



# Dealing with Threats, Risks & Safety

## SESSION TWO: IDENTIFICATION AND ANALYSIS OF SECURITY INCIDENTS

**Overview:** This is a process to identify and analyze incidents where women's security has been threatened. It enables a group to gather important information to help assess potential risks to them, their work and organizations.

**Purpose:** This session builds on the work of the **contextual analysis**, moving from an analysis of overall context to specifics. Identifying and analyzing incidents where women's security has been threatened provides important information for helping assess potential risks to them, their work and organizations. This information also contributes to building a data base and producing new knowledge about the scope of threats facing women -- details that can be used in education and advocacy efforts. Such incidents are defined as *any act or event in which someone is targeted because of their gender and activism, and which results in physical, material, psychological or moral harm to women and girls, their families, organizations and movements*. These incidents may occur in different realms of life -- in the home, workplace, civil society organizations/ movements, government and military entities or through other forces such as paramilitary groups, corporate interests, or religious fundamentalists.

**Credit:** Adapted by Marusia López Cruz and Valerie Miller, drawing on the Protection International manual "New Manual for Defenders of Human Rights" and our work with women activists in JASS Mesoamerica (including with IM-defenders) and JASS Southern Africa

**Time:** 3 hours (this can also be spread out over multiple sessions or make an ongoing activity – see note below)

**Materials and space needed:**

- 8 x 11 colored cards
- Markers
- Masking tape
- Three flip charts
- A created timeline (last 12-18 months) on a wall on which to post security incidents.





### Process:

**Facilitation note:** *There are multiple ways to approach this activity. Doing it all at once can be overwhelming and even disempowering so you will probably want to break it up. In a 4 - 5-day workshop, you might set aside different times in the first two days to fill out separate cards so the analysis is broken up. That way it doesn't seem so overpowering and people can use the final days to process and apply the information and analysis to the other steps in the overall risk analysis process. In an organizational setting where you have more time, you can do the initial review of security incidents to get a sense of past patterns and then take time every week or so to document and discuss any current incidents and plan accordingly. Activists and organizations incorporate this process into their everyday thinking so they can be better prepared to respond to changing dynamics and threats. The process described here is best for a workshop and will need to be adapted to other settings.*

### Opening:

- Explain purpose and process of session.
- Introduce and define the idea of “security incidents”, including the realms in which they may occur
- Ask group to quickly brainstorm some examples of threats they have encountered. See examples below.

**Facilitation Note:** *the following provides some examples from other women's experiences. Depending on the group responses, you may want to add some of these to deepen their analysis and discussion.*

### Examples of Security Incidents based on gender discrimination:

- *Threats from relatives or spouses to withdraw their affection or to limit access to children if women continue their human rights and justice work.*
- *Sexual harassment by police and security forces – touching and hitting intimate parts of women's bodies during and after protest marches; cases of rape while in custody*
- *Gossip and rumors accusing women of 'inappropriate' sexual behavior – being lesbians, whores, promiscuous – this can happen within a community, in the media or online.*
- *Slander campaigns calling activists bad mothers, child killers, terrorists, etc.*
- *Death threats and intimidation by thugs associated with government or economic interests, both national and international*
- *Organizations hostile to female leadership*



- *Sexual harassment and bullying within civil society organizations -- not holding the perpetrators accountable*
- *Officials of the justice system preventing women activists and human rights defenders from carrying out their work, saying women are not fit or competent for such responsibilities.*

**Individually:**

Have people name 2 - 3 significant security threats or actual acts of violence carried out against them (and/or colleagues in their organization) over the last 6 - 12 months as a result of their work and activism on behalf of equality and justice. Remind them these may be products of gender violence and discrimination in their home, workplace, government entities, their own organizations and movements, or due to other people and interests opposed to their work etc. For each incident, have everyone record the following information on large colored cards of paper, one card per incident.

- What was the concrete threat or action against you? Describe in one or two words, write in caps at top of card.
- Where and when did it occur?
- Who was involved? Who do you believe was behind the threat?
- Can you verify/prove what occurred?
- What were its effects on you, your family, community and organization - what harm/damage did it produce?
- How did you/family/your organization respond? Who supported you? How?
- How would you categorize the seriousness of the incident: high, medium, low:
  - *High: produced permanent harm that is impossible to overcome*
  - *Medium: produced harm that can be overcome in a long timeframe*
  - *Low: produced harm that can be overcome in a short timeframe*

**In plenary:**

- Once completed, have everyone place their cards on a timeline.
- Have the group look at the timeline together and notice any patterns - types of threats, timing of threats, intensity of incidents, etc.

**Facilitation note:** *There may be a concentration of cards around certain moments on the timeline. This should be probed with the group to find out what contextual factors were affecting these dynamics. Depending on your goals, time and context, you may just want to get an overview of these incidents - for example, in the case of a workshop setting, you could ask people to choose one incident to explain and do the overall analysis based on a sampling of incidents. If you are*



doing this within an organization, you may want to structure this exercise in a way that allows you to go into greater depth. Similarly, if you are working with a particular woman in a high risk

context, you will need to accompany her in this analysis to track the gamut of threats and devise strategies in response.

- Ask individuals to describe the action or threat briefly, including the actors involved and then how they categorize it (high, medium, low) and why? As facilitator, record the basic information on the following chart.

**Facilitation note:** It's probably best to have three flip charts so that you can dedicate a sheet of paper to each level. You could also use this chart to begin an in depth discussion on strategies by adding a third column to describe how people addressed the threats and what they think worked or didn't work.

Level of seriousness	Security Incident: What was it? Who was involved
High	
Medium	
Low	

- After filling out the chart, ask a range questions to probe further. Depending on your purposes, these could include:
  - What insights do you draw from this chart – How do you assess the impact of these incidents of discrimination and threat on your lives?
  - What common threats and experiences of discrimination and violence do you face? And who are the main actors and institutions at the core of these common threats?
  - What strategies have you used to confront the threats? Which ones have seemed to have work, which not? What does that suggestion going forward?
  - How do you feel after finishing this exercise?

**Wrap up:** Summarize and highlight major points you want to emphasize, clear up any misunderstandings, provide any new information that will deepen people's analysis, and pay special attention to the group's emotional state.

**Facilitator Note:** Talking about the violence and threats people have experienced can be very painful, difficult and traumatic. At the same time, recognizing how people have responded to such violence and worked to challenge those responsible can be inspiring and empowering. Whatever the case, this session can generate strong emotions. It's important to give people the space to feel



*sad as well as to share and gain a sense of their own power and potential. Tears are common. Attending to self-care and emotional support during these sessions is extremely important – from*

*shared food, to calming breathwork, to song, to movement (see self-care activities in our **Integral Protection/HMB** pack).*

*It is advisable, however, to be prepared in case someone has a serious reaction or breakdown. It is important to have another facilitator or resource person present with expertise in this type of crisis situation during the session. It is imperative that you do not continue with the threat and risk analysis until you can attend to the emotional needs of the group. You may have to consider providing professional psychological support to individuals with deeper scars.*