

Sexual Assault Program Frequently Asked Questions

The Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) section is intended to help Peace Corps staff implement MS 243 and other policy and procedures related to the agency’s sexual assault program. The FAQ represents the advice and interpretation of the various offices at headquarters that oversee implementation of MS 243. The FAQ are guidelines rather than policy.

Staff should also be familiar with other FAQ, such as those provided for PST sessions related to sexual assault and CARS CMS, the agency’s case management system.

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Reporting and Notifications

1. Where can I find the phone numbers to report an incident, request assistance, etc.?

The phone numbers required for internal Peace Corps notifications are listed below. Many numbers are also provided in the Notifications Flowchart (See the MS 243 Procedures and Question 43 the end of this document). Most of the numbers are staffed 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Peace Corps agency-wide duty phone	+1-202-692-1470 (staffed 24/7)
Designated Security Specialist	+1-202-437-5159 (staffed 24/7)
Victim Advocacy	+1-202-409-2704 (staffed 24/7)
Medical Duty Officer (for medical emergencies)	+1-202-692-1028 (staffed 24/7)
General Counsel	+1-202-692-2150
Inspector General	+1-202-692-2915

2. If a Volunteer reports a sexual assault to a staff member who is not part of the designated staff team does this mean that the report is automatically a standard report?

No, if a Volunteer reports a sexual assault to a staff member who is not a member of the designated staff team (for example, a Duty Officer), that staff member must immediately report the assault to the post Peace Corps Medical Officer (PCMO). All reports should be first treated as a restricted report. The report does not automatically convert from restricted to standard. The report will only be converted to standard if 1) the Volunteer chooses standard reporting via the Volunteer Preference Form (VPF), 2) the agency believes there is a serious or imminent threat to health or safety of the Volunteer and the report must be converted to standard, or 3) there is a court order or statute requiring disclosure of Restricted Information. See the [MS 243 Procedures](#) section on confidentiality. See Annex XII for additional information on Agency Conversions.

3. Are there any consequences if staff do not inform designated staff about a reported incident?

All staff are obligated to report sexual assaults to the Peace Corps Medical Officer (PCMO) or other designated staff member if the PCMO is unavailable. The PCMO will contact the Safety and Security Manager (SSM) and Sexual Assault Response Liaison (SARL) and contact the Volunteer to explain the Peace Corps process including the types of reporting and support services available. Not reporting an incident to the PCMO is a failure to perform official duties, and may result in disciplinary action. Any disciplinary actions are dependent on the nature, extent, and result of the failure to report the incident (e.g., intentional not reporting or accidental not reporting, once or several times, etc.).

4. Is a Volunteer on Volunteer sexual assault automatically a standard report?

No. However, if designated staff believes there is a serious or imminent threat to the Volunteer or that the offender poses a threat to other Volunteers, the Safety and Security Manager (SSM) should immediately contact the Designated Security Specialist (+1-202-437-5159) to determine if the report must be converted. If staff do not perceive there is a serious or imminent threat, and the Volunteer has chosen a restricted report, then the incident must be handled as a restricted report.

5. What documentation is needed when a Volunteer wants to change from a restricted report to a standard report?

If possible, a Volunteer should amend their original Volunteer Preference Form (VPF) by checking Standard Report and providing a new date and signature for the conversion. A new VPF can be used if the original is not available at the time of conversion. The revised/new VPF showing the conversion should be uploaded into CARS CMS within 5 business days. See the CARS CMS Documentation Requirements for further information.

If a Volunteer chooses to convert to a standard report while not at post, a designated staff member may complete the VPF by phone, email, or text/SMS and the Volunteer can sign the VPF the next time the Volunteer is at post.

6. Is a Volunteer's signature always required on a Volunteer Preference Form (VPF)?

Yes. However, the Volunteer Preference Form (VPF) does not need to be signed immediately. If the Volunteer is not at the Peace Corps office or not with designated staff at the time of reporting, the VPF can be completed by designated staff and acknowledged by the Volunteer by phone, email, or text/SMS. When the Volunteer next comes to post, the Peace Corps Medical Officer (PCMO) will ask the Volunteer to sign the form.

The VPF should be uploaded into CARS CMS within 5 business days in accordance with the CARS CMS User Instructions.

7. How is the Sexual Assault Hotline (PCSAVES Helpline) different from filing a report?

A call to the sexual assault helpline is not the same as reporting a sexual assault. The Peace Corps Sexual Assault Volunteer Education and Support (PCSAVES) Helpline is an anonymous resource Volunteers can access for crisis support and information. Helpline staff do not ask for the Volunteer's name or post. The Helpline staff are not Peace Corps employees, but they are trained to provide information to a caller about Peace Corps resources and how to access support services. Helpline staff cannot make a referral for services, but they can help the Volunteer understand how to seek them out. See the PCSAVES FAQ for Volunteers for further information.

Volunteers can access the PCSAVES Helpline by online chat at pcsaveshelpline.org, by calling 001-408-844-HELP (4357). Volunteers can request that a PCSAVES crisis counselor call them back by requesting a call on the pcsaveshelpline.org webpage.

8. What should designated staff do if a Volunteer doesn't want to report an incident?

If a Volunteer discloses to Peace Corps staff that they have been sexually assaulted, this constitutes a report. The procedures should still be followed, including submission of a Consolidated Incident Reporting System (CIRS) report and all CARS CMS and PC Medics documentation. Staff should complete a restricted report for the incident and note that the Volunteer denied all services.

If a third party (someone other than the Volunteer Victim) reports to staff that the Volunteer has been sexually assaulted, the PCMO should be informed immediately and should initiate the response according to instructions about "Third Party Reporting" (see Question 13 below).

For every report of sexual assault, staff must explain that knowledge of a sexual assault requires Peace Corps to respond and take specific actions to provide for the health and safety of the Volunteer. Staff should explain our practices related to the confidentiality of the Volunteer's information and explain the services available. Staff should explain that the Volunteer's choices are important, and Peace Corps will make every effort to honor them if possible. Volunteers can decline services if they wish. Because a report is required (CIRS, CARS CMS, and PCMEDICS), staff must:

- 1) Make the Volunteer aware that staff will still need to complete a restricted report;
- 2) Emphasize the confidentiality of the Volunteer's information; and

- 3) Let the Volunteer know that they will be contacted by the Office of Victim Advocacy and receive an email invitation to complete the Response Quality Survey.

The SSM must complete a Serious or Imminent Threat Assessment (SITA) in accordance with the procedures. If there is the possibility of a serious or imminent threat, the Safety and Security Manager (SSM) should immediately contact the Designated Security Specialist (+1-202-437-5159) to determine if action, including a standard report, is required. A completed Serious or Imminent Threat Assessment (SITA) is required for all sexual assaults.

9. What should staff do if the Volunteer asks them not to share information about a sexual assault with other designated staff at post?

It is not unusual for a Volunteer to trust one staff member more than others, and for the Volunteer to be willing to share what happened with that staff member, but not other staff. It is important for the trusted staff member to be supportive and honest in working with the Volunteer to follow the Peace Corps procedures. See Question 8 in this document (What should designated staff do if a Volunteer doesn't want to report an incident).

The trusted staff member should tell the Volunteer that he/she understands the desire to keep things private. Staff should stress that access to information about sexual assaults, including the Volunteers name and other PII, is limited to those few staff with a legitimate need to know. In restricted reports, only Designated Staff are involved in responding and providing services. All information will be handled with the utmost discretion.

Staff may wish to show the Volunteer how the narrative for his/her CIRS report would look like. Seeing how the incident will be described, and that no names are included in the description, may help the Volunteer feel less nervous about reporting.

10. What should designated staff do if the Volunteer's situation meets the Peace Corps' definition of sexual assault, but the Volunteer does not want to call it that?

Because the agency wants to be trauma informed and victim-centered, staff should use the same language the Volunteer uses to describe the sexual assault incident. Staff should ask questions to sensitively determine whether an assault occurred and use caution if the Volunteer defines the incident differently. Designated staff might ask the Volunteer if he or she considers what happened to be a sexual assault, or even state that the incident they are describing meets the Peace Corps definition of sexual assault. Staff should not force a Volunteer to use the term "sexual assault" if the Volunteer chooses to discuss the incident using other words.

All medical, counseling, and advocacy services can be provided to a Volunteer without the Volunteer having to label the incident a sexual assault.

11. How and when should the Office of Inspector General (OIG) be notified about a report of sexual assault?

Reporting to OIG is dependent on the type of report (Restricted or Standard), whether the report originated from a third party, and whether or not the alleged offender is a Peace Corps Volunteer/Trainee, Staff member, or Contractor.

Standard Reports

- If the alleged offender is a Peace Corps Volunteer/trainee, staff member, contractor or consultant, The Office of Inspector General (OIG) must be immediately notified by the Country Director (CD). The Office of Inspector General (OIG) can be reached at +1-202-692-2915.
- If the offender is not a Peace Corps Volunteer/trainee, staff member, or contractor, then OIG does not need to be notified by post.

Restricted Reports

Restricted reports of sexual assault reported directly by the Victim (not originating from a third party) do not need to be reported to the OIG regardless of who the offender is.

Third Party Reports

If Post becomes aware of a sexual assault as a result of a Third Party Report (an allegation made by anyone other than the Victim), post should follow the guidelines and Third Party Notification Chart in the Procedures.

Under those procedures, staff notifies OIG of the sexual assault only if the offender is a Peace Corps Volunteer/trainee, staff member, or contractor, and does so after the PCMO has contacted the Volunteer. This notification to OIG must occur (when initially revealed by a third party and when the accused person is a PCVT, staff member, or contractor) even if the Victim elects a Restricted Report. If the Volunteer in question confirms that she is a Victim, then Post should also follow the typical MS 243 protocols for responding to a sexual assault.

See question 13 below for more information about Third Party Reporting.

Note that OIG does have access to all information contained in both restricted and Standard Reports, but will not initiate an investigation of a sexual assault that is the subject of a Restricted Report unless it is converted to a Standard Report.

12. What information must be shared with embassy staff? (When should a Country Director notify a Regional Security Officer (RSO) of a sexual assault?)

The Peace Corps must notify the Regional Security Officer (RSO) when a Volunteer or trainee is a victim of a serious crime. With regard to sexual assaults, the Peace Corps is responsible for notifying the RSO

when the sexual assault is first reported. We are not obligated to provide additional information unless the RSO requests it. In providing any additional information, Peace Corps staff members are legally obligated to limit the amount of information shared. Unless assistance is needed, information about a sexual assault should not be provided to anyone except an RSO.

If the Volunteer victim chooses a restricted report, the Country Director (CD) should immediately notify a Regional Security Officer (RSO) at the U.S. embassy of the assault. The CD may only share the *type of assault* (i.e., rape, aggravated sexual Assault or non-aggravated sexual assault) and *category* of the location of the sexual assault (e.g., residence, local establishment, public transit, etc.) with the RSO. The date or general timeframe may also be shared. Because the Kate Puzey Act limits the amount of information CDs can share related to sexual assaults, CDs should not share any personally identifiable information (PII) related to a restricted report. The Consolidated Incident Reporting System (CIRS) does not send automated notifications to RSOs related to restricted reports. CDs must determine how RSOs wish to be notified related to restricted reports.

Whenever a standard report is made for a rape or aggravated sexual assault, or when a standard non-aggravated sexual assault is reported *and* post feels that there are ongoing security concerns that require RSO support, the CD should immediately notify a RSO with a phone call (or other means if agreed upon by the CD and RSO). For all other standard, non-aggravated sexual assault cases, RSOs will be notified via the CIRS automated system. With a standard report, if the RSO requests additional information, the CD can provide basic, categorical information about the offender (e.g., a host country national).

CDs wishing assistance in working with the RSO or other embassy staff related to sexual assaults should contact their Peace Corps Safety and Security Officer (PCSSO) or the Designated Security Specialists in the Office of Safety and Security (+1-202-437-5159). In the special case where the alleged offender is an embassy staff person or someone affiliated with the embassy, the CD may also wish to consult with the Office of General Counsel.

Please refer to the Peace Corps manual sections related to confidentiality for additional information.

	Notification of an RSO by a CD or designee				
Incident Type	Sexual Assault				Other Serious Incidents
Report	Restricted		Standard		N/A
Classification	Rape or Aggravated Sexual Assault	Non-Aggravated Sexual Assault	Rape or Aggravated Sexual Assault	Non-Aggravated Sexual Assault	Death, Kidnapping, Robbery, Aggravated Physical Assault

Action	Phone call or email as determined by RSO and CD	Email or as determined by RSO and CD	CIRS plus phone call or email as determined by RSO and CD	CIRS	CIRS plus phone call or email as determined by RSO and CD
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Third Party Allegations of Sexual Assault

13. What is the process if someone other than a Volunteer reports a sexual assault?

At times, the Peace Corps might receive allegations of sexual assault by an individual other than the Volunteer victim, such as another Volunteer, host family member, bystander, neighbor or local official (i.e., a “third party”). Such “third party reports” must be handled in accordance with the Third Party Reporting section of the MS 243 Procedures, and the Third Party Notification Chart in the Procedures. In those cases, the PCMO should reach out to the identified Volunteer victim as soon as possible and ask whether an assault occurred. The PCMO should also inform other members of the designated team at post that a third party allegation has been made and that the PCMO will speak with the Volunteer.

Peace Corps must notify OIG of the Third Party Report if the alleged perpetrator has been identified as another Volunteer/trainee, staff or contractor. This notification should occur after the Volunteer victim is contacted by Designated Staff, and must happen regardless of whether the Volunteer victim confirms or denies that an assault occurred, or elects a Restricted or Standard Report.

- If the Volunteer victim confirms that a sexual assault occurred and elects a Restricted Report, this notification to OIG is made by the DSS.
- If the Volunteer Victim confirms that a sexual assault occurred and elects a Standard Report, this notification to OIG is made by the DSS.
- If the Volunteer victim denies that an assault occurred, this notification to OIG is made by the CD.

The Third Party Reporting Procedures cannot begin until the victim’s identity is known by Peace Corps.

Sexual Misconduct

14. Is sexual misconduct the same as a sexual assault?

No. Sexual misconduct is a broader category of behaviors than sexual assault. For example, stalking or sexual exploitation is sexual misconduct, but not a sexual assault. Volunteer on Volunteer sexual misconduct, whether it is a sexual assault or not, should be handled using IPS 1-12: Volunteer Sexual Misconduct and the accompanying Procedures, and reported to the Office of Inspector General (OIG) to the extent required by MS 861 Office of Inspector General. If the sexual misconduct involves a sexual assault, MS 243 applies as well.

NOTE: IPS 1-12 is under review and will be revised in 2018.

CARS CMS

15. What is CARS CMS?

The Coordinated Agency Response System (CARS) Case Management System (CMS) is the centralized database used to manage crimes, vehicular accidents, and other security incidents. CARS CMS enables the agency to better respond to Volunteer victims, communicate across offices, track services provided, and monitor and evaluate the response processes. The CARS CMS has different levels of access to ensure that personally identifiable information (PII) and other restricted information is not shared with staff who do not have a specific need-to-know that information. Data entered into the CARS CMS becomes part of the agency's official records.

More information about the CARS CMS, including the User Guide and related training and communications resources, can be found on the CARS CMS Learning Portal:

<https://in.peacecorps.gov/LC/CRM/Pages/CARS-CMS.aspx>

16. Are staff required to use the CARS CMS?

Yes. As of April 18, 2016, all staff are required to use CARS CMS to document the support provided to Volunteers who are Victims of crime. [CARS CMS Documentation Requirements](#) are attached to the MS 243 Procedures.

17. Is CARS CMS just for sexual assaults?

No. CARS CMS is used for documenting support provided for all types of incidents documented in the Consolidated Incident Reporting System (CIRS), not just sexual assaults. See the CARS CMS Documentation Requirements for more information about what documentation is required.

Sexual Assault Response Liaisons (SARLs)

18. What do we do if a Volunteer does not request SARL assistance?

SARLs are members of the Designated Staff team, but they provide assistance only when requested or accepted by a Volunteer. SARL services should be offered to all Volunteers who are Victims of sexual assault. Staff may recommend that a Volunteer request a SARL if a PCMO or SSM is unable to assist in a given situation or if designated staff think that the SARL might be better prepared to handle a request. For example, if a Volunteer is arriving from site and a PCMO or SSM is unable to meet her, they may recommend that a SARL accompany a Peace Corps driver. Designated staff may ask a Volunteer if she wants SARL assistance at different times during the in-country process.

19. What can a SARL know about a restricted report?

SARLs should be notified of all reports of a sexual assault. Under restricted reporting, if SARL services are not requested, the SARL will only be told the same information that a Country Director is told. For example, "A [rape/aggravated sexual assault/sexual assault] has occurred and is being treated as a restricted report. The Volunteer has not requested the services of a SARL. I will keep you posted on the progress of the case." SARLs are notified of all assaults so they can prepare for the possibility of assistance being requested.

If a SARL is requested, the SARL should have access to all relevant information that is not medically confidential. Note, while both SARLs may be notified that a restricted report occurred (no PII), only the SARL that is on-duty and who will perform services should receive restricted information (restricted information includes PII). If a SARL is providing services to the Volunteer, then the SARL should participate in any Coordinated Agency Response System (CARS) calls related to that Volunteer.

Safety and Security

20. Should a Safety and Security Manager (SSM) do a SITA or a PIA?

The SSM and PCMO must conduct a Serious or Imminent Threat Assessment (SITA) after every sexual assault, even if a Volunteer is not going back to that location. The SITA requires the signature of both the SSM and the PCMO, and the CIRS number must be written on the form when the number becomes available. The SITA must be uploaded to CARS CMS.

A Post-Incident Assessment (PIA) is required for aggravated sexual assaults, rapes, and any other time there is ongoing concern safety and security. Requirements for conducting the PIA are outlined in the [MS 243 Procedures for Responding to a Sexual Assault](#). See also MS 270 and SSI 202.

21. What should Designated Staff do if someone other than the Volunteer or Peace Corps contacts the police (e.g., a counterpart or host family calls the police)?

If the Volunteer wishes to file a restricted report and does not wish to participate in a law enforcement investigation, Designated Staff should inform the law enforcement of the Volunteer's wishes. If the police will not stop the investigation, Designated Staff should work with Office of Victim Advocacy (OVA) and the Designated Security Specialist at headquarters (who will work with the Office of the General Counsel) to ensure the Volunteer understands the impact the investigation will have on their report and outline the options available. If required by local law, Peace Corps staff should work in a collaborative fashion with police investigators. The SSM should consult with the Designated Security Specialist (+1-202-437-5159) and Office of the General Counsel (+1-202-692-1211) for guidance.

22. What is a safety plan?

A safety plan is a plan developed by a Volunteer with staff to help address any immediate and ongoing threats to the personal safety and well-being of a Volunteer following a security incident. Safety plan conversations are centered on the Volunteer. The plan must outline steps that both the Volunteer and Peace Corps staff can take to assist the Volunteer in managing the Volunteer's ongoing safety. Safety planning can be for any incident, not just sexual assault. A safety plan is not a behavioral contract. Safety plans do not have to be written and Volunteers should not be asked to sign them or be disciplined for failing to adhere to a safety plan. See ANNEX V of the MS 243 Procedures.

Country Directors (in standard cases or any non-sexual assault incident) and headquarters staff may collaborate with the designated team to assist Volunteers with the creation of a safety plan. A safety plan does not need formal approval; however, the Volunteer and staff should be in agreement with the

general concepts and steps discussed (e.g., the importance of following specific rules/procedures or what to do if a risk arises).

23. What can a PCSSO be told about a sexual assault?

In both Standard and Restricted Reports, a Peace Corps Safety and Security Officer (PCSSO) can be given information on a need to know basis so that the PCSSO can fulfill their technical support role.

Information that is medically confidential should not be shared. A PCSSO can only be given PII if a Designated Security Specialist (DSS) in the Office of Safety and Security requests PCSSO consultation.

Health

24. What does a Volunteer need to decide/choose immediately after reporting a sexual assault?

If allowed under local law, a Volunteer must choose whether or not she or he wants a sexual assault forensic exam (SAFE) as soon as possible (normally within 3-5 days) in order to preserve evidence that could be used in prosecution. In some countries, law enforcement involvement may be required in order to get an official SAFE exam.

As soon as possible following a report of sexual assault, Designated Staff also should explain the services available to the Volunteer, explain standard and restricted reporting and ask if the Volunteer wants to report to law enforcement. Volunteers can request additional services at any time following an assault. Staff should use their best judgment in assessing when Volunteers are able to understand the information provided and make informed decisions.

Although a Volunteer does not have to choose standard or restricted reporting within a set time frame, staff should upload a Volunteer Preference Form (VPF) to the case management system within 5 business days of the incident being reported to post. If the Volunteer has not chosen the type of report they wish, the VPF should indicate that the report is restricted and that the Volunteer has not yet decided. When the Volunteer makes a decision, an updated VPF should be uploaded to the case management system.

25. Does a PCMO need to complete a physical examination for sexual assaults that are not rape or attempted rape (e.g., unwanted touching, grabs, gropes)?

No. If the Volunteer indicates that she or he is not injured in any way, and the PCMO agrees, a physical examination is not required. For every sexual assault, PCMOs should use their clinical judgment to determine if mental health screening (Section E of TG 540 Attachment D/E) is necessary and should ensure that the Volunteer's history of sexual assault (Section D) has been entered into PCMEDICS. If a comprehensive mental health exam is conducted, the PCMO should record the exam in PCMEDICS (and/or check the Mental Health exam box on Attachment H, Standing Orders).

Volunteers have the right to refuse treatment at any time, including a physical examination or a SAFE. If a Volunteer refuses an examination that the PCMO feels is necessary, the PCMO should reach out to an International Health Coordinator (IHC) through PCMEDICS or, when a quick response is needed, by calling +1-202-692-1028. What should post do with used SAFE kits?

If the assailant is another Volunteer, American citizen, or the assault occurred on US property, the Sexual Assault Forensic Examination (SAFE) kit should be processed with an OIG number and sent to headquarters in Washington, DC.

If the assailant is a host country national or third country national, then host country rules and regulations apply. Typically a SAFE kit would be kept by the provider and/or submitted to the legal system, not kept by Peace Corps. For further information, see Medical Technical Guidelines 540 and 542. PCMOs that require assistance should contact an International Health Coordinator (IHC) through PCMEDICS or, in an emergency, by calling +1-202-692-1028.

26. Is medical evacuation a Volunteer's right?

Yes. Volunteers who report a sexual assault are entitled to medical evacuation for treatment of their medical and/or mental health needs. The decision to medically evacuate a Volunteer must be made 1) after a comprehensive mental health evaluation by staff from the Counseling and Outreach Unit (COU), and/or 2) after consultation with Office of Medical Services staff to evaluate the Volunteer's physical complaints. The decision to medevac is a medical decision made by headquarters staff in the Office of Health Services (OHS) in conjunction with the Volunteer. PCMOs provide important insights and advice to headquarters staff in making this decision.

If a Volunteer desires a medical evacuation for a situation that OHS feels is not medically indicated (meaning there is no need for medical or mental health care), respite leave may be offered to provide the Volunteer with the appropriate rest and support needed to continue service. The determination to provide respite leave, like a medical evacuation, is made by COU and the Volunteer. See Question 29 for information on respite leave.

27. Does a medical evacuation increase the likelihood that a Volunteer will have to end their service?

Peace Corps wants Volunteers to have safe and productive period of service. Sometimes a Volunteer must leave their country of service to receive more advanced or more comprehensive care (therapy, medical treatment, etc.), which is the purpose of a medical evacuation. While on medical evacuation, staff from the Office of Health Services work, in conjunction with the medical providers and Volunteer to determine if continued Peace Corps service is in the best interest of the Volunteer and the Peace Corps.

After completion of the necessary course of care, most Volunteers have the opportunity to return and successfully complete their service. When Volunteers do not return to country following a medical evacuation, this is most often the preference of the Volunteer. In some cases, the medical or mental health needs are such that continued service is not in the best interest of all parties or the care needs extend past the designated period of time for the medical evacuation (45 days). In these instances, the decision of Medical Separation is made by the parties involved, allowing for the Volunteer to continue their plan for care and giving the opportunity for reinstatement of the Volunteer after the care needs have been met (within one year of the separation date).

28. What is respite leave?

Respite leave is leave that is granted, at the agency's expense, for Volunteers that experience a traumatic incident while in service. A Volunteer may ask a PCMO for respite leave within 30 days of reporting a traumatic event such as a sexual assault. The PCMO will refer the request to the Counseling and Outreach Unit (COU). The Office of Victim Advocacy (OVA) may also convey a Volunteer's request to a PCMO, or the COU clinician may propose respite leave when assessing the Volunteer's needs after a sexual assault.

COU will work with designated staff and the Volunteer to determine if respite leave is appropriate or whether a medical evacuation would be better. Volunteers or trainees who need medical or mental health care should receive a medevac, not respite leave.

When a request for respite leave is approved, the Volunteer will be issued a round-trip travel authorization and a ticket to the approved location of the respite leave. The location of the respite leave will be the Volunteer's Home of Record unless OHS/COU determines that another location to be more appropriate. Respite leave is granted for an amount of time not to exceed 14 days. The reason for respite leave, like a medevac, is restricted information that should not be shared with staff that do not have a specific need-to-know.

While on respite leave, a Volunteer or trainee may decide that it would be good to receive counseling or medical care. When this happens, the respite leave would be converted to a medical hold. A medical hold is appropriate because the immediate need developed while at home and the Volunteer did not go through the medical evacuation process. The medical hold clock (45 days maximum, with a possible extension if granted by the Associate Director of OHS) begins on the date respite leave is converted to a medical hold.

NOTE: Although a Volunteer can request and receive a conversion of respite leave to a medical hold (effectively a medevac), respite leave will not be granted at the end of a medevac or medical hold to extend or add an additional leave period. In other words, a Volunteer can decide they want respite leave and then request and receive additional support. A Volunteer cannot request and receive a medical evacuation and then request respite leave for the same traumatic event. See MS 245 for additional information on respite leave.

29. Can a PCMO submit a CIRS report?

Yes. Safety and security staff at post (i.e., the SSM, back up SSM or SSA) have the primary responsibility to write Consolidated Incident Reporting System (CIRS) reports. However, there are times when security staff are not present or able to submit the CIRS report or when the Peace Corps Medical Officer (PCMO) may have more information and/or is more involved than the SSM. In these cases, the PCMO may submit the CIRS report. CIRS reports must be submitted within three days after an incident is reported to post. If the PCMO does not have CIRS access, the CD or Regional Security Advisor (RSA) can submit a CIRS access request form to OCIO Help Desk for the PCMO.

30. Will Peace Corps provide counseling for sexual assault that occurred prior to a Volunteer's service?

Yes, the Counseling and Outreach Unit (COU) can assist a Volunteer related to issues that occurred prior to their Peace Corps service if those issues are impacting the Volunteer's ability to function. The PCMO should make a referral if the Volunteer needs COU assistance.

Monitoring and Evaluation

31. Is it mandatory for Volunteers to complete the Response Quality Survey (RQS)?

No. The Response Quality Survey (RQS) is an evaluation survey sent to every Volunteer that reports a sexual assault. The survey is optional and the individual responses from Volunteers are confidential. Volunteers can also skip questions that they do not wish to answer.

Peace Corps values the input of Volunteers in assessing the support provided and would like all Volunteers who report a sexual assault to complete the RQS. The Sexual Assault Risk Reduction and Response (SARRR) procedures are modified based on the input of Volunteers. Volunteer feedback related to their experience will help Peace Corps make changes to ensure the best response possible.

32. How can staff provide feedback on the MS 243 and the Sexual Assault Risk Reduction and Response Program?

Staff with specific ideas about improvements or concerns related to the Sexual Assault Risk Reduction and Response (SARRR) program, including MS 243 and other associated manual sections or medical technical guidelines, should share their thoughts with the Sexual Assault Risk Reduction and Response (SARRR) Program Director or with the evaluation staff responsible for conducting evaluation activities related to the Peace Corps' sexual assault activities. The evaluation staff for the sexual assault procedures are housed within the Office of Safety and Security and can be reached at evaluation2@peacecorps.gov.

Training

33. What should designated staff do if a trainee decides to opt-out of PST sexual assault training?

At least one week prior to the delivery of the PST sexual assault training modules (Sexual Assault Awareness & Impact; Sexual Assault Reporting & Response) training staff should announce that upcoming sexual assault training sessions include descriptions of sexual assaults. Staff will inform trainees of the date and time when these sessions will be delivered so they can make an informed decision about whether they would like to participate. Additionally, for all sexual assault trainings staff must provide a disclaimer at the beginning of the training:

We are here today to discuss a very difficult topic – sexual assault. We recognize this topic can be difficult for some people. We encourage you to participate to the extent you feel comfortable. Feel free to step out of the room if you need to and please don't make assumptions about your colleagues who might need a break from the session. If this brings up things you want to talk about, we encourage you to talk with the PCMO or SSM.

When a trainee opts out of a sexual assault training session or is triggered in such a way that the trainee needs to leave a training session, an assessment is required. Designated staff should:

- Check to see if the trainee is okay at that time, and

- Let the trainee know that they would like to follow-up at a later time, in a more private setting.

Before swearing in, the PCMO must meet with the trainee in a more private setting (i.e., not in the middle of the training facility with others around) to provide the key elements of the training and discuss how the information contributes to the trainee's safety during service. The PCMO will assess to see if a referral to COU for additional assessment is needed. If the trainee is struggling during training, a follow-up must be done by a COU staff member, not an in-country provider.

34. What should designated staff do if a trainee says that the sexual assault sessions are victim-blaming or heteronormative, or if they express other concerns about content?

If a trainee raises a concern related to SARRR training, first listen to understand the specific nature of the concern. You can remind them that Peace Corps' sexual assault PST training has been vetted by experts in the field of sexual assault to ensure that the content is victim-centered and victim sensitive. Let them know Peace Corps' is dedicated to continuous improvement of its training and welcomes feedback. Trainee(s) can email specific feedback related to SARRR training to sstrainings@peacecorps.gov. Peace Corps will address concerns related to SARRR training in a timely and appropriate manner."

35. What training is required for staff related to sexual assault?

All staff are required to receive annual training in sexual assault awareness and current policies and procedures for responding to sexual assault. Staff training related to sexual assault is conducted both online and in-person.

Staff at headquarters and post are required to complete two online trainings within 30 days of their entry on duty date. The two mandatory online trainings are: Sexual Assault Awareness and Victim Sensitivity *and* Sexual Assault Policies and Procedures. Both trainings can be found in [PC University](#). If staff have difficulty logging in to PC University, would like to check whether they have completed both online trainings, or to receive a list of those staff who have completed the training, they should email the learning management system administrator at pcuniversityti@peacecorps.gov. Staff at post and some headquarters offices have an additional mandatory requirement for annual refresher training. This training alternates between in-person and online (e.g., 2016 is in-person training delivered by Peace Corps Safety and Security Officers and 2017 will be online).

In addition to the two mandatory online trainings, PCMOs, SSMs and SARLs must also participate in an in-person training session and pass an associated post-test to become fully certified to work as designated staff. These sessions are typically held during Overseas Staff Training sessions or special trainings designed for SARLs.

All users of the agency's case management system (CARS CMS) must complete online training in order to get access to the system.

Other

36. How do I explain confidentiality as it relates to the Peace Corps response to sexual assault?

All reports, restricted and standard, are confidential. Under MS 243, confidentiality means that only those staff members with a specific need-to-know may receive PII or information about the assault. Confidentiality does *not* mean that no one will know.

Information about a sexual assault should always be handled in confidential manner even if that information is not restricted information. Information should not be shared with people that do not have a specific need-to-know.

The Services and Reporting Information Sheet for Volunteers has additional information about confidentiality and access to information that Volunteers may find helpful.

NOTE: Volunteers have the right to choose whether or not to disclose their personal information. All staff, designated and non-designated, must handle the Volunteer's sexual assault information in a confidential manner. If staff feel that the number of people or type of people a Volunteer is talking to about the assault might require conversion of a report from restricted to standard, designated staff should consult with the Designated Security Specialist (+1-202-437-5159) or Office of Victim Advocacy (+1-202-409-2704) to determine if the Office of General Counsel (OGC) should be contacted.

37. How do I explain the difference between sexual harassment, unwanted attention, and sexual assault to a Volunteer?

Harassment is offensive conduct that interferes or is intended to interfere with a Volunteer's performance or creates an intimidating, hostile, or offensive environment. Harassment may include being subjected to sexual, racial or gender based comments or questions that are intended to illicit or spark a response. Indecent exposure (e.g., "flashing" of genitals) is considered sexual harassment. In order to be classified as a sexual assault, an incident must involve physical contact or unwanted touching of the Volunteer by the offender. Sexual harassment that is committed by a Peace Corps Volunteer/trainee, staff member, contractor or consultant may be reported to the CD and the Office of Civil Rights and Diversity pursuant to MS 645.

Being the focus of attention is part of every Volunteer's daily life. Some of this attention may be welcome while other attention will be unwelcome. How a Volunteer perceives attention is highly personal. What one may experience as curiosity, others may experience as harassment. Examples of unwanted attention may include being stared at or asked the same questions repeatedly. Unwanted physical contact that is sexual in nature, such as grabbing breasts or buttocks, is a sexual assault, not unwanted attention or harassment.

NOTE: Stalking is repeated behavior directed at a Volunteer or trainee that causes them to fear for their safety; the safety of others and/or suffer substantial emotional distress. The major difference between unwanted attention, harassment and stalking is that stalking causes Volunteers to fear for their safety or suffer substantial emotional distress while unwanted attention and harassment typically do not. If, at any time, behavior directed at a Volunteer makes them feel threatened or intimidated, the Volunteer

should contact their SSM or another Peace Corps staff member they trust for support. See IPS 1-13 (MS 242) Stalking.

For further information about incident classifications, the [Consolidated Incident Reporting System \(CIRS\) guide](#) is available on the Peace Corps intranet.

38. How do I know when I should follow-up or check-in with a Volunteer?

PCMOs should refer to the medical technical guideline (TG 540) for medical follow-up requirements. Follow up by staff other than the PCMO is usually at the request or approval of the Volunteer and varies according to the nature of the incident, the Volunteer's preference, and staff work patterns. SSMs and SARLs should tell the Volunteer that they would like to follow-up with the Volunteer and ask when an appropriate time would be. Staff should ask the Volunteer when, how, and how often the Volunteer would like to be contacted (e.g., phone call next Monday only, phone call every Wednesday, etc.).

39. Does the Immunity Policy (MS 240) apply to issues other than sexual assault?

No, MS 240 is specific to instances of sexual assault. The Peace Corps will provide the Volunteer who is a victim of sexual assault, as well as any witnesses who provide information or assistance in relation to the sexual assault of a Volunteer, with immunity for policy violations related to the incident. The Immunity Policy applies to Volunteer actions at the time of the sexual assault. It does not provide the Volunteer with immunity from future policy violations or violations unrelated to the sexual assault.

Staff are discouraged from addressing policy violations in the immediately after any crime to avoid blaming Volunteers and additional mental upset. Policy violations can and should be addressed in a proper fashion and, when a crime is involved, in consultation with the appropriate headquarters staff.

40. Who has the final say in whether or not a Volunteer can continue their service?

Generally speaking, the Country Director has the authority to determine if a Volunteer may continue in service. When there are serious concerns about a Volunteer's health or safety, OHS and OSS in collaboration with the CD and other offices such as OVA, may also make the decision that a Volunteer cannot continue in service.

In any situations involving end of a Volunteer's service, the Volunteer's preference, through the Office of Victim Advocacy, should be given considerable weight throughout the decision making process. The final decision should be shared with the Volunteer in-person and in-writing. The Volunteer must be informed of their right to make a written appeal.

41. What services are available to RPCVs for sexual assaults that occurred during their service?

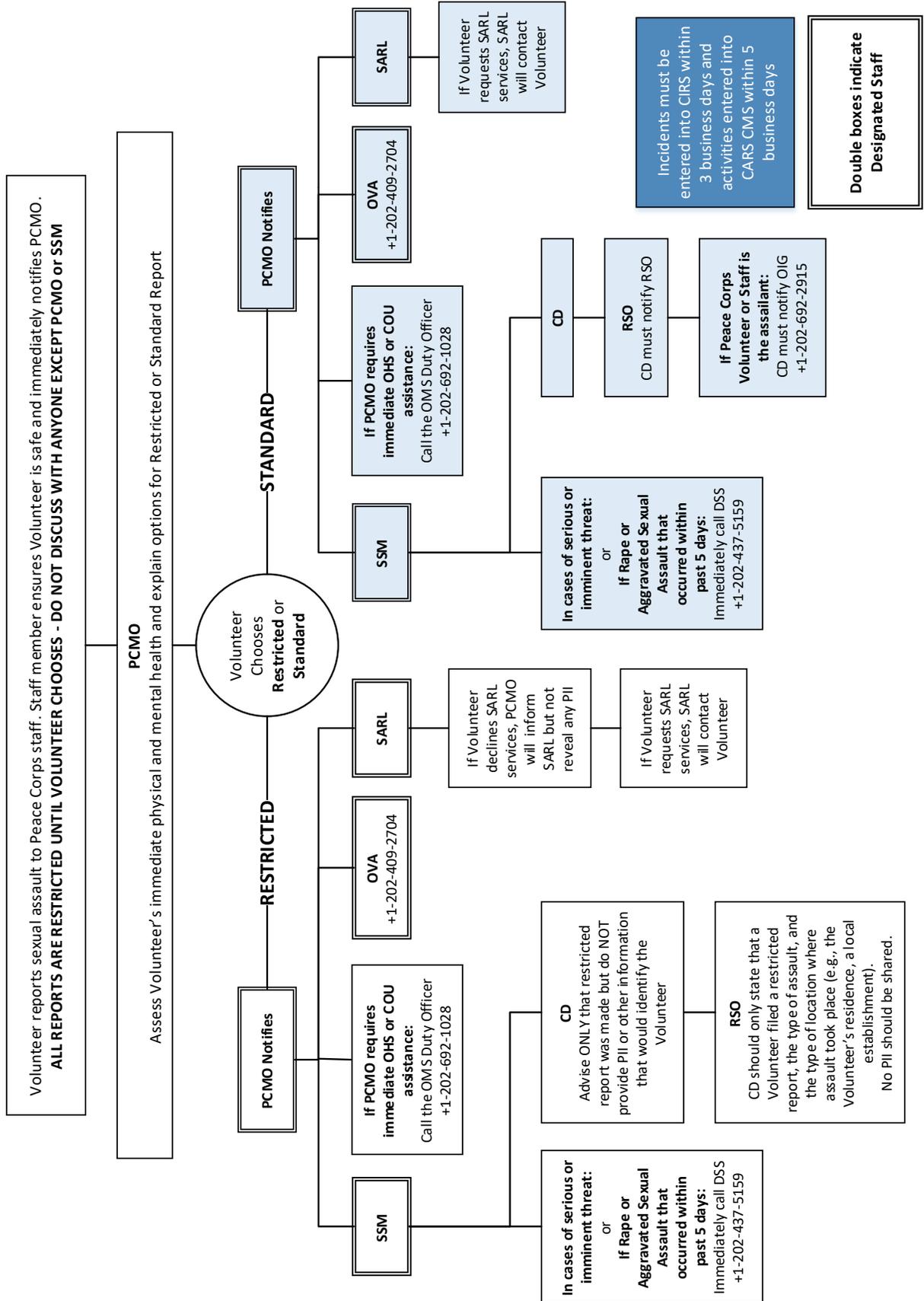
Please refer to Annex XIII which addresses services that are available to RPCVs.

Flowcharts

42. Notification Flowcharts – General and Third Party Allegations

The flowcharts are attached to the end of this document.

SEXUAL ASSAULT NOTIFICATION FLOW CHART



Third Party Allegations of Sexual Assault

A third party is someone other than the Volunteer victim or the perpetrator

Third party notifies a Peace Corps staff member that a Volunteer was sexually assaulted

Staff member immediately notifies PCMO

ALL REPORTS ARE RESTRICTED UNTIL VOLUNTEER CHOOSES –DO NOT DISCUSS WITH ANYONE EXCEPT PCMO OR SSM

PCMO contacts Volunteer

PCMO explains that someone has told Peace Corps that the Volunteer may have been assaulted

PCMO assesses Volunteer's immediate physical and mental health and explains the services and reporting options available

PCMO notifies SSM, and SARL

Volunteer confirms or denies the assault

Volunteer CONFIRMS assault occurred

PCMO or SSM notifies CD with all relevant information (PII is included)

Follow procedures
Volunteer chooses services and standard or restricted reporting

If the alleged perpetrator is another Volunteer, staff member or Peace Corps contractor.
Regardless of the PCV's selection, the Designated Security Specialist will notify OIG of the Third Party Report

If the alleged perpetrator is another Volunteer, staff member, or Peace Corps contractor.
CD notifies OIG