

Creating A Safe Environment: The Role Of Safeguarding Workshops In Protecting Vulnerable Groups

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Abstract.

Safeguarding is a critical component of healthcare services, particularly as it relates to protecting vulnerable populations. It aims to shield individuals from violence, exploitation, sexual abuse, and neglect. The concept of safeguarding goes beyond physical protection, encompassing psychological, social, and legal dimensions that uphold individual rights—especially for vulnerable groups such as children, women, persons with disabilities, and those with limited access to safe healthcare services. This community engagement initiative aimed to raise awareness and understanding of safeguarding and risk mitigation in healthcare services. The safeguarding workshop involved participants from Muhammadiyah organizations and utilized group discussions, case studies, role-plays, and scenario-based simulations. Pre- and post-training evaluations were conducted to assess the increase in participant understanding. The results indicated an improvement in safeguarding knowledge and led to the drafting of the initial Safeguarding Guidelines for Health Council of Muhammadiyah Central Board. These guidelines encompass safeguarding definitions, core principles, preventive strategies, case-handling procedures for violence, exploitation, and sexual abuse (VESA), and reporting mechanisms tailored to Muhammadiyah's context. Even the novelty of safeguarding as a concept, some participants found it challenging to identify forms of VESA or understand preventive measures. Thus, continued efforts through advanced training and broader policy dissemination are necessary to deepen understanding and enhance implementation.

Keywords: Policy Guidelines; Safeguarding; Vulnerable Groups and Workshop.

I. INTRODUCTION

Safeguarding issues can arise in various forms and contexts around the world. It is a critical yet often overlooked concern in the social service sector. Acts of abuse and violence may occur during social activities, in schools, communities, refugee camps, and other settings making safeguarding a global concern [1], [2]. In health and social services, safeguarding holds particular importance as it directly concerns vulnerable populations [1]. Safeguarding policies and practices have undergone significant changes in recent years in response to incidents where organizations failed to protect vulnerable individuals from sexual exploitation and other forms of abuse [2]. Safeguarding should not be underestimated, especially within organizations that work closely with vulnerable groups. It requires a collective commitment to protect individuals particularly the vulnerable from violence, harassment, exploitation, and discrimination. Implementing safeguarding is not solely an individual responsibility; it must be a shared obligation across the organization. Every staff member, volunteer, stakeholder, and partner should actively contribute to creating a safe environment and ensuring the dignity and rights of all beneficiaries are respected and protected [1]. Globally, UNICEF reports that 650 million girls and women approximately 1 in 5 have experienced sexual violence during childhood.

Similarly, between 410 and 530 million boys and men about 1 in 7 have also experienced sexual violence in their childhood years [3]. In Indonesia, cases of violence involving children, women, and men

have continued to rise. In 2019, there were 4,951 reported cases involving male victims and 17,132 cases involving female victims. By 2023, the number increased to 6,237 for male victims and 25,368 for female victims. This alarming trend underlines the urgent need for protection and effective safeguarding, especially for vulnerable groups. Within the context of safeguarding, abuse can manifest in the form of deliberate actions or neglect by individuals or organizations [1]. Healthcare organizations inherently interact with vulnerable populations in the course of providing services. In Indonesia, the right to health services is guaranteed under the 1945 Constitution and Law No. 17 of 2023 on Health. Therefore, safeguarding should become an integral part of health service delivery. This community engagement program specifically targeted health service staff in hospitals to raise awareness on safeguarding issues [4]. A study by Duffy (2025) on the concept of safeguarding adults emphasizes that through conceptual analysis, nurses can better engage with and uphold key safeguarding principles, providing guidance to ensure the protection and well-being of adults at risk of abuse [5].

Within socially and religiously oriented organizations such as Muhammadiyah, safeguarding becomes a vital element to ensure that health and social services are not only of high quality but are also rooted in the principles of individual protection. The Health Council of Muhammadiyah Central Board (MPKU PP), in collaboration with a multidisciplinary university team under the MENTARI-PHC program, conducted a Safeguarding Workshop aimed at enhancing participants' understanding of safeguarding, equipping them with risk mitigation skills, and supporting the development of the MPKU PP Muhammadiyah Safeguarding Guidelines. This initiative emerged from the urgent need for structured safeguarding policies within Muhammadiyah's healthcare services. As cases of violence, exploitation, and sexual abuse (VESA) continue to increase across sectors including in health organizations must establish a strong and sustainable protection system.

II. METHODS

This safeguarding workshop adopted an andragogical training approach, emphasizing active interaction and participatory learning. Following the principles of andragogy, the learning process was designed to be relevant and immediately applicable to the participants' real-life roles. Participants were engaged through group discussions, case studies, role-plays, and scenario-based simulations to deepen their understanding [6]. To assess the effectiveness of the training, pre-test and post-test evaluations were conducted to measure the improvement in participants' knowledge and comprehension. The workshop materials covered the following key topics:

1. Fundamental understanding of safeguarding and its role in organizational settings
2. Identification and prevention of Violence, Exploitation, and Sexual Abuse (VESA)
3. National and international legal frameworks and policies related to safeguarding
4. Introduction to Human Trafficking issues and their impact on the health sector
5. Risk mitigation strategies for VESA in healthcare environments
6. Development of evidence-based safeguarding policies
7. Drafting of the Safeguarding Guidelines for MPKU PP Muhammadiyah
8. Action plans for implementing safeguarding across Muhammadiyah institutions

Workshop participants included representatives of MPKU from various regions, healthcare professionals, academics, and individuals with strategic roles in safeguarding implementation. Each session was designed to equip participants with both a strong conceptual understanding and practical skills that could be directly applied in the field.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The safeguarding workshops were conducted in two cities—Surabaya and Makassar—organized in two batches with four distinct sessions. This initiative was a collaborative effort between the Health Council of Muhammadiyah Central Board (MPKU PP Muhammadiyah) and a cross-university community service team under the MENTARI-PHC program. Broadly, the program revealed three main outcomes: enhanced

participant understanding, the development of a draft safeguarding guideline, and participant feedback and evaluation. These themes are further elaborated below.

Enhanced Participant Understanding

The pre- and post-test evaluations demonstrated a significant improvement in participants' comprehension of safeguarding and VESA. The pre-test results indicated that while most participants had a basic understanding of safeguarding with scores exceeding 50% post-test results showed marked improvement. The majority scored above 80%, and some indicators reached 100%. Workshops have proven to be effective in enhancing participants' understanding. A study by Hendrika et al. revealed a similar finding, where participants' understanding improved from 30% prior to the workshop to 85% afterward, with the added ability to apply the knowledge in practice [7]. Similarly, Ansori et al. demonstrated that the workshop method supported participants in implementing innovative learning strategies and technologies, which in turn enhanced sustainable and effective educational practices [8]. Improved understanding plays a crucial role in successful implementation. This aligns with Setyawan's findings that demonstrate a significant positive correlation between workers' comprehension of Health, Safety, and Environment (HSE) and their actual implementation of HSE management plans [9]. Therefore, enhancing participants' understanding is a critical first step in enabling them to apply safeguarding principles effectively.

Development of the Safeguarding Guidelines Draft

One of the workshop's main achievements was the creation of an initial draft of the MPKU PP Muhammadiyah Safeguarding Guidelines. This draft includes definitions of safeguarding, core principles, preventive strategies, procedures for handling VESA cases, and incident reporting mechanisms tailored to Muhammadiyah institutions. The guideline is designed to be adaptable across Muhammadiyah's healthcare service units, including hospitals, community health centers (Puskesmas), and clinics. Developing such guidelines supports easier adaptation into practice. In an organizational setting, a guideline can serve as a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP), outlining step-by-step procedures in a structured and documented manner [10]. SOPs help streamline workflows and act as a reference to ensure organizational goals are achieved efficiently [11].

Well-defined SOPs also improve work performance, allowing staff to complete tasks in a structured and consistent way. In the context of Muhammadiyah health services, these safeguarding guidelines aim to create uniform standards that enhance efficiency and reduce procedural ambiguity. Structured workflows minimize barriers and wasted time, thus boosting productivity [12]. The existence of safeguarding guidelines contributes to improved performance among healthcare staff in Muhammadiyah hospitals, enhancing the efficiency of service delivery and ensuring alignment with established regulations. In contrast, the absence of standardized procedures can lead to confusion, lack of clear information, and, in the worst cases, maladministration [13]. In Indonesia, service standardization is mandated by Law No. 25 of 2009, which defines service standards as benchmarks that serve as both implementation guidelines and evaluation references for service quality. These standards represent the obligations and commitments of service providers to deliver public services that are high-quality, accessible, timely, affordable, and measurable [14].

Participant Feedback and Evaluation

The evaluation results showed that participants considered the workshop highly beneficial in raising awareness and skills related to safeguarding. Some participants admitted to having no prior knowledge of safeguarding, but after the sessions, they acknowledged its relevance to their professional and social environments. Most participants responded positively to the interactive learning approach, which they found helpful in understanding and applying safeguarding concepts. Evaluation is a systematic process used to assess the extent to which educational objectives have been achieved [15]. In this program, evaluation and participant feedback were gathered through collective discussions. This approach facilitated the development of participant understanding and contributed to the improvement of the safeguarding guideline draft. By seeking feedback, facilitators could identify areas of strength and those requiring improvement—critical steps for performance enhancement [16]. Dialogic feedback is recognized as an effective strategy for continuous assessment [17]. The implementation of this workshop demonstrated that safeguarding remains a relatively new concept for most participants, particularly in the context of primary healthcare services. Many

participants struggled to identify specific forms of VESA and the appropriate preventive actions. Therefore, continued efforts are required to reinforce safeguarding comprehension through follow-up training and broader dissemination of policies.

Integration of Fiqh-Based Approaches in Safeguarding

An important dimension that enriches the safeguarding initiative within Muhammadiyah institutions is the incorporation of *Fiqh Perlindungan Anak dan Perempuan* (Islamic jurisprudence on the protection of children and women), as developed by Muhammadiyah and 'Aisyiyah. This faith-based approach reinforces the ethical and theological foundation of safeguarding by grounding it in the Islamic values of *tauhid* (divine unity), *justice* ('*adl*), and *public interest* (*maslahah*), all of which affirm the protection of human dignity—particularly for vulnerable groups [18]. Muhammadiyah's Majelis Tarjih and Tajdid has emphasized that safeguarding children from violence and exploitation must be a religious and moral obligation, not only a legal requirement. The framework developed advocates for a comprehensive understanding of children's rights and highlights that abuse prevention should be rooted in religious reasoning that supports human rights and gender justice [19]. Complementing this, 'Aisyiyah has actively disseminated the principles of *Fiqh*

Perlindungan Anak internationally, promoting values such as *karāmah insāniyyah* (human dignity), *musāwāh* (equality), and *rahmah* (compassion), along with the fulfillment of children's rights to life, growth, protection, and participation. These values are not only theological but also practical pillars that align with safeguarding principles in global health and social work frameworks [20]. The integration of these fiqh-based principles into the development of the MPKU Safeguarding Guidelines offers a culturally and religiously contextualized model that can be adopted by health service providers within Muhammadiyah. It ensures that safeguarding is not only compliant with international standards but also deeply rooted in Islamic ethical commitments making it more acceptable and actionable within the organizational and community context. This religious grounding may also serve to enhance buy-in from stakeholders, especially in faith-based settings, and support broader dissemination of safeguarding values in Muhammadiyah-run hospitals, clinics, and community outreach programs. Moreover, the integration of safeguarding into Muhammadiyah's organizational policies and primary health services is an urgent necessity. Strategic follow-up actions include:

1. Conducting widespread dissemination of the MPKU PP Muhammadiyah Safeguarding Guidelines across Muhammadiyah health service units
2. Organizing ongoing training for healthcare providers and Muhammadiyah cadres to enhance safeguarding knowledge and implementation
3. Establishing systematic monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to ensure effective and sustainable safeguarding practices
4. Developing accessible and protective procedures for reporting and addressing VESA incidents

This initiative successfully involved relevant personnel in directly improving understanding and contributing to the development of safeguarding through feedback and open dialogue. Shamsad emphasizes the importance of a supportive environment and effective communication strategies to strengthen institutional protection, prevent abuse, and involve various stakeholders including staff, volunteers, governments, beneficiaries, and communities [2].

IV. CONCLUSION

The safeguarding workshops organized by MPKU PP Muhammadiyah in collaboration with MENTARI-PHC successfully enhanced participants' understanding of safeguarding and VESA (Violence, Exploitation, and Sexual Abuse). The initiative also resulted in the development of a preliminary draft of the Safeguarding Guidelines for MPKU PP Muhammadiyah, which will serve as a reference for implementing safeguarding measures across Muhammadiyah institutions. To ensure the effectiveness and sustainability of this policy, stronger commitment is needed from all Muhammadiyah stakeholders to integrate safeguarding into organizational policies and the operational systems of primary healthcare services. Looking ahead, continuous training, as well as structured monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, will be essential to ensure the long-term implementation of safeguarding principles in Muhammadiyah's health service systems

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