

**Safeguarding Policy for SAATHII**  
Working with Vulnerable, Stigmatized and  
Marginalised Groups, including Women  
and Children

V3. June 2024



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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Context

SAATHII (registered in 2002 as a Charitable Trust in Chennai, India) is a non-profit secular organization working towards universal access to healthcare, justice and social protection. It works to strengthen and expand stigma-free access to health, rights and social welfare schemes to vulnerable communities such as women and children, LGBTQIA+ communities, incarcerated persons, and those affected by HIV, TB, viral hepatitis, COVID and other health conditions.

## 1.2 Purpose and Scope

SAATHII aims to create a safe and inclusive environment, free from harm, discrimination, and abuse.

The purpose of this safeguarding policy is to:

- Provide all employees, associated parties as well as partners, sub-grantees, collaborators and other stakeholders with the overarching principles and procedures that direct SAATHII's approach to safeguarding,
- Make every possible effort to protect members of Vulnerable, Stigmatized and Marginalized Groups, including both children and adults, who come into contact with SAATHII in the course of our work
- Outline responsibilities for identifying and reporting actual or suspected abuse

This policy applies to all individuals involved with SAATHII, including staff, volunteers, beneficiaries, formal and informal partner organizations, and other stakeholders from civil society, government and the private sector. It encompasses all activities, events, and interactions related to SAATHII's organization's mission of strengthening and expanding access to healthcare, social and legal protection for communities marginalized on account of gender, sexuality, and those affected by HIV, TB or other factors.

## 1.3 Definitions

**Safeguarding:** This refers to protecting people from harm and abuse, and keeping people safe.

**Harm:** Any form of bullying, harassment, exploitation and abuse or other act that causes injury or suffering.

**Abuse:** For the purpose of this policy, any form of child or adult abuse, including sexual exploitation, sexual harassment and bullying will be referred to as "abuse".

**Vulnerable, Stigmatized and Marginalized Groups (VSMG):** SAATHII works with communities vulnerable to stigma, discrimination and marginalization based on gender, gender-identity, sexual orientation persons living with HIV, women, children, prisoners, caste-marginalized groups, and religious minorities.

**Child:** As per Indian law, child refers to any human who has not completed 18 years of age, and is considered to be a 'legal minor', incapable of giving informed consent.

**Safeguarding incident:** A safeguarding incident is an actually or alleged adverse event that results in, or risks, significant harm to SAATHII’s staff, consultants and volunteers, beneficiaries, partners, or other stakeholders who come into contact with SAATHII through its work. Safeguarding incidents include:

- Allegation of abusive behaviour made against a SAATHII employee or associated party that has led to a referral by the targeted individual or organization to and response from the police and/or the local authority
- Threat of harm to a SAATHII employee or associated party that is work-related, that has led to a referral to and response from the police and/or the local authority

## 2. Commitment to Safeguarding

### 2.1 Ethical Principles

SAATHII is committed to upholding the highest ethical standards in all our activities. We pledge to respect the dignity and rights of every individual, regardless of their health status, gender identity, age, legal status, caste, HIV/TB or other disease status, or religious beliefs. We will not tolerate any form of discrimination, harassment, or abuse.

### 2.2 Legal Framework

SAATHII is dedicated to complying with all relevant national laws and regulations concerning safeguarding, human rights, and child protection. Specifically, this includes the:

- Human Immunodeficiency Virus and Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (Prevention and Control) Act, 2017
- Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019
- Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPwD) Act, 2016
- Mental Healthcare Act, 2017
- Protection of Women from Sexual Harassment Act, 2013
- Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989
- Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012
- Additionally, SAATHII abides by the directives of the Supreme Court verdicts concerning transgender rights (National Legal Service Authority vs. Union of India and others, 2014) and decriminalisation of homosexuality (Navtej Singh Johar & Ors. v. Union of India thr. Secretary Ministry of Law and Justice, 2018).

### 2.3 Organizational Values and Existing Policies

SAATHII works to promote a culture that values safety, respect, diversity, and inclusion.. Existing policies that reflect these values policies for Child Protection, Whistle blowing, as well policies pertaining to the Data Protection, Internal Complaints Committee, Inclusive Restrooms, and Affirmative Action in Recruitment, all of which are available in the overall HR policy document.

Please see, for example:

[https://saathii.in/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/Child-Protection-Policy-SAATHII\\_V4.pdf](https://saathii.in/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/Child-Protection-Policy-SAATHII_V4.pdf)

[https://saathii.in/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/SAATHII\\_Whistle-Blower-Policy\\_2023.pdf](https://saathii.in/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/SAATHII_Whistle-Blower-Policy_2023.pdf)

### 3. Safeguarding Roles and Responsibilities

Every employee and associated party has the responsibility to have read and understood this safeguarding policy. SAATHII’s responsibility is to ensure the policy is clear and there is adequate and appropriate orientation for each level of employee or associated party. The following individuals within the organization have specific safeguarding responsibilities:

**Designated Safeguarding Lead from Management Committee:**

Dr. L. Ramakrishnan, Vice President  
LRamakrishnan@saathii.org

**Designated staff with responsibility for Safeguarding:**

Ms. H. Sudha Mercy Rachel, HR, Governance and Operations Manager [sudhamercy@saathii.org](mailto:sudhamercy@saathii.org)

Safeguarding concerns can also be sent to  
[safeguarding@saathii.org](mailto:safeguarding@saathii.org)

Members of the Management Committee, reporting to the Trustees and Chief Mentor, are responsible for ensuring that safeguarding policies and practices are implemented effectively. They will provide oversight, review the policy regularly, and allocate necessary resources promptly. They should also be aware of the diverse backgrounds and needs of our beneficiaries and stakeholders and interact with them respectfully. Our partners, beneficiaries, and the broader community have a role in safeguarding as well. They should report any incidents or concerns to SAATHII and help create an environment of trust and accountability.

### 4. Risk Assessment

At project inception and on an ongoing basis, SAATHII will assess and identify potential threats to the well-being of our staff, volunteers and other constituencies. These assessments will consider factors such as the diverse identities and backgrounds of our constituents, and their vulnerabilities to stigmatization and marginalization. Upon identifying risks, SAATHII will implement appropriate strategies to minimize these risks. This may include changes to programs, policies, and procedures. If these risks and mitigation strategies are not already included in the Risk Register, they will be added, as needed.

### 5. Training and Capacity Building

SAATHII will provide comprehensive training to all staff and volunteers on issues related to safeguarding, issues of marginalized groups, diversity, inclusion and related policies. Training will include identifying signs of abuse, appropriate responses, and understanding the unique challenges faced by stigmatized groups. SAATHII will continuously monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of our training programs, making necessary adjustments to improve our safeguarding efforts.

### 6. Reporting Mechanisms

## 6.1 Incident Reporting, Log and Risk Register

Individuals who suspect or experience any form of abuse, discrimination, or harm are encouraged to report it using the designated reporting mechanisms. Reports will be handled with sensitivity and confidentiality.

The designated safeguarding lead from the Management Committee maintains an online safeguarding incident log that is updated to reflect all safeguarding cases. This is stored in a Google Doc, and only the two staff with responsibilities for safeguarding have access to the spreadsheet.

The Incident Reporting form is at <https://tinyurl.com/saathii-incident-log>

This safeguarding incident log is referred to in SAATHII's risk register (Row 12, Safeguarding, Severity Category Extreme, Likelihood 2, Impact 5). It will be discussed during the routine review of risk register by the respective project teams, and will be used to reflect on vulnerabilities, mitigation, and notify law-enforcement authorities where necessary.

## 6.2 Whistleblowing

SAATHII will continue to implement its whistle blower protection policy to encourage staff and volunteers to report concerns without fear of reprisal. [https://saathii.in/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/SAATHII\\_Whistle-Blower-Policy\\_2023.pdf](https://saathii.in/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/SAATHII_Whistle-Blower-Policy_2023.pdf)

# 7 Investigation and Response

## 7.1 Investigation Procedure

SAATHII will establish a transparent and unbiased investigation procedure to address reported incidents. This may involve internal or external investigators, depending on the severity and nature of the incident. Victims of abuse or discrimination will be provided with appropriate support, including access to counselling, legal assistance, and medical care as needed.

## 7.2 Disciplinary Action

Individuals found responsible for abuse, discrimination, or harm will face disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment or volunteer status, and may be reported to the relevant authorities.

## 7.3 Reporting to Authorities

In cases of severe abuse or violation of the law, we will cooperate fully with law enforcement agencies and other relevant authorities. Issues of child abuse will be raised to the District Child Protection Officers, and violence against cis women (heterosexual, lesbian, bisexual) to the Women and Children Development authorities. Harassment of transgender and intersex individuals is addressed by the Transgender Rights Act. At present there is no specific law against abuse of cisgender gay and bisexual men, and this is a lacuna in the legal system.

## 8. Confidentiality and Data Protection

SAATHII will collect and store personal data in accordance with legal requirements, with a strong focus on data protection and security. The Safeguarding Incident log is only accessible to the designated leads, and information related to these incidents will be shared on a need-to-know basis with authorities, and with the utmost care for the privacy and safety of individuals involved.

## 9. Review and Continuous Improvement

This safeguarding policy will be reviewed at regular intervals to ensure its relevance and effectiveness. Any necessary updates will be made to align with evolving best practices and legal requirements. SAATHII is committed to learning and improving its safeguarding practices continually. SAATHII will seek feedback from beneficiaries, staff, and other stakeholders to enhance our commitment to safeguarding.

## 10. Conclusion

This safeguarding policy reflects SAATHII's unwavering commitment to safeguarding the well-being and dignity of all individuals associated with our organization, particularly those from stigmatized groups. We are committed to creating an environment that is safe, inclusive, and respectful, where every person can thrive without fear of harm or discrimination.

By implementing this policy, SAATHII reaffirms its core values of empathy, equality, justice, and transparency, striving to be a beacon of hope and support for those who need it most.

**Acknowledgments:** The policy draws on SAATHII's existing Human Resources policy and on AmplifyChange's guidance document *What does a good safeguarding policy look like?*

This safeguarding policy will be reviewed, approved and endorsed by the Management Committee when modified and/or when legislation changes.



Dr. L. Ramakrishnan

June 29, 2024

Signature, name and date of MC Member with Safeguarding Responsibility