Safeguarding policy

Date: July, 2026

Our commitment

NOVAH creates radio drama and conducts research to help prevent intimate partner violence. That work means we regularly speak with, learn from, and tell stories drawn from the experiences of listeners, research participants, and the women and couples our programmes reach, many of whom are living with or recovering from violence.

Our approach is simple: do no harm. This policy sets out how we put that into practice, and the standard we expect from anyone working with us, including implementing and research partners.

Who this policy protects

This policy applies to anyone who takes part in NOVAH's research or whose experiences inform our content, in particular:

- Listeners who engage with our radio dramas and share feedback with us
- Women and couples taking part in our research (formative research, content testing, qualitative evaluation, etc.)
- Anyone whose real story or testimonial NOVAH considers using in its content or communications

Working with our partners

We share this policy with implementing and research partners as the basis for a shared standard. Where a partner already has its own safeguarding or ethical review standards, for example an academic partner's institutional review board, we expect that to meet or exceed what's set out here. Where a partner has no existing policy, we agree on a sensible approach together, informed by this policy, before any work with participants begins.

Our research standards

When we carry out or commission research on intimate partner violence, NOVAH and its research partners design and conduct that research in line with the World Health Organization's ethical and safety guidelines for research on violence against women. These guidelines shape everything from how a study is designed, to how field staff are trained, to how disclosures are handled, to how data is stored, anonymised, and reported.

Key guidelines

The most important guidelines we follow are:

- **Interviewer safety and training.** Everyone collecting data on violence is carefully selected and specifically trained, not only in survey administration but in how to respond sensitively if a participant becomes distressed or discloses risk.
- **Privacy during interviews.** Only one person per household is interviewed in the same research activity, in a private setting where no one else, especially a partner, can overhear the conversation, so that participation itself cannot expose someone to harm.
- **Informed consent.** Participants are told what the research involves, that questions may be sensitive, and that they can stop or skip any question at any time, before they agree to take part.
- **Confidentiality of data.** Names and other identifying information are kept separate from responses about violence wherever possible, data is stored securely, and results are reported only in aggregate, so no individual can be identified.
- **Referral to support.** Every study is designed with a known local referral pathway, so that anyone who discloses violence or distress can be offered information about local support services, whether or not they asked for it.
- **Minimising distress.** Questions about violence are asked using careful, validated wording, and the interview is structured to end on a supportive note, rather than leaving a participant in a distressed state.
- **Do no harm to communities.** Findings are shared in ways that avoid stigmatising individuals, couples, or communities, and are not released in a form or at a stage that could put participants at greater risk.

These principles come from the WHO's foundational guidance on this topic, first published in 2001 as *Putting Women First: Ethical and Safety Recommendations for Research on Domestic Violence Against Women*, and updated in 2016 as *Ethical and Safety Recommendations for Intervention Research on Violence Against Women*, which extends the same principles to research that tests an intervention, such as a randomised controlled trial like Twubakane.

Consent

No one takes part in NOVAH research or content, and no one's story, quote, or data is used, without their free, informed, and ongoing consent.This applies to taking part in research and to how we choose to feature someone's story in our content. Feedback that a listener chooses to share with the programme, for example by calling or texting in, is handled under Listener feedback below.

- We explain clearly what participation involves, how information will be used, and who will see it, in a language and format the person understands.
- Anyone can decline or withdraw at any time, without any negative consequence to them or their household.

- Consent to take part in research is kept separate from consent to be featured or quoted in NOVAH content. Agreeing to one does not mean agreeing to the other.
- We never seek a partner's or family member's permission to speak with someone, and we never involve a perpetrator of violence in the consent process.

Privacy and how we talk to people

Because disclosing violence can itself be dangerous, how and where we ask questions matters as much as what we ask.

- Conversations about intimate partner violence happen in private, away from a partner or other household members, so that taking part cannot put someone at risk.
- Only one member of a couple is ever asked about IPV.
- Field staff are trained to respond supportively to a disclosure without pressing for more detail than someone wants to share, and without promising confidentiality we cannot guarantee.

Data protection

Personal data we collect, including survey responses, phone numbers, names, and case notes, is collected only for a clear purpose, stored securely with access limited to those who need it, and never shared with a third party, including community leaders or local authorities, without consent, except where we are legally required to report a serious risk of harm. Research results are reported in aggregate, so no individual or couple can be identified from a published finding.

Content and Marketing material

Content and storytelling standards

Our storylines are fictional, written to model healthier relationship behaviour rather than to depict real households. When we do draw on real voice:

- Names, phone numbers, and identifying location detail are removed or replaced before anything is shared externally, unless someone has clearly and knowingly consented to being identified.
- A person can ask at any time to have their story removed or anonymised.
- Feedback that listeners share with the programme is used according to the rules set out in Listener feedback below.

Listener feedback

Feedback that listeners share with the programme, for example by calling or texting in, is handled as follows:

- Internally, for the feedback team's own tracking and follow-up, it is fine to keep a listener's name attached to their feedback.
- Feedback may be shared on air only if it doesn't disclose sensitive personal information and only once the radio host has explicitly told listeners that shared feedback may be read out.
- When feedback is used in marketing or donor-facing materials, including the public feedback dashboard, it is anonymised (names, phone numbers, and identifying location details are removed).

Photography and visual materials

NOVAH has explicit consent from the women, men, and couples featured in our photography and visual materials to use their images in our external communications, including donor communications, reports, presentations, and website materials to present NOVAH's work and interventions.

However, because NOVAH works on the prevention of intimate partner violence, we apply additional safeguards in how images are used. In line with ethical communication practices, we avoid using any image in a way that could imply that the person photographed is a victim, survivor, or perpetrator of intimate partner violence, unless this has been explicitly and specifically agreed with them.

In practice, this means that we do not place a person's name, face, or identifiable image next to a statistic about intimate partner violence, nor do we use their image merely to illustrate "the problem" of violence. We also avoid captions or layouts that could lead viewers to assume that the people pictured have personally experienced violence.

Where possible, images should instead be used to represent NOVAH's broader work: couples' communication, radio listening, family life, and prevention. The people featured should be portrayed with dignity, agency, and respect.

Any use of NOVAH imagery by partners or donors should follow these same principles. If there is any uncertainty about whether a proposed use is appropriate, please check with NOVAH before publication.

Responding to risks

Monitoring

No activity is conducted before risks are assessed. While an activity is conducted, risks are regularly monitored by the project manager, and regularly shared to co-directors, using different data sources to assess them (e.g. field visits, calls with community leaders, etc.).

Safe disclosure and referral

If someone discloses an immediate risk to their safety, our response is to support that person, not to investigate or intervene ourselves.

- Every field activity that could surface a disclosure is planned with a known local referral pathway, so anyone who discloses can be offered a concrete next step if they want one.
- Concretely, everyone interviewed receives a referral card pathway (whether they disclosed violence or not), and they are offered to keep it or to not keep it.
- When someone discloses immediate risk, field staff take time to debrief with them and offer a locally relevant referral pathway.
- No NOVAH staff member, volunteer, or partner attempts to independently investigate, mediate, or confront an alleged perpetrator.

Reporting a concern

Anyone, staff, partner, participant, or member of the public, can raise a safeguarding concern about NOVAH's work. Concerns are treated seriously and in confidence, and a person raising one in good faith will never face any adverse consequence as a result.

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This policy is reviewed at least annually, and sooner if our programmes expand to a new country or a new way of working with participants.