

Lone worker guidance for conducting research in the field

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1. Introduction

This guidance is designed to reflect good practice and aims to promote an awareness of the issues and risks encountered by staff and students who could either frequently or occasionally be classified as a 'Lone Worker' in the context of conducting research.

This guidance cannot cater for every situation and working environment but seeks to outline some of the measures that can be used to protect workers and reduce the risks associated with lone working. The guidance focuses on individuals who undertake research activities such as one-to-one interviews and focus groups, which may involve working off-site in unfamiliar surroundings (for example when visiting someone in their own home for the purposes of conducting research).

Whilst it is very important to raise awareness of the higher risks faced by lone workers, these should not be over-exaggerated as increased fear may have a detrimental impact upon individuals and therefore be counter-productive.

There are a number of dimensions to the risk that researchers may face when involved in close social interaction:

- 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;
- Risk of a disclosure or suspicion of a safeguarding issue.

The guidance covers:

- Clarifying responsibilities
- Budgeting for safety
- Planning for safety in research design
- Assessing risk
- Setting up fieldwork
- Interview precautions
- Maintaining contact
- Conduct of interviews
- Strategies for handling risk situations
- Debriefing and support after the event
- Making guidelines stick
- Resources

2. Clarifying responsibilities

DMU has a 'duty of care' towards their employees under the terms of the Health and Safety at Work Act, extended by the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations which are supported by a European Union Framework Directive. The European Directive provides a code covering elements of guidance such as:

- avoid risk altogether
- combat risks at source
- adapt work to the individual
- make sure employees understand what they need to do
- ensure that an understanding of risk is integrated within the organisation's overall policy framework.

2.1. Areas of Responsibility

Below are areas of priority and commitment towards creating a preventative risk environment by the Faculty, the Principal Investigators (PIs) and individual researchers.

2.1.1. The Faculty

Faculties are required to:

- Encourage staff to follow clear robust procedures to help identify potential risks and to deal with incidents when they occur;
- Take responsibility for, and support the need to operate systems, procedures and technology provided for staff's enhanced protection;
- Support the provision of good quality training of staff in order to prevent and manage violent situations, or to use procedures, systems or devices provided for their security and safety, to their best effect;
- Follow University procedures and mechanisms in order to support staff who have been subject to an abusive or violent incident;
- Provide a supportive pro-security culture for staff.

2.1.2. Principal Investigator (PI)/Academic Supervisor (AS)

The PI/AS is required to:

- Identify the risks associated with undertaking the research and ways in which these risks could be reduced;
- In consultation with the research team, develop appropriate procedures as necessary in line with the identified risks associated with undertaking the project;
- Consider the need for purchasing appropriate technology, for example mobile phones for off-site working, or purchase safety alarm devices, and ensure that all members of the research team are confident in using them;
- Encourage team members to share good practice, experiences and concerns;
- Provide clear instructions to the research team that they should not feel pressured into entering into lone working situations where they feel that their safety or the safety of their colleagues may be compromised.

2.1.3. Staff/Students Undertaking Research

Individual staff members (and students) undertaking research are required to:

- Follow the guidelines and procedures agreed with the PI/AS;
- Report any incidents, or potential risks to the PI/AS;
- Make use of any technology provided as appropriate and take responsibility for ensuring they know how to use it properly;
- Ensure they take responsibility for their own safety.

3. Budgeting for safety

All research proposals and funding agreements should include the costs of ensuring the safety of researchers working on the project. It may be helpful to distinguish infrastructure costs which are apportioned to all projects, from costs particular to the project.

Infrastructure costs might cover training on risk assessment, communication aids, personal or vehicle insurance cover, a named member of staff responsible for fieldwork safety, or staffing a fieldwork contact point. It will be important to clarify which of these costs fall to the employer and which are to be borne by the funder.

Project costs might include extra fieldwork time (working in pairs, providing a 'shadow' or reporting back to base), taxis or hired cars, appropriate overnight accommodation, special training and counselling for staff researching sensitive topics. These extra cost elements may need to be discussed with funders as the proposal is being drafted.

4. Planning for safety in research design

Researcher safety can be built into the design of all research proposals including:

Choice of interview site - consider whether home interviews are necessary for the research. Interviews in a public place may be acceptable and safer substitutes; for example, meeting a working person during the lunch break rather than at home in the evening.

Staffing - consider designs where it is possible to use pairs of researchers to conduct an interview, or to interview two members of the household simultaneously.

Choice of researchers - consider whether the research topic requires the recruitment of researchers with particular attributes or experience. PIs may have to decide against using existing staff if the content of the interview will arouse strong feelings or cause distress.

Recruitment methods - where possible, design methods of recruitment to allow for prior telephone contact. This provides an opportunity to assess the respondent and their circumstances.

Time-tabling - take account of the tiring effects of spells of intensive fieldwork. A more relaxed schedule may mean that researchers are more alert to risk and better able to handle incidents.

Reporting - ensure that lone workers inform someone at the office of a) where they are going; b) what time the data collection is due to commence; and c) what time it is expected to be completed.

Contact - where possible arrange to make a phone call when attending data collection as a lone worker and arrange a time to check in with the office once data collection is completed.

Any other aspects - any other aspects which may be pertinent to the research topic.

5. Assessing risk in the fieldwork site

Once the fieldwork site has been selected, try to reconnoitre the area before fieldwork starts. Questions to ask include:

- a) Is there reliable local public transport?
- b) Are reputable taxi firms easy to access?
- c) Is it safe to use private cars and leave them in the area?
- d) Is there a local rendezvous or contact point for researchers?
- e) Are there appropriately priced and comfortable hotels within easy reach?
- f) Are there local tensions to be aware of such as strong cultural, religious or racial divisions?
- g) What do local sources, such as the police, say about risks in the research territory?

It may be useful to prepare the ground by:

- Meeting local 'community leaders' to explain the research and gain their endorsement;
- Informing other significant local actors, such as statutory and community organisations in touch with potential interviewees;
- Notifying the local police in writing about the purpose and conduct of the research and asking for a contact telephone number.

5.1. Risk and respondents

The topics for discussion in many research interviews - for example, poverty, unemployment, relationship breakdown, social exclusion, bereavement and ill-health may provoke strong feelings in respondents. Some research involves people who have a history of violent behaviour or may have ongoing mental health conditions. If such characteristics are known in advance, the researcher and supervisor should be as fully briefed as possible on the risks involved and understand the precautions they need to undertake. This may involve contact with the relevant NHS clinical teams or via the NHS R & D teams of the relevant Trust and should be a feature within the ethics application.

Issues of race, culture and gender and other protected characteristics may impact significantly on the safety of researchers. Careful consideration of risk and safety in relation to race, culture, gender and gender identity (and their intersectionality) is required before any fieldwork can be considered. Researcher safety is a major component of doing ethical research, and you should be mindful of your own safety - both physical and emotional – alongside that of your research participants. Using gatekeepers within a community before doing fieldwork may be particularly pertinent if hostility to protected characteristics is a concern. Adherence to, observation of, and respect for local laws, guidelines and practices are essential for ensuring safety in a range of national and international contexts where the risks relating to identity may be more pronounced.

Lone female researchers are generally more vulnerable than lone males. More orthodox cultures may be hostile towards them. Certain racialized contexts may make the conduct of non-ethnically-matched interviewing more fraught than otherwise. Risk situations of these kinds may be avoided by contacting respondents in advance to ask about preferences and expectations.

Researchers who are gender and sexually diverse may be especially vulnerable when conducting research both internationally and in the UK. Researchers should be cognizant of the risks of the countries or territories they are visiting and the support that may be available to them. While most countries only explicitly outlaw overt actions, researchers should be aware that they may be denied fair treatment by authorities simply, for instance, for being an LGBTQ+ person or for researching LGBTQ+ groups or LGBTQ+ rights, regardless of their own sexual or gender identity, and may be subject to arbitrary punishment.

6. For UK government travel advice, see: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/lesbian-gay-bisexual-and-transgender-foreign-travel-advice> , for a comparative overview of

international safety of LGBT persons, see: <https://www.asherfergusson.com/lgbtq-travel-safety/>. Setting up fieldwork

Wherever possible, interviewers should try to obtain prior information about the characteristics of selected respondents, their housing and living environments.

- Study a map of the area for clues as to its character. Look for schools, post offices, railway stations and other hubs of activity. Think about escape routes from dense housing areas.
- If doubts about safety are indicated, reconnoitre the vicinity in advance to assess the need for accompanied interviews, shadowing and pre-arranged pick-ups. At all times any concerns should be raised to the PI
- If the design allows, telephone in advance to assess the respondent and enquire whether any other members of the household will be at home.
- Consider whether it might be more appropriate to conduct the interview in pairs.
- Arrange alternative venues, already assessed for safety, if security is in doubt. For example, on DMU premises, in a local coffee shop, in an NHS setting.

7. Interview precautions

PIs/AS should instruct interviewers to take precautions to minimise risk in the interview situation and ensure that help is at hand. The following practical tips should be considered:

- Avoid going by foot if feeling vulnerable. Use convenient public transport, private car or a reputable taxi firm. Plan the route in advance and always take a map (or have a phone with this function and know how to use it);
- Try to avoid appearing out of place. Dress in a manner that is sensitive to local customs/rules/cultural or spiritual norms. Equipment and valuable items should be kept out of sight.

Cold calling is not a feature of research and no research should be conducted without first gaining ethical approval. We should always know who and what we are contacting an individual about.

- Try to make sure you are seen entering an interviewee's home. Greet porters or caretakers, ask in a local shop for directions or use other ways of ensuring your presence is noted. But take care not to compromise interviewee confidentiality.
- In multi-storey buildings, think about safety when choosing lifts or staircases.
- If in the light of prior information there is any doubt about personal safety, a co-researcher should wait in the dwelling or in a visible position outside. If waiting outside, a system for communicating needs to be arranged in advance.
- Carry a screech alarm or other device to attract attention in an emergency. This would need to be provided by the study.
- Let the interviewee know that you have a schedule and that others know where you are.

Strategies include arranging for a colleague or taxi to collect you; making phone calls; arranging for calls to be made to you.

Leave your mobile phone switched on even during data collection.

- Assess the layout and the quickest way out. If interviewing in a private dwelling, stay in the communal rooms.
- If feeling insecure try to position yourself with clear access to an outside door.
- Always carry identification, a badge or a card, giving the researcher's work address and telephone number. Respondents should be invited to check the authenticity.

8. Maintaining contact

It is essential to establish reliable lines of communication between the usual office base and the fieldwork site. The PIs should designate a responsible person at the office-base fully briefed on the research team's schedule and clearly instructed on when and how to take action. In the case of student projects, there must be discussion and agreement on what procedure will be followed by the student while remaining in contact with a designated person; this may not be the supervisor due to practical reasons.

Where data is to be collected overseas then due consideration should be given to procedures in line with this guidance. If in doubt seek further guidance from the relevant Faculty Research Ethics Committee, as detailed below:

Art, Design and Humanities (ADH) – adhethics@dmu.ac.uk

Business and Law (BAL) – BALResearchEthics@dmu.ac.uk

Computing, Engineering and Media (CEM) – ethics.CEM@dmu.ac.uk

Health and Life Sciences (HLS) – hlsfro@dmu.ac.uk

The main elements of a fieldwork contact system are as follows:

- Details of the researcher's itinerary and appointment times – including names, addresses and telephone numbers of people being interviewed or called and overnight accommodation details - should be left with a designated person at the office base or a temporary fieldwork base (taking care about interviewee confidentiality). All details should be entered on the individual's DMU calendar and accessible (this is password protected so all names and address can be added);
- The researcher should notify the base of any changes during fieldwork;
- Fieldworkers should carry mobile phones and chargers so that the base can contact them;
- Where more than one researcher is working in the site they should meet or communicate by mobile phone at pre-arranged times. If such an arrangement is not kept, the other researcher should inform the responsible person at base.

Ideally, at the end of the day's work a telephone call should be placed informing base that the schedule of work has been completed. This may require the designated person being on

duty outside normal office hours to receive the call or check for recorded messages, and to follow-up if no call arrives. Or the employer might contract with an alarm service.

9. Conduct of interview

Despite taking precautions, risk situations may arise in the course of data collection. To avoid engaging in behaviour that may be construed as insensitive, researchers:

- Should be briefed on cultural norms;
- Need to be aware of the gender dynamics of interactions;
- Need to appreciate the use of body language and the acceptability or not of physical contact;
- Need to establish the right social distance - neither over-familiar nor too detached.

10. Strategies for handling risk situations

PIs should ensure that researchers have access to training in techniques for handling threats, abuse or compromising situations, and assess at appropriate intervals whether researchers need to refresh their knowledge.

- Carrying mobile phones and/or personal alarms may be helpful, as long as these are considered only as part of a comprehensive safety policy. Over-reliance on mobile phones and alarms must not substitute for proper training in interpersonal skills.
- Researchers should always carry enough money for both expected and unexpected expenses, including the use of taxis. It is sensible not to appear to be carrying a lot of money, however, and to carry a phone-card, in case it is necessary to use a public telephone.
- Household dogs or other animals may make some researchers uncomfortable. It is reasonable to ask the owner to keep the dog (or animals) in another room until the researcher has left.
- Researchers should also be prepared to deal with the effects of the interview on respondents, and be ready to spot signs that the respondent is becoming upset or angry. Often, the researcher's training means that strong feelings of this kind can be acknowledged and contained, but there may be occasions when it is more sensible to end the discussion and leave. Such a withdrawal should be decisive and quick, offering an appropriate reason. A lost interview may be made up, if this seems appropriate, after discussion with the research manager and gaining consent from the participant.
- There may be a declaration of a safeguarding issue, either to the participant or others. All members of the research team should be clear as to the procedures for the escalation of safeguarding issues, which can be found in the [DMU Safeguarding Policy](#). For the purposes of DMU staff this assumes that researchers are employed (contracted) to the university and it is in that capacity that the relevant procedures will be relevant. Researchers who are also healthcare professionals or from another professional bodies will have a duty of care under their professional code. However, it is in their role as a researcher for DMU that they should escalate the risk.

11. Debriefing and support after the event

When research fieldwork is complete, it is helpful for researchers to reflect on their adherence to the guidelines and raise any difficulties encountered in meeting them. It may require research teams to have a formal 'clinical supervision' style approach for reflection whereby there is a process for the researchers to share instances during fieldwork. Students should have an opportunity to share their ongoing fieldwork with their supervising team. Instances of concern should be recorded in the supervision record and, where appropriate, discussed at a School/Faculty level. Where immediate danger exists then data collection should cease with immediate effect until a review conducted.

Some research teams routinely conduct project reviews, and these should include an assessment of fieldwork safety. Researchers should be encouraged to cover fieldwork safety dimensions in reporting their research findings to funders.

If adverse incidents occur, these must be reported to the PI and Research Governance Manager, and should be recorded and kept within the study site file. Serious incidents should be discussed with safety officers or professional associations. If violent incidents occur which impact the well-being of the researcher, these should be reported to the employer's health and safety officer and to the local police force.

If incidents arise during the course of the fieldwork, these need to be dealt with straight away for the well-being of the researcher. The trauma of violence or the threat of violence and /or a safeguarding issue may require structured support through counselling or the use of victim support organisations, or by providing leave of absence. If the fieldwork is not complete, there may be a need for additional and particular forms of support to enable the researcher to undertake any remaining work or reassign the work.

Appropriate support - which should also protect the confidentiality of the respondent - may also help the researcher come to terms in a healthy way with the incident and feel free to continue his/her work programme, as well as providing further material to inform the development of safety codes.

12. Making guidelines stick

Ways of making guidelines stick will include awareness raising among both new and experienced staff (and students) who are involved in research.

- Safety issues should feature in the training of all new researchers, and guidelines should be included in induction packs and staff handbooks.
- Copies of these guidelines should be included in the induction for anyone involved in research
- PIs should be aware of the guidelines when commencing a research study that will involve data collection with participants.

- Support staff responsible for setting up fieldwork arrangements should be trained in the procedures.
- Students undertaking any research which involves data collection should familiarise themselves with these procedures to ensure that all students remain safe.

It will always be important to remind researchers that if they ignore their employers' policies and procedures for health and safety at work, they may be considered negligent should an incident occur.

13. Further resources

Arksey, H. and Knight, P., (1999), *Interviewing for social scientists* (esp. Ch. 9), Sage, London.

Association of University Teachers, (1996), *Personal guidelines for staff conducting interviews off campus*, Circular LA/5674, February, AUT, London.

Improving safety for lone workers "Not Alone. A Guide for the Better Protection of Lone Workers in the NHS." NHS, updated 2013 Available on-line
https://www.nhsemployers.org/~media/Employers/Documents/Retain%20and%20improve/Managers%20guide_Le0882_3.pdf

Paterson, B.L., Gregory, D. and Thorne, S., (1999), 'A protocol for researcher safety'.

Qualitative Health Research, Vol. 9, No. 2, March: 259-269.

Rai, D.K., (1995), *In the margins: current practices in qualitative social research with Asian communities*, Social Research Paper No. 2, University of Lincolnshire and Humberside, Hull.

Sandell, A., (1998), *Oxford Handbook of patients' welfare: a doctor's guide to benefits and services*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Social Research Association, *Ethical guidelines*, Social Research Association, London. Suzy Lamplugh Trust, *Personal safety at work: guidance for all employees*, Suzy Lamplugh Trust, London.

Appendix 1 – Procedure for working alone

Background:

When conducting research, it may be necessary to conduct data collection in participants own homes or in locations outside of DMU. This presents specific concerns about lone working, so it is essential that a co-worker can track your movements. Please refer to the procedure below when planning your field research.

General procedure

1. Ensure that the co-worker who will be tracking your movements has your contact details by the researcher or student filling in Appendix 2 (staff details), many phones may be able to be tracked using a “find my phone” app, if your phone is able to use this facility you should download the app with instructions and give it to your tracker.
2. Where a participant is to be visited in their home ensure that a co-worker is available to track you. You do not need to do this if the participant is being visited at an NHS site such as at an acute setting, community clinic or in a residential/nursing home setting.
3. When making an appointment to see a participant, always try to make the arrangement with the person directly and not via a family member/friend. Ask the participant for guidance on getting there (this is useful as the property location may not always be obvious), where the best place to park is and whether there are any pets. Ask if anyone else will be present during your visit. Do not be afraid to ask that an over-exuberant or potentially dangerous pet be placed in another room for the duration of your visit. Consider looking on Google street view at the locality prior to your visit.
4. If there is documented information that suggests that there may be safety concerns about the participant or a family member, then take this into account when arranging data collection and arrange to meet at the university in an open public place or a NHS location such as a clinic or hospital location.
5. Ensure that your co-worker has details of the participant’s name, address and a contact number for them. Also provide the date, time, place and estimated duration of your appointment (Appendix 3).
6. Ensure that you have a working, charged mobile phone. Arrange to text or phone your co-worker before you enter the participant’s property and when you leave to confirm that all is well.

7. If you have **any** concerns on arrival at the property or at any point during the visit, leave the situation and report back to the tracker. Your safety is more important than data collection.
8. If your co-worker has not heard from you by 30 minutes after the anticipated conclusion of the appointment time they will attempt to contact you. If they are unable to do so, they will commence follow up actions. Additional arrangements will be needed for visits where an overnight stay is required.
9. Follow up actions for tracker: See appendix 3

Appendix 2: Contact Form - staff

To be given to the person you have asked to be your co-worker along with the participants details form below, this is to help them if you either do not call at the designated time or they are unable to contact you.

Contact Details for your "Co-Worker"

Name	
Mobile phone number	
Office phone number	
Home phone number	
Car Number Plate Make & Model of Car (to be used for number plate recognition in the event of an emergency)	
Required for students: Supervisor authorisation: (Name, Signature and date)	

I confirm that I have read and will follow the School's lone working policy for visiting participants in their own home. Work being undertaken is covered by an appropriate risk assessment.

Print Name:

Signature:

Date:

Appendix 3: Participant details form

This form is to be given to your co-worker and is designed to be kept only for the day of visit and should then be disposed of in confidential waste.

It is only to be used if you are unable to contact the member of staff who is visiting the participant in their own home.

Date/time of appointments	Name of Participants	Contact numbers	Addresses	Any other information

If you do not hear from the member of staff at the appointed time, wait 30 minutes and then:

1. Ring the member of staff on their mobile – if they do not answer;
2. Ring them on their office number to check and see if they have returned;
3. Ring their home phone number to see if they have returned home;
4. Check the “find my phone” app if applicable;
5. Ring participant to see if they have left their address, asking for the time they left;
6. Ring the Principle Investigator/Academic supervisor for approval to escalate the situation;
7. Ring the police;
8. Ring DMU security to inform them of the situation in case the police make direct contact with security following the report;

9. Inform the Head of School (HoS) of actions taken.

Give detailed information about the appointment, the time it was due to finish, the fact that you are unable to contact the individual and outcome of each telephone conversation in order.

Date & Time	Contact	Number	Outcome of telephone conversation
	Member of staff on mobile		
	Member of staff's office number		
	Member of staff's home number		
	Participant's home – are they still there or when did they leave?		
	Principal Investigator		
	DMU security	0116 2577642	
	Police – give details of where they have been, who you have contacted and their response, and information about their car / mode of transport	999	
	e-mail HoS		