

**Tavistock & Portman Trust Research Ethics Committee (TREC)**

**FIELDWORK RISK ASSESSMENT FORM**

**Guidance Notes**

It is recognised that fieldwork can pose risks to the health and safety of individuals and have implications for the academic project that is being undertaken, as well as risks to the institution’s reputation. There are risks associated with any field work undertaken in one’s own country, as well as additional risks associated with field work abroad. In this category there can be greater or fewer risks depending on the country involved – its geographical features and political climate, as well as familiarity of the researcher with the locality.

From hereon it will be necessary for Schools where there is a likelihood of such work being conducted by staff, paid researchers and postgraduate students to utilise the Code contained in this document; to include health and safety and risk awareness in induction to provide necessary training; and to undertake risk assessment prior to fieldwork being undertaken.

The Code has been derived from two main sources (used by many other academic institutions in developing their own policy and protocols).

The Social Research Association Code of Practice for the Safety of Social Researchers, freely available on [http://www.the-sra.org.uk](http://www.the-sra.org.uk/)

Craig,C.; Corden, A., and Thornton, P. Safety in Social Research, Social Research Update, No 20 [www.soc.surrey.ac.uk/sru/SRU29.html](http://www.soc.surrey.ac.uk/sru/SRU29.html)

***Identifying Responsibilities***

For employers of researchers safety in fieldwork is an aspect of ‘duty of care’ enshrined in Health and Safety at work legislation. Institutions also have such a duty in relation to postgraduate students’ welfare in the field. In this context there is a duty to eliminate or minimise risk by ensuring that these are adequately assessed and control measures put in place. As safety is the dual responsibility of employer/employee and supervisor(s)/students, all parties will need to be aware of the code and its requirements. .

***Budgeting for Safety***

Ensuring the health and safety of fieldworkers can result in additional initial costs and this will impact on the funding of fieldwork and on institutional infrastructure costs. In the former this might entail such things as taking taxis, safe accommodation, ensuring communication (mobile phone or radio phone for example) while the latter will include insurance; training needs etc. However, it is also clear that any costs are necessary to ensure safety of staff and students, and that unplanned costs are not incurred at a later stage.

***Planning for Safety in Designing the Research***

This includes a consideration of the safety and potential risks in the following:

1. Choice of methods e.g. undertaking face to face interviews in risky sites or undertaking participant observation in particular situations.
2. Choice of interview or observation sites. These will vary for example according to degree of privacy/seclusion, home v public sites, environment surrounding interview/observation sites; time of day work undertaken; transport availability.
3. Staffing. In particular the risks of lone working need to be evaluated and if essential, control mechanisms put in place. Consider whether it is possible to work in teams or interview other people in household or setting at the same time.
4. Researcher skills involves assessing whether the researcher is well equipped in terms of attributes and experience to undertake the work. Are there issues of ‘race’ or gender or other personal characteristics to consider?
5. Negotiation of access to site or sample and sample or respondent recruitment. Consider alternatives to ‘cold-calling’ and preferably recruit initially via telephone, email or letter. Consider opportunities for assessing individuals and/or their circumstances.
6. Time management. It is important to consider that fieldwork can be tiring and sometimes stressful. A timetable should allow for sufficient rest, reflection and assessment. People are less alert to risks when they are tired and are better able to handle situations when they are alert.

Some of these areas of potential risk then require further assessment as the planning of fieldwork progresses.

***Setting up and Assessing Risk in the fieldwork site***

It is important to be as familiar as possible with the area, territory or specific site where the fieldwork is to be conducted. This might include prior visits and investigation. Things which might be important are:

* Whether there is reliable public transport.
* Access to a licensed taxi company.
* Could there be a local rendezvous or contact point?
* Are there local tensions and/or social divisions to be aware of?
* Assessing whether their might be hostility to researcher’s presence.
* What do local sources say about risks in the area? This might include checking with police.
* Look at routes, means of escape as well as where there are hubs of activity.

Risks can be minimised by preparing for the presence of a researcher in the area, by informing significant local community leaders, and/or statutory or community organisations.

Consider how you are going to conduct the administration of interviews or survey questionnaires and or sites for observation.

* You should get as much information as you can about potential respondents, their housing and living environments.
* Avoid cold-calling if at all possible, and assess situation thoroughly before hand. In some research projects it is possible to work in pairs or have backup. . If design permits, arrange interview times and venues in advance and let someone know the details of where you will be when. Telephoning in advance also allows some assessment of respondent and whether others will be at home.
* Plan routes in advance and mode of transport.
* Avoid looking out of place and dress inconspicuously, keeping valuable items out of sight.
* Think about potential risks in multi-storey buildings.
* If you are interviewing in households remain in communal rooms.
* Let interviewee know you have a schedule and that others know where you are.
* You should consider carrying a personal screech alarm and a mobile phone which you leave on.
* Carry identification that will provide authentication of your status/role.

***Conducting the Interview or Observation***

Despite taking precautions risk situations may arise during the course of the interview. Issues of ‘race’ gender, culture, and topic or questions pursued can provoke hostility. Training may be necessary in inter-personal skills and to enable researchers to handle threats.

In advance consider:

* Your awareness of cultural norms e.g. some cultures are hostile to lone females, others to lone males.
* Could any issues arise with the use of voice recorders or camera (where these are involved in the design)?
* What would be appropriate body language?
* How to keep the right social distance – neither over familiar or too detached.
* Carry some money and means of contact in case of emergencies.

***Risks to Respondents***

Many topics in social research interviews may provoke strong feelings or prompt anger. Researchers should be alert to any effects of the interview on respondents and have strategies to deal with them. Often strong feelings can be acknowledged and contained but very rarely it may be necessary to cease the interview and leave.

Some respondents are chosen because they have a particular characteristic or behaviours and it is important that any risks associated with these are assessed in advance

***Maintaining Contact***

It is important that some means of maintaining contact with others is established and that others know where you are and when. This might be a co-researcher; a project manager for larger projects; or supervisors in the case of post-graduate students. Members of your own household should also be kept informed and on a day to day basis this might be the main way of keeping contact and someone knowing where you are. You should thus have some means of telephoning in when you are entering and leaving the fieldwork site.

A log for available contacts which provides a schedule of appointments, interview times and venues should be prepared and this should be lodged with your supervisor/manager.

***Support and Debriefing after fieldwork***

It is helpful for researchers to have the opportunity to debrief with managers/supervisors after periods of fieldwork. This enables reflection on both the success of the planning and fieldwork itself and an assessment of whether there are issues which need to be dealt with.

If any incident occurs during fieldwork these need to be dealt with immediately. A full report needs to be written. If it is serious, such as a threat of violence, harassment or assault, then these need to be reported to appropriate personnel (including the police) who are responsible to health and welfare, and there needs to be available counselling or support for the victim.

Incident reporting and debriefing can help to ensure that health and safety codes are adequate, and enable revision if necessary.

***Additional Risks for Fieldwork outside the UK***

**Those doing fieldwork abroad should also look at the guidelines provided by the international office on international travel and contact the relevant person re university insurance. You should ensure that you have met any requirements that are laid down in this guidance.**

Many of the risks outlined above will also apply to those undertaking fieldwork in other countries. But fieldwork abroad can often entail additional risks associated with the locality of the fieldwork, and/or the researchers lack of familiarity with the research setting.

Among the factors researchers need to consider are:

1. Obtaining adequate travel and medical insurance
2. Having the correct health precautions- injections, malaria prevention etc and whether knowledge of first aid would be advisable.
3. Do they have appropriate language skills?
4. Will they have to encounter any hazardous terrain and if so what equipment is required?
5. Are they aware of what knowledge and skills are required for food preparation and obtaining good drinking water?
6. What documents are required?
7. Leave your Director of Studies, research or line manager with a record of next of kin/home GP contacts.
8. Evaluate local conditions as well as local codes of practice and standards as they might impinge of fieldwork
9. Have some means of communication and a logging of itineraries and return times. If lone working is involved what strategies will you use to ensure someone knows where you are at all times?
10. Evaluate means of travel as these can be more risky than at home (vetted drivers, maintenance of vehicles etc).
11. If you are driving ensure you are equipped to drive in the terrain, know what to do in case of breakdown; be aware of conditions after dark; and do not leave valuables in car.
12. Ensure you have suitable secure accommodation available.
13. Could your research be affected by the potential for severe weather conditions and do you know how to deal with them.
14. Do you know what to do should there be an emergency and/or if evacuation is required.

It should be noted that this document does not lay down all the potential risks for any one piece of fieldwork, and that researchers should consider what other ones could arise in their own specific project.

All researchers/ postgraduate students undertaking fieldwork should complete the Risk Assessment Proforma (attached).

***Ensuring Guidelines***

* Include guidelines in Induction programmes and in Staff and Postgraduate Handbooks.
* Have some centralised database of information sites in particular for those planning fieldwork abroad.
* Provide training in aspects of fieldwork planning, in strategies for minimising risk and also in dealing with threats and risks. For some of this it may be necessary to use outside facilitators who have built up experience and expertise (eg Suzie Lamplugh Trust).

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**Fieldwork Risk Assessment Audit**

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| Name:  | School: Tavistock & Portman NHS Foundation Trust  |
| Student number: | Supervisor / Director of Studies: |
| Thesis Title:  |
| Fieldwork location: Institutional setting  | Type of Fieldwork: Face-to-Face Interviews |
| Proposed dates or periods of Fieldwork:  |
| Potential hazards or risks: *(rate high medium or low)* |  |
| 1.  | 2. |
| 3. | 4. |
| 5.  | 6. |
| 7. | 8. |
| 9. | 10. |
| Potential Consequences for each hazard: *(please continue on a separate sheet if necessary)*  |
| Controls in place for each hazard in order of likely risk: *(please continue on a separate sheet if necessary)* |
| *By signing this document you are indicating that you have consulted the policy and have fully considered the risks.* Signature of Student: Date:  | I agree to the assessment of risk in relation to this project. Signature of Supervisor of Studies:Date:  |