



Health and Safety Office and Research and Enterprise Development Department

Guidance Note

Topic:	Health and Safety Guidance for Research undertaken in the Community
Date:	February 2011
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Legislation:	Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974 Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999
Status:	Guidance Note

1.0 Introduction

This guidance is aimed at minimising the risks to the health and safety of University researchers when engaged in research activities that primarily involve working directly with research participants, usually outside of University premises in private settings or environments unfamiliar to the researcher. This includes data collection, interviewing, surveys and observational studies.

This guidance is for anyone carrying out research under the auspices of the University, in particular those who are undertaking research that involves unaccompanied home visits or surveying the general public.

The guidance is designed to provide a structure for ensuring that a measured risk assessment is undertaken at a level that is appropriate to the proposed research. It is not prescriptive as the research it covers encompasses a wide variety of scenarios.

2.0 Responsibilities

Under the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974, the University as an employer has a duty to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare at work of all its employees. There is also contained in the legislation a general duty of care to protect students and members of the public.

The provision of a healthy and safe working environment within each Department and health and safety during activities organised by the Department is the responsibility of the Head of that Department. All staff are responsible for ensuring that they conduct their activities, and those activities over which they have control, in a manner and in accordance with the University's Health and Safety Policy, associated Codes of Practice and relevant statutory provisions. They must co-operate with their line manager and Head of Department so that responsibilities at their level can be discharged.

The Chief Investigator must therefore take responsibility for the health and safety of their research team in undertaking a specific research project. This includes responsibility under the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 for ensuring that a risk assessment is undertaken before a project commences and advising on safety guidance and procedures appropriate and specific to the project. The risk assessment is designed to identify potential hazards, assess risks and put appropriate control measures in place to mitigate those risks before the research commences. Where a project involves lone working or visiting people outside the University environment, this should be addressed in the risk assessment, preferably at the research design

stage to avoid having to change the research methods at a later date. A template proforma for risk assessment is provided as Appendix 2 with an example at Appendix 3.

Each person working on a project, including students, staff, and visiting researchers are responsible for ensuring they follow any project specific procedures and this guidance. They also have a responsibility for ensuring their own safety.

Those staff undertaking research in the community as part of their clinical or non-research professional duties within the NHS or Social Care should follow this guidance and abide by any NHS and/or Social Care policies applicable to their work.

3.0 Guidance

3.1 Potential Risks

Risks of undertaking research with close social interaction with the research participants can include:

- risk of physical threat or abuse
- risk of psychological trauma, as a result of actual or threatened violence or the nature of what is disclosed during the interaction
- risk of being in a compromising situation, in which there might be accusations of improper behaviour
- increased exposure to risks of everyday life and social interaction, such as road accidents and infectious illness
- risk of causing psychological or physical harm to others.

Certain topics of research may provoke strong reactions in research participants. Such topics might include: illness; disability; social exclusion; relationships; bereavement; poverty; criminality; addiction; unemployment; culture; race; gender. Any risk assessment must address these issues and ensure that both participants and researcher have a full understanding of the intent of the research, the participant has properly consented to the research, the researcher is as fully briefed as possible about a research participant, expectations of the researcher and the participant are properly managed, and the researcher has had appropriate training and experience for the nature of the research. More detailed guidance on scoping and assessing project specific risks is available at Appendix 1.

A risk assessment proforma is provided at Appendix 2 with an example in Appendix 3. The control measures to mitigate risk need to be properly defined and documented and should be in place before the research is allowed to commence.

3.2 Budget

In order to properly address safety issues on a project, appropriate specific funding for safety considerations should be built into a research proposal. Most funders will agree to such costs as long as they can be properly explained and justified as directly relevant to the research. Anticipating risks at the project design stage is therefore critical to ensuring appropriate safety measures are allowed for and implemented.

3.3 Planning

Safety should be given proper consideration in the design of the research. A risk assessment of the proposed project at the outset will allow some risk mitigation in: selecting appropriate research methods; appropriateness of other people in attendance; physical setting of an interview; timing of interviews; numbers of staff conducting interviews; choice of researchers (e.g. their experiences and training); recruitment methods. The project plan and risk assessment should consider strategies for handling potentially risky situations, such as appropriate training, personal alarms etc.

3.4 Training

Training should be factored into project timelines if required. As appropriate to the nature of the research and the role a person undertakes, training could be undertaken in risk assessment, communication skills (body language, personal space as well as verbal), interpersonal skills, handling difficult issues (e.g. sensitive issues, difficult situations which may arise such as: cultural, gender, socioeconomic issues), handling threats, abuse or compromising situations. The [University Staff Development Department](#) provides a number of training courses that may be appropriate.

3.5 Insurance

- The University holds legal liability insurance and this has been extended to indemnify staff or students if they are held liable for injury or damage occurring in the course of their University work or duties.
- The University maintains personal accident insurance to cover employees in the course of University business, including fieldwork. However, it is important to ensure the University Insurance Officer is advised of any particularly risky research in order to ensure the cover is adequate. However, the University does **NOT** provide personal accident insurance cover for students who must make any appropriate insurance arrangements as necessary.
- Travel insurance will be required for all University related overseas work and this can be obtained online at <http://www.bris.ac.uk/secretary/insurance/travel/guide.html>
- It is the responsibility of each employee to make sure they have adequate insurance for their own private cars when used for University business. Employees should take all steps to ensure their vehicle is insured for business by disclosing their use to their insurer.

3.6 University Support Mechanisms

The University has extensive and effective support mechanisms in place to support and help address issues that staff and students may face during or after any research project.

The staff support systems are available at;

<http://www.bris.ac.uk/pwe/supporting.html>

Students can access support from the following link;

<https://www.ubu.org.uk/support>

Other related University policies and advice:

- University of Bristol Health and Safety Organisation
<http://www.bristol.ac.uk/safety/policy/organisation/safetyorganisation.doc>
- Student Placement Policy
www.bris.ac.uk/safety/guidance/studentplacement.doc
- Risk Assessment Code of Practice
<http://www.bristol.ac.uk/safety/policy/cop/riskassessmentcop.doc>
- Data Protection
<http://www.bristol.ac.uk/secretary/dataprotection/>
- Personal Safety at Work
<http://www.bristol.ac.uk/safety/policy/organisation/safetyorganisation.doc>
- Insurance
<http://www.bristol.ac.uk/secretary/insurance/>

Further reading:

The Social Research Association – Staying Safe

<http://www.the-sra.org.uk/guidelines.htm#safe>

Informed Consent

NHS: <http://www.nres.npsa.nhs.uk/rec-community/guidance/#InformedConsent>

Social Sciences: <http://www.nres.npsa.nhs.uk/rec-community/guidance/#InformedConsent>
<http://www.the-sra.org.uk/documents/pdfs/ethics03.pdf>

Appendix 1

Guidance for Completing a Risk Assessment*Undertaking fieldwork*

Researchers should ensure they take appropriate precautions to minimise risks in undertaking an interview and ensure that help is available at a level and timeliness that is appropriate to the risk. Before starting any project researchers must ask themselves whether the data can be obtained by any other way.

Maintaining contact

An essential part of mitigating risk in fieldwork research is to ensure the lines of communication between the researchers and the usual office base are kept open. The Chief Investigator and any researcher undertaking fieldwork should both ensure that there is a designated person who is fully briefed on the activity and clearly instructed on when and how to take action. An action plan should include specific visit details, schedules, prearranged call times, names and addresses of research participants, phone numbers, overnight accommodation details, what to do in the event of a change in plan, anything else relevant to the nature of the research. It is important to ensure that research participant confidential information is kept safe and balance this with the need to ensure the physical safety of the researchers. This can be achieved by using sealed envelopes etc as appropriate.

Whatever contact system is agreed by the Chief Investigator and the research team, it is important that it is properly communicated and that both the researcher and the designated person speak to each other regularly during a field trip e.g. between interviews, before and after travel, at the end of the day etc. Contingency planning in the event that communication is broken should also be addressed in this process, an Example Emergency Response Plan is given at Appendix 4.

Report all incidents

Incidents need to be dealt with straight away for the wellbeing of the researcher and any research participant. This may include reporting to the police, counselling, taking leave of absence from work, liaising with the appropriate personnel manager.

Any incidents must be reported to the Head of Department and the Departmental Safety Advisor using an accident report form available at <http://www.bristol.ac.uk/safety/safe/forms/accident.doc> Incidents that may give rise to an insurance claim on behalf of or against the University must also be reported to the University Insurance Officer.

Review

Debriefing after visits is recommended to allow researchers to talk through the emotional impact of any interviews, not just the research findings. It also allows the research team to reflect on their adherence to the safety guidelines and suggest improvements during the project and for future projects of a similar nature.

The risk assessment and safety guidance should be reviewed at the end of the research and good practice recorded for future projects and within the research findings. This information should also be disseminated, if appropriate, to colleagues and peers in similar research fields. It is recommended that the Chief Investigator conducts a review of the risk assessment periodically and annually as a minimum.


Overseas work

All offsite overseas work must comply with the regulatory requirements of the country in which it takes place and must include a thorough risk assessment and liaison with the University Insurance Officer to ensure that appropriate insurance is in place.

Things to consider, as appropriate to the nature of the research:

1. Try to obtain as much information in advance about the characteristics of selected participants, their housing and living circumstances.
2. Fieldworkers and at least one other member of the research team should have complete information on research visits e.g. contact details, schedules, overnight accommodation.
3. Agree code words with research team to signify when help is needed e.g. in case a conversation requesting assistance is being overheard.
4. Particularly risky research to be discussed with University Security Services and the University Insurance Officer.
5. Talk to the research participant on the phone in advance of a visit. Identify any specific requirements especially in respect of participants with limited physical ability, and if any other members of the household will be at home.
6. Ensure physical setting of research is appropriate for participant e.g. mobility issues, phobias, other medical conditions.
7. Make clear at the outset of interview that you have a schedule, arrange to be called when the interview should be closed, keep mobile on but put on silent or discreet setting – never turn it off.
8. Where research is high risk or the nature of a participant's condition may undermine the integrity of the results, consider accompanying staff.
9. [Proper informed consent](#) must be appropriately in place before the research commences. Information sheets to include, as appropriate, research purpose and methods, details on how findings will be reported, confidentiality, data protection, withdrawal from research, possible side effects and benefits, complaints etc.
10. Times and dates should be mutually convenient.
11. Contact/confirmation of visits should be in writing to avoid confusion.
12. Criminal Records Bureau/Independent Safeguarding Authority checks for research staff working with children or vulnerable adults must be in place. See <http://www.bristol.ac.uk/secretary/legal/>
13. Fieldwork site considerations: reliability of public transport; taxis; safety of car parking; local tensions that the researcher needs to be aware of; seeking police/local advice on working in the area; notifying the local police about the purpose and conduct of the research.
14. Consider arriving early to familiarise self with area, local amenities and public places, make self visible, plan escape routes, note location of phone boxes, parking, study maps etc.
15. For surveys and unarranged interviews with the public – study places, maps, timetables, local transport, taxi ranks and phone numbers etc in advance. Consider checking in at periodic intervals, shadowing, pre-arranged pick-ups/taxis etc.
16. Avoid unnecessary risks, e.g. waiting for a bus late at night, visiting late at night especially in perceived high risk areas.
17. Additional specific costs may include: taxis; risk assessment training; other project specific training; personal insurance; adequate insurance for researchers own cars when used for University business; additional staffing; hire cars; overnight accommodation; counselling for research into sensitive topics.
18. Never disclose your home number or address – carry University contact details with you.
19. Always take and show your University ID and issue appropriate temporary ID for contractors etc
20. Carry enough money to get home – but not too much. Have a phone card for payphone.
21. Dress inconspicuously and unprovocatively.
22. Keep equipment and valuable items hidden.


Appendix 2

 University of BRISTOL		University Of Bristol				
		Risk Assessment				
		Department:				
		Risk Assessment Completed by:			Date:	
Description and location of hazard	Who might be harmed	Existing Control Measures	A. Likely severity of injury (1 to 3)	B. Likely Occurrence (1 to 3)	Risk Rating (A) x (B)	Comments/Action

Score	3	2	1
Column A: Severity of Injury:	Major Injury or death	Injury requiring medical treatment	Minor or no injury
Column B: Likely Occurrence:	Regular exposure of several employees to hazard.	Occasional exposure of few employees.	Exposure to hazard very rare.

Risk Score	Response Times	Risk Score	Response Times
9	Immediate cessation of activity until interim controls are agreed and implemented	3&4	Review on change of process or if circumstances change. Provide additional training, supervision and monitoring.
6	Critically examine the areas of exposure in the process and agree timetable for completion of all agreed actions	<3	12 months review (date of next audit). No real changes in procedure required to reduce risk further

Appendix 3

		University Of Bristol				
		Risk Assessment				
		Department:				
		Risk Assessment Completed by:			Date:	
Description and location of hazard	Who might be harmed	Existing Control Measures	A. Likely severity of injury (1 to 3)	B. Likely Occurrence (1 to 3)	Risk Rating (A) x (B)	Comments/Action
Risk of physical threat or abuse	Researcher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning of research to minimise risks • Effective means of communication • If the visits are deemed to be high risk then researchers must not work alone • Dress appropriately • Emergency plan in place • * Staff training in confrontational situations 	3	1	3	
Risk of physiological trauma	Researcher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning of research to minimise risks • Effective means of communication • University support mechanisms • Use of consent forms • Staff training • * etc... 	2	1	2	
Driving	Researcher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compliance with Road Traffic legislation • Adequate insurance of car for business use • * etc... 	3	1	3	

Score	3	2	1
Column A: Severity of Injury:	Major Injury or death	Injury requiring medical treatment	Minor or no injury
Column B: Likely Occurrence:	Regular exposure of several employees to hazard.	Occasional exposure of few employees.	Exposure to hazard very rare.

Example Emergency Response Plan

