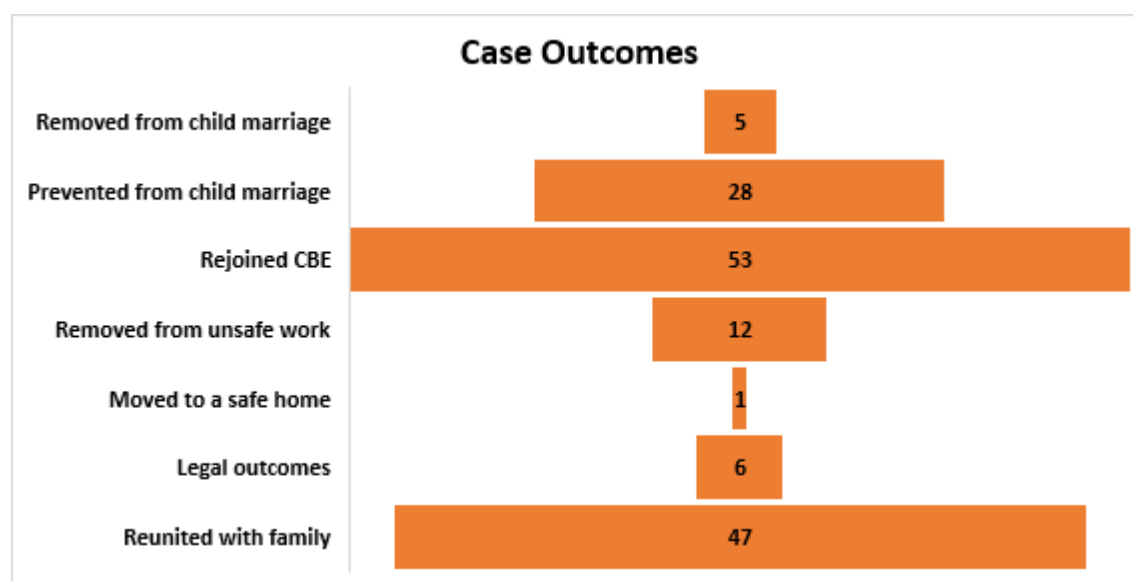
2. Case reviews by the District Department of Social Welfare

The safeguarding team continues to work hand in hand with the Department of Social Welfare in all the three districts to ensure that survivors are supported well with case management processes. In the year under review, 134 (24 boys, 93 girls) case conferences for complex cases of TEAM beneficiaries were conducted across the three districts. This represents 42% of the total cases reported.

Case Outcomes

While the project has not systematically asked individual survivors to provide feedback on support services, a tracer study conducted in October 2020 with a sample of CBE learners found that 98% felt confident or very confident in reporting abuse within their community, and 95% felt confident or very confident that abuse concerns will be resolved by those responsible.

The graph below depicts examples of outcomes from the safeguarding team's interventions.



Key highlights from the outcomes above include:

i. Legal Outcome: Vera's Story

*Vera*¹ who hails from Mchinji, is a girl with concentration and mobility challenges. One evening, towards the end of last year, her mother sent her to buy a household item from a nearby shop. On her way, an adult male grabbed her and dragged her to a forest where she was raped. One villager saw this happen and ran to the village to get people to search for her.*

¹ Real name of the survivor has been withheld

They later found her, visibly distraught and the perpetrator had fled. He was later apprehended by police.

When the project was alerted of the incident the next day, the Safeguarding Officer immediately followed up with the survivor and her family to support in psychological first aid and facilitate provision of protection services. The incident was at this time not reported to authorities and the survivor had not accessed medical care. The Safeguarding Officer therefore engaged with the survivor and their family to get consent to report the incident to the Social Welfare Office and check progress with the police. With coordination from Social Welfare, Vera was assisted to access health care at a nearby hospital and gave a statement to police for investigations. Vera and her guardian were later referred for psychosocial counselling.

When the court proceedings started, the project supported her with funds to attend the sessions at the boma (district). Throughout the process, the Safeguarding Officer informed and prepared Vera for the next steps. In May this year, the perpetrator was found guilty of sexual assault and sentenced to four years in prison.

The project did a post-care follow up to check on how the survivor and their family are coping. The family were relieved that the incident had been concluded by the courts and were pleased with the support from the project throughout the process.

ii. Reunited with family

Psychosocial counselling proves to be an important tool in addressing needs of beneficiaries, and particularly useful for cases of neglect. There was a case from Lilongwe where a mother abandoned her children for personal reasons, one being a beneficiary of the project. After a series of counselling sessions provided to the mother, she (the mother) returned home and is now taking proactively taking care of her children. The project continues to do post-session follow-ups.

iii. Moved to a safe home

Another highlight this year is when the project supported a beneficiary to move to a safe place. The beneficiary, a 15-year-old is a survivor of sexual violence. The perpetrator who is her brother-in-law started abusing her at the age of 7, and recently, he had abducted her and moved to another community. Upon receiving the incident report, the Safeguarding Officer coordinated with the District Department of Social Welfare (DSW) and the police to rescue her and move her to a safe place provided by the Salvation Army. The perpetrator was arrested by the police and the court hearing for the case has since started. The survivor is being supported with psychosocial counselling and safe integration back to her family.

iv. Improved access to protection services by the community

The project recorded a number of incidents in which survivors of abuse and/or their families accessed protection services as soon as the incident happened and got support from the project later. One such incident is of a beneficiary who was physically assaulted at night, and by the next day when alerting the TEAM project, she and her baby had already been treated at the health centre. This example highlights progress towards the project's sustainability actions, two of which are building capacity of communities to report abuse and encouraging the use of community structures in responding to disclosures of abuse.

Strengthening of capacity and structures

Community stakeholders' training in child protection

As part of the sustainability plan, the TEAM Girl project emphasises the importance of using community structures in responding to abuse related concerns. As such, to ensure that community stakeholders who respond to such disclosures are equipped with the right knowledge, attitudes and skills, the safeguarding team organised and conducted training in child protection. This targeted Child Protection Workers, Health Surveillance Assistants, Mother Group members, Community Development Officers and Community Policing Forums. Two trainings were conducted within the year – one in October and another in April. The trainings had an attendance of 240 stakeholders and were conducted in clusters of maximum 15 people, over two days at each cluster. At the end of the training, participants:

- Were equipped with the right information for improved knowledge on child rights, child abuse and reporting, including services available in their communities where they can access protection services
- Improved their capacity in using good safeguarding practise in responding to protection concerns from TEAM Girl beneficiaries and the community as a whole. This includes following principles of information sharing in making referrals, ensuring the best interest of the child and assessing risks in reporting

From the training conducted in October, community stakeholders demonstrated an increase in knowledge, attitude and skills from an average score of 56% to 66%. In April there was an increase from 65% to 85%. Upon reflection, reasons for the lower results in the first training could be a combination of the limited time for delivery, as well as the prior assumption that the stakeholders had basic knowledge in child protection, and it became clear during the training that they did not.

Overall, the trainings conducted this year created a platform for the participants to network with other stakeholders from their respective communities and district staff, and develop strategies for strengthening protection of children within their communities.

Interface meetings with community chiefs

Conducted in the month of July, this activity was a recommendation suggested from the child protection trainings as one way of reducing child marriages and sexual exploitation of children - concerns which are prevalent amongst our beneficiaries. It is a way of strengthening community structures to respond to issues of abuse towards children and adults at risk. Meetings were organised and held with chiefs from all the project communities to reflect on and discuss ways in how they can be supported to enforce by-laws around child marriages and other forms of abuse. Attended by 274 community leaders – in clusters of a maximum 15 participants at each zone, the chiefs reflected on their work of protecting children and adults at risk in their communities, including by-laws application to reduce child marriages and the gaps in enforcement. From the gaps, action plans were developed which include conducting awareness meetings with parents and encouraging learners to attend CBE classes.

Advocacy on children's' rights through the radio programme

TfaC's interactive radio programme continues to run on Malawi's biggest broadcaster, Zodiak, with the aim of building capacity of community members in protecting children. The storyline of the drama this year has focused on changing attitudes of community members around recognising and reporting child abuse. Experts across Malawi in child protection, policy, law, advocacy and prevention were featured throughout the weekly broadcasts to cement the key messages of each broadcast. These included the Principal Child Rights Officer from Malawi Human Rights Commission, the Health Promotion Officer from Ministry of Health-Health Education Unit; a psychologist working with Kamuzu College of Nursing; and within TfaC, the Safeguarding Manager and psychosocial counsellors.

KIIs were held with 19 community members who attend Community Listening Clubs. 95% of them said they felt incidents of abuse had reduced within the community, 81% said they had reported abuse as a result of the project - citing radio broadcasts as a key factor in increased understanding and awareness. The majority of radio poll question responses in year 3 demonstrated positive attitudes (77%) towards child protection and related SRH issues.

Key COVID-19 adaptations

Throughout the year, the project has made a number of adaptations due to fluctuations in COVID-19 infection rates as a result of the first, second and third wave of the pandemic. In terms of ensuring that TEAM beneficiaries are safe, supported and protected, the following key adaptations were made:

- Responding to protection cases of children and adults at risk (TEAM Girl beneficiaries) using phone calls. Home visits were and remain a priority in cases where after initial assessment the survivor is not safe, and there is significant risk of harm if the TEAM project does not provide immediate interventions. The home visits were done in conjunction with the Department of Social Welfare as they are classified as an essential service.
- Provision of psychosocial counselling remotely to survivors of abuse through phone calls. The TEAM Girl counselling service continue to provide services to TEAM survivors of abuse who have been referred by the safeguarding team.
- Remote capacity building to a network of trusted adults identified in each community to support survivors access protection services. The trusted adults which were identified include Agents of Change, CBE Facilitators and Mother Group members. A reminder to report abuse is sent via WhatsApp every week, and safeguarding messages on different topics such as Do No Harm, behaviour protocols for working with children are discussed every month with the stakeholders beginning the month of July 2021.
- TfaC's interactive radio programme was also adapted within this year. For instance, in the months of November and December, the focus was on prevention of child abuse including sexual and gender-based violence amidst COVID-19. The radio was also refocused to target only community members and they were led by Mother Group members.

- Delivery of community child protection activities in clusters and following COVID-19 preventative measures.

Challenges

Despite registering a number of positive outcomes from the interventions conducted in this year, the project also faced a few setbacks discussed below:

- One of the biggest challenges was associated with following up incidents of child labour, child marriages and sexual exploitation where parents/guardians of the survivors reported that their children are not minors. This information contradicted that gathered during enrolment and concerns were that the children's' ages were being misrepresented in order to justify their marriage, work or relationship with an adult. The Department of Social Welfare finds it challenging to verify such information as most children in Malawi do not have any form of identification.

To address this challenge, the safeguarding team is identifying organisations advocating for children who have reached the age of 16 to register for their national identity through the National Registration Bureau. The project is also working closely and seeking support from collaborator Irish Rule of Law for individual cases.

- Another concern this year is the increase in the number of safeguarding incidents perpetrated by project staff.

A number of strategies have been adopted to address this challenge. These include continuous capacity building for staff, especially facilitators, through repeated and diverse training, messaging and reminders on safeguarding and abuse. In future trainings, more time will be allocated to safeguarding to adequately go through the safeguarding policy, code of conduct and ensure everyone understands before signing the policy.

- Related to the COVID-19 restrictions and limitations on travel, in Q11 there was pressure from trusted adults in the community for the team to conduct home visit as soon as cases have been reported. While this is conducted for emergency cases, through meetings and existing community activities, the team has been emphasising utilisation of community structures in the community. Additionally, TfaC's sustainability strategy will focus on building links between community members and local support mechanisms as well as the DSW.
- There were reports that some facilitators were reporting cases but then attempting to investigate if the abuse has indeed occurred or not. This not only presented a risk of further harm to beneficiaries, but a risk of community backlash for the facilitators, which was evidenced in two centres. To address this, the team developed messages around different safeguarding topics to continually remind facilitators to follow best practice and to never investigate allegations. The individual facilitators who faced community backlash were followed up and supported as needed.

Way forward – progress towards sustainability

There is good progress towards identifying interventions in child protection that will support sustainability after the project phases out.

Between August 2020 and July 2021, 90 community stakeholders supported survivors of abuse to access protection services within their communities. Stakeholders who spearheaded this include mother group members, chiefs, facilitators and the table below describe number of beneficiaries each supported.

Community stakeholders	Number of stakeholders who provided support for survivors to access protection services within their communities
Mother group members	32
Chiefs	4
Community policing	7
Others (facilitators, parents)	47

As seen in the outcomes section, a significant number of serious case reviews were instigated by the DSW showing commitment to follow through different cases and ensuring that beneficiaries are fully supported.

Results from a survey that was conducted with the DSW officers showed that they believe there are a number of positive benefits that the collaboration the TEAM Girl project has. For instance, one DSW officer said it was *“very inspiring and encouraging that TEAM Girl has really helped us to strengthen working relationships with other stakeholders like HSA and we are able to refer some of the cases to them.”* The respondents also described that the relationship TfaC and TEAM Girl has with the DSW as integral, as both have the same goal and interest in the welfare of children - *“It is a healthy and supportive relationship as we are complementing each other’s efforts in eliminating violence against children”*; *“It is a cordial relationship that fosters child protection and ensures that the children’s rights are met.”*

100% of the respondents agreed that they have seen positive changes in their work to safeguard and protect children from abuse as a result of working with TfaC. Respondents said that there is prompt action on following up cases and coordinating across agencies which is key to protecting children – *“There are a number of positive changes so far that have been observed such as improved coordination, as well as being able to follow cases that would not be possible with our own resources that are in most cases inadequate.”* Respondents stated that the DSW offices are now more able to record cases and conduct follow-up visits to check the progress of the cases where TfaC provide resources such as transport and fuel.

In this year, the TEAM project will

- Hold meetings with the district DSW to understand how direct links, reporting mechanisms and responses can be strengthened. This will be used to identify if and

how the DSW can continue to support reports received at the community level beyond the project

- Hold meetings with trusted adults within the community, to explore what they see as key factors in their ability to provide support for survivors once the project has ended. This will be used to develop the sustainability plan further. This will be prioritised for Cohort 1 communities where CBE activities are phasing out.
- Hold meetings with the DSW to discuss key challenges they face in regards to resources and capacity. This will feed into any national advocacy campaigns and INGOs leading on the issue of increased fund allocation for child protection prevention and responses.
- Continue to strengthen the community structures that respond to disclosures of abuse through trainings and awareness campaigns in child protection.
- Build capacity of learners through the TfaC girls' clubs, and the communities through the interactive radio programme to recognise abuse, and report to relevant authorities for action
- In Q13, TfaC will pilot positive parenting workshops, targeting parents/guardians of beneficiaries who are either pregnant/have ever been pregnant or in child marriage/have ever been married before or with a child/ever had a child. The aim to build their knowledge, attitudes and skills around child development and positive parenting so that they can better support their children and prevent child marriages.