

Root Causes of Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Sexual Harassment (SEAH)

There is a distinction between the “Root Causes” and “Vulnerability and Risk Factors” of SEAH.



Vulnerability and Risk Factors refer to specific factors in an individual’s environment that increase their risk of experiencing SEAH. For example, a lack of secure private accommodation may place women at higher risk of SEAH because it is easier for perpetrators to enter these spaces.

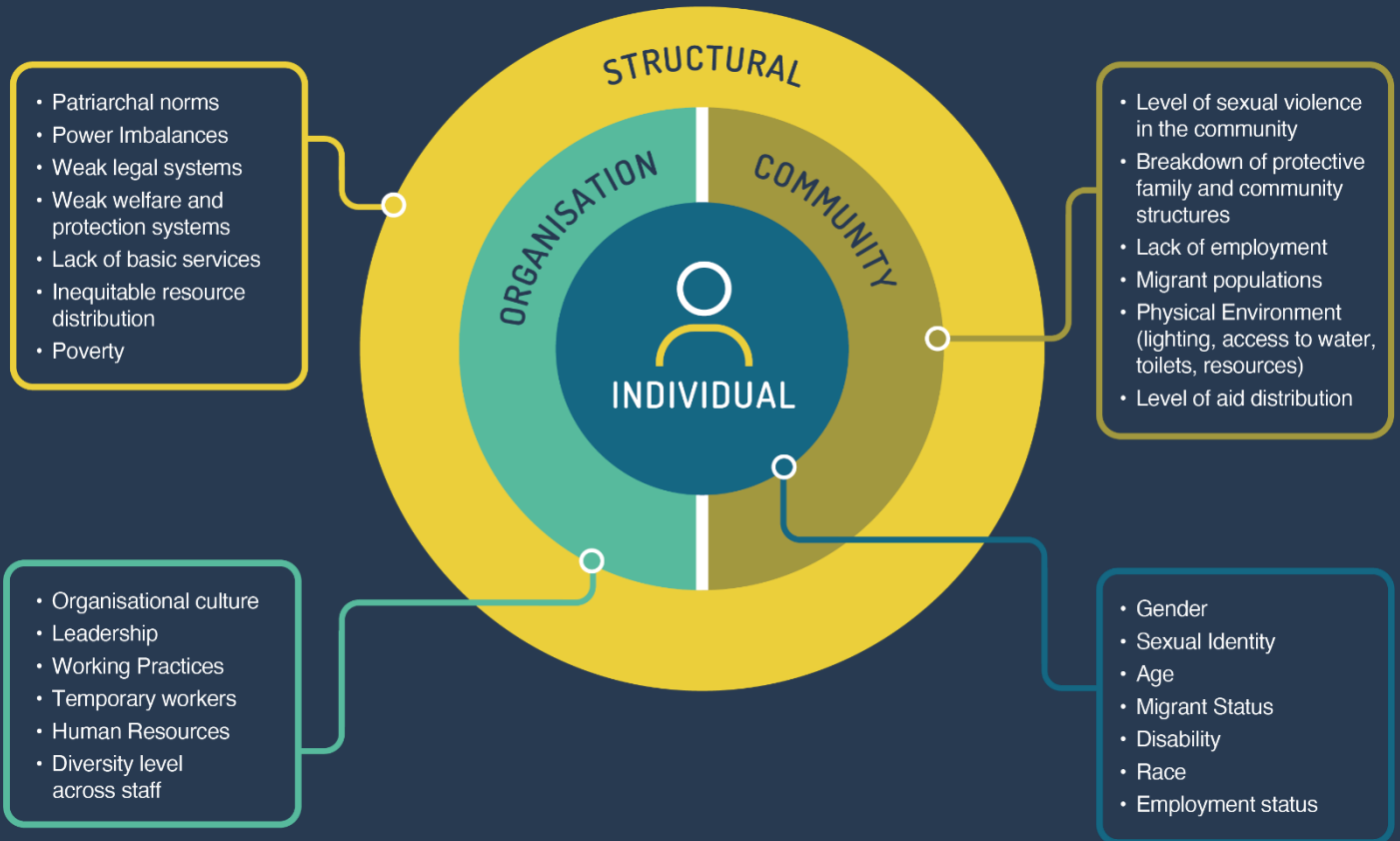
Root Causes, in contrast, refer to factors that create power imbalances that enable perpetrators to commit SEAH with impunity. For example, an individual may be at a higher risk of SEAH if they are reliant on aid distribution to meet their basic needs. The factors that contribute to this imbalance of power fall into two main areas:



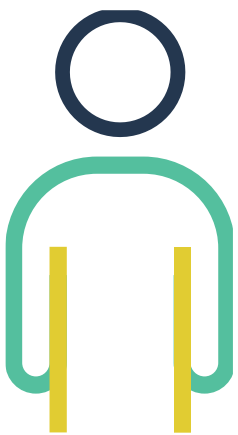
1. Deep rooted, unequal and harmful cultural and social norms, which are used to cause harm to or exclude individuals or groups from society and power. These norms can often lead to discrimination on the basis of a person’s identity or characteristics such as sex, gender and gender identity, sexuality, disability, race or religion.

2. Inequitable distribution of resources. Those in power control the distribution of resources. Individuals can abuse their power to withhold vital resources from women and girls in return for “sexual favours”. These resources include but are not limited to: food, shelter, money, and decision-making.





Risk Factors and Root Causes of SEAH: At individual, community, organisation and Structural level



An individual exists within a wider environment and society. Factors which increase the risk of SEAH exist at each level (structural, community, organisation, individual), and are often underpinned by social norms.

The interaction between an individual's identity and the social norms in their surrounding environment can be critical in determining the distribution of and access to power.

Issues of power and privilege are at the root of all forms of SEAH. The groups identified as most vulnerable and at risk of SEAH are overwhelmingly those who hold less power and privilege in their context. Societal, and organisational, norms which exclude people based on their sex, gender, gender identity, race, class, sexuality and ethnicity play into a culture of impunity where these types of behaviour are far too common.

Within the aid sector, there are power inequalities which place individual community members and aid workers at risk. In order to address SEAH in the aid sector we must recognise and challenge these root causes and work together to establish new norms.

For more information on this subject please see our [Evidence Digest on Root Causes](#) and our resources on [Abusing Power](#).