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Qualiti, the Cardiff node of the ESRC-funded National Centre for Research Methods, established a commissioned inquiry into the risk to the well-being of qualitative researchers. The inquiry began in January 2006, chaired by Michael Bloor (University of Glasgow) and supported by research input from Ben Fincham (now of Brighton University). It was clear from the outset that there is an important gender dimension to research risks and Helen Sampson (Cardiff University) agreed to convene a subgroup of the inquiry to address gender and risk issues. Two focus groups on gender issues, attended by researchers from across the UK, were facilitated by Dr Sampson. As well as the focus groups and a literature survey, the inquiry consists of a variety of interviews with people with cognate institutional responsibilities (such as university insurance managers and chairs of ethics committees) and with people working in institutions where employees run cognate risks (aid workers and journalists). In addition, a Phpb 'bulletin board' website was established as a data gathering tool, in imitation of a Parliamentary Inquiry. The website was organised in such a way that contributors from the research community could submit 'evidence' (reports of experiences, or viewpoints, or both) by posting to four website headings, namely physical risk, emotional risk, institutional risk management and gender and risk.

An initial draft of the report was submitted for comment to an academic panel with expertise in this area. Many valuable comments were received and gratefully incorporated into this published version of the report, although final responsibility for the contents inevitably rests with the authors.

There are risks to researchers in undertaking fieldwork. Some of these are obvious, some less so. These risks may impact on the physical, emotional or social well-being of researchers. Whilst there has been a concentration of effort in ensuring research subjects or participants are protected from the potentially harmful consequences of research (through upholding the principle of informed consent for example), there has been much less thought about protection of researchers from potential harm. It is likely too that researchers undertaking qualitative fieldwork are exposed to particular forms of risk, which arise from the characteristic emphasis of qualitative approaches on conducting research in naturalistic settings.

Qualitative researchers may experience a range of risks. Some risks relate to the physical well-being of researchers and correspond to conventional health and safety considerations in employment of all kinds. It is not difficult to think of situations in which researchers may be at risk of violence or other physical danger. Equally, researchers may become emotionally threatened, where, for example, the data being collected are distressing or emotionally taxing.

These different types of risk reflect the objectives of the research, the settings in which it is conducted and the backgrounds and characteristics of the participants in the research, both ‘subjects’ and researchers.

There are occasions where researchers will enter the field without fully understanding the potential impact of the research for their well-being. This situation is akin to the principle of ‘informed consent’, where researchers should be enabled to make a judgement with regard to ‘acceptable’ and ‘unacceptable’ risks of harm to them. At the same time, regulation of researcher risk should not threaten the integrity of the research process itself: much qualitative research is carried out in naturalistic settings and depends upon the quality of the relationships between participants and researchers, and both settings and relationships may carry risks for researchers.

Our aim throughout this Inquiry has been to produce practical recommendations to reduce research-related harm. Accordingly, the concluding section of the Inquiry Report is concerned with these recommendations. Other sections of the report address the research literature (necessarily a long section), the ‘evidence’ submitted to the website, and the results of our interviews on the institutional framework of researcher risk. In order to highlight the importance of the gender dimension to this inquiry, we have devoted a separate section to gender and risk, drawing on both the literature and the website submissions.

We hope that this multi-method approach has done justice to the multi-faceted nature of the issue. Whether or not justice has been done, we wish to acknowledge the very many contributions to the inquiry – in submissions to the website, in focus group contributions, in interviews and in the work of our panel of readers. In the research community we have been particularly fortunate in having contributions from a very wide range of persons – experienced field researchers, early career researchers and research managers – and to have received contributions from the USA, Europe and Australasia, as well as the UK.

Emotional risk

Emotional risk to researcher well-being is an area of increasing interest in literature concerning qualitative research. The literature falls broadly into three categories. Firstly it covers, the impact on researchers of working in emotionally sensitive arenas, secondly the impact on researchers of working with vulnerable or distressed research subjects and, thirdly, the potential impact of reflexivity in qualitative research practice.

Institutional risk management

The issue of institutional risk management is one which has not received a large amount of attention in social science literature, in comparison with physical and emotional responses to the risk to well-being. The ways in which research is managed is of primary importance to how individual researchers will respond to certain environments. Whilst there are professional guidelines and institutional instructions on how best to conduct qualitative research there has been relatively little reflection by researchers on the extent to which risks can be mitigated or amplified by good or bad research management. This section of the review incorporates elements of published professional guidelines and incorporates them into a wider literature.

Gender and risk

Researcher well-being and gender has been isolated as an issue that we feel deserves particular attention. There is a literature, principally feminist, that has called to the research community's attention the role of gender in relation to both 'risk' and 'well-being'. However, we have chosen to overview this literature in a separate section of the report, integrating literature and website submissions, and drawing on the work of two focus groups.

The code of practice is written in such a way that once a principle is established a scenario is used to illustrate it. For example, in the section Budgeting for safety, it says ‘all research proposals and funding agreements should include the costs of ensuring the safety of researchers.’ This statement is striking in its specification that researcher safety must be provided for at the planning stage. The code goes on to illustrate some possible safety costs: they cite training on risk assessments, communication aids and insurance as being important elements of ensuring safety that may incur costs – they go on to point out that ‘it will be important to clarify which of these costs fall to the employer and which are to be borne by the funder’. The drawing of attention to the distinction between funder and employer is particularly important for researchers. When trying to establish lines of responsibility between employers and funders, researchers are rarely clear who is responsible for what. The code of practice explains:

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 costs elements may need to be discussed with funders as the proposal is being drafted.

The research institute should be prepared to devote resources to safety issues: raising awareness; clarifying responsibilities and lines of accountability; creating and implementing procedures; carrying out regular reviews. (Social Research Association 2006)

An implication here is that the claim, that some researcher safety procedures (such as working in pairs) cannot be implemented because they would be too expensive, is a claim that is indicative of bad research management, of inadequate early planning. The code of practice not only offers advice about the dynamic between researchers and others, but also highlights the need for researchers to ask themselves a range of questions before entering the field. The range of research makes the suggestion of generic questions pointless, so the SRA again adopts a ‘you might want to think about...’ approach. In the section Assessing risk in the fieldwork site they suggest the sorts of questions researchers might want to ask. These include: ‘Are reputable taxi firms easy to access?’, ‘Are there local tensions to be aware of such as strong cultural, religious or racial divisions?’ and ‘What do local sources, such as the police, say about risks in the research territory?’ As has been mentioned, these specific questions will not be relevant for many research projects, but the principle of thinking hard about potential risks to well-being is one worth instilling and is implicit in the SRA code of practice.

In drafting the code of practice the SRA has spent time envisaging a broad range of scenarios where researcher safety is an issue. As a result some of the recommendations may seem to be either over-sensitive or obvious. An example could be in *inter ie. re utions* where researchers are instructed to:

Try to avoid appearing out of place. Dress inconspicuously and unprovocatively taking account of cultural norms. Equipment and valuable items should be kept out of sight.
(Social Research Association 2006)

Whilst the first part of this recommendation might be over-sensitive and the second obvious, there is no harm in reminding researchers that the way they dress may influence how people will view them, and that researchers in the past have been assaulted and/or robbed.

The recommendations for ensuring the safety of social researchers provided by the SRA are a particularly useful, straightforward set of guidelines that, if followed, would enable researchers to undertake fieldwork in the knowledge that lines of responsibility towards and from them

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The occupational safety, health and environment unit at University 'A' issued guidance for lone fieldworkers early in 2005. These cover a range of environments and activities and, in a similar way to the SRA code of practice, are divided into substantive areas, namely *identification, training, supervision, equipment, communication, first aid, and emergency procedures*. The guidelines document itself is 31 pages long and draws on the same literature as the SRA code of practice – notably *Personal Safety for Lone Workers* produced by the Suzy Lamplugh Trust (Suzy Lamplugh Trust 2003), as well as including a copy of the SRA code of practice itself, attached to the end of the document.

The first thing to note is that the concept of ‘duty of care’ is spelled out from the outset. This includes a reference to a moral obligation on behalf of those working in the University:

The University must exercise a “duty of care” to employees and to those under supervision and this duty is recognised in both criminal and civil law.

1.1.1.1. University of York

Safety and Environmental Protection Services (SEPS) – *note, not in field or* issued July 1996. The guidelines issued by the University 'B' Safety and Environmental Protection Services relating to safety in fieldwork consist of six brief sections. An introductory two paragraph *ground* section refers researchers to the CVCP [it should be noted that the CVCP no longer exists] Code of Practice for Safety in Fieldwork, in addition to outlining the University's 'moral', 'civil' and 'legal' responsibility to exercise 'a 'duty of care' to employees and others under its supervision'.

This very short web document then moves to a *definition of field or* –

Any practical work carried out by staff or students in the University for the purpose of teaching/ research in places which are not in the control of the University, but where the student is responsible for the safety of staff and /or students and others exposed to their

1.2.2. Overview of issues arising from recently published works

This section of the review will provide an overview of issues arising from recently published works. While not exhaustive, we hope that the coverage is comprehensive. The literature has been identified through a number of strategies. Many specific references emerged from reading. Extensive bibliographic trawls, including internet searches, have provided literature. Furthermore an international panel of scholars has been consulted and the panel has been most valuable in identifying additional relevant sources.

We have divided the literature according to different types of researcher risk. Naturally, this arrangement has resulted in a fair amount of crossover between categories; for example, the threat of being attacked has both an impact on a researcher's feelings about physical safety as well affecting their emotional well-being. In dividing the literature in this way, we are not suggesting that the issues raised are necessarily separate.

1.2.3. Researcher risk: physical injury to fieldworkers

Given the length of time people have been undertaking anthropological/ethnographic studies in settings that might be considered dangerous, it is surprising that there is such a limited literature addressing the potential for, and instances of, physical injury to fieldworkers (Sluka 1990; Howell 1990; Sanders 2006; Adams 2006; Belousov et al. 2006). As Belousov et al. point out, collections addressing researcher risk in the field tend to be segregated by discipline (examples being Nordstrom and Robben 1995; Farrell and Hamm 1998; Lee-Treweek and Linkogle 2000). There are field sites where common sense suggests that researchers have been exposed to risk of injury or illness. However, discussion of such exposures has been quite limited.

In *Dangerous Ideology*, Ray Lee famously draws a distinction between ambient and situational danger (Lee 1995: 3). Ambient danger relates to researching in environments where danger is present in the setting - such as the danger encountered by Brewer when studying routine policing in Northern Ireland (Lee 1995: 3), or Fincham's study of bicycle messengers in the UK (Fincham 2006). Situational danger relates to danger arising out the presence of a researcher provoking 'aggression, hostility, or violence from those within the setting', as experienced by Katherina Schramm when working in Ghana (Schramm 2005). Lee points to urban ethnographers who have encountered violence when studying drug use. This distinction between ambient and situational risk is one that appears to resonate throughout studies where there is the potential for physical harm in qualitative research settings. As will be further explored, in the gender and risk section, gender issues may constitute a specific site for the development of situational dangers particularly in settings where ambient risks are present (Sampson and Thomas 2003, La Pastina 2006).

Researchers (Lee-Treweek and Linkogle 2000, Thompson 1967, Oglesby 1995, Howell 1990) have catalogued instances of assault, murder and psychological trauma as a result of fieldwork, however, it should also be noted that, whilst there are examples of research where researchers have been seriously injured or killed, these are relatively rare events in social research.

Researching in insecure environments

Examples of researcher unease about threats to their safety (Sampson and Thomas 2003; Campbell 2004; Gill 2004; Schramm 2005; Palriwala 2005; Adams 2006) are more common in the literature than actual accounts of violence or injury. The settings and situations in which threat is experienced vary widely, but all of the above researchers found themselves in situations where they were certain that their physical well-being was seriously compromised.

Sampson and Thomas describe how the physical isolation of deep sea voyages, where there was no opportunity to leave ships, presented researchers with two related threats to physical well-being. The first was the possibility of finding oneself in a 'hostile or threatening research environment' (Sampson and Thomas 2003: 170-1). The implication being that antagonistic crew members could, if they wished to, harm researchers with impunity. The second threat caused by isolation was the inability of anybody on a ship far out at sea to access help, of any kind, if the need arose. The shipping industry is dominated by a masculine culture allied with an appalling record of industrial injuries. Sampson and Thomas suggest that as women working in complete isolation in a male-dominated, often exclusively male, setting, they were exposed to increased threat from those opposed to their research presence. In this context ambient risks amplified situational risks.

For Gill it was a normalisation of danger by a population that left her vulnerable during fieldwork in the Dominican Republic. In offering a detailed account of the unanticipated consequences of researching in unfamiliar contexts she states that she had been 'ill prepared for living in an environment of crime and violence' (Gill 2004). Her original idea was to study music and migration. However, it rapidly transpired that crime was to become a major feature of the work:

On the second day I found myself flattened under a car to avoid getting shot by a woman seeking revenge for her husband's murder in the town market, and on the third day I was sprinting away from a knife fight at a local hang-out (Gill 2004).

Gill reports that in the course of her seven months of fieldwork in a small community there were fifteen homicides and 'dozens of muggings, robberies, suicides, and violent confrontations' (Gill 2004). With this backdrop of extreme violence Gill had to try and balance anthropological curiosity with the requirement to stay as safe as possible. As she points out anthropological work breaks just about all the rules for western women and personal safety:

‘rules of personal safety are based on sticking to the familiar – the antithesis of anthropological research’ (Gill 2004). Yet she was not unduly stifled by these apparently contradictory positions. As a result of her development of relationships in the community, and the fact that she was being hosted by one family in particular, she completed her fieldwork despite finding that the research site was very different to the one she had anticipated.

Other researchers describe finding themselves unexpectedly under threat. Whilst attending a forum on reparations and repatriation at the Pan-African Culture Institute in Ghana Schramm found herself being picked out as a white person during one of the speeches and referred to as a ‘colonial master’. Later speeches described how the ‘white man’ was the ‘enemy’ to be ‘killed and destroyed’, a sentiment that drew a cheer from the audience. Schramm describes how she concentrated on making notes as though this act divorced her from the position in which she felt she was being placed. During a conversation with a woman who had come and sat next to her Schramm describes that she found it impossible to talk properly because she felt so intimidated. ‘The situation that I had found (or rather actively put) myself in – that of being obviously out of place – forced me to put on a protective shield that did not allow for penetration’ (Schramm 2005: 179).

Being ‘out of place’ clearly brings with it the potential for problems. This does not necessitate being abroad but applies equally to all unfamiliar research settings. Palriwala spent an extended period of fieldwork studying a village in Rajasthan. Whilst in the village Palriwala found that the norms and customs of the people (for example, the prohibition on women sleeping alone in a hut) were not ones that she could easily adopt. Being from Delhi herself, Palriwala felt as though her contraventions of ‘cultural values’ and ‘behavioural norms’ were viewed as more serious than if she had been from another continent. However, she felt that as a

Injuries and Disease

The numbers of reported deaths to fieldworkers are mercifully few. Two well-known deaths are those of Myrna Mack and Ken Pryce: Myrna Mack, an anthropologist, was murdered by Guatemalan paramilitaries (Menchu, 1998); and Ken Pryce, the author of a celebrated ethnography of West Indian life in Bristol (Pryce, 1979), disappeared while researching criminality in Jamaica and his body was later found washed-up on a beach. However, although deaths have been few, there are many examples in the literature of researchers spending time in environments where the potential for injuries is high. Ray Lee suggests that, of all social scientists, anthropologists are most exposed to the potential for injury because of the tendency for research to be carried out in remote areas. However, many ethnographers are exposed to potential injury simply as a result of spending time in environments that are not predictable. Examples of this include Kinkade and Katovich's study of pizza delivery employees (Kinkade and Katovich 1997), where the chances of being mugged were high, De Genova's ethnography of migrant Mexican workers at a depot for cleaning the tanks of chemical containers (De Genova 2006), Sampson and Thomas' study on board cargo ships, 'notoriously unsafe work environments' (Sampson and Thomas 2003: 171) and Fincham's study of bicycle messengers, where the chances of being hit by cars was high (Fincham 2006: 198). Most of these studies report a potential for injury, but Fincham's study of bicycle messengers does report injuries as well as threats:

To begin with I found the cycling quite exciting, and this was reflected in my field diary:

Rush hour on Oxford Street was absolutely thrilling, but my inexperience definitely resulted in a couple of heart stopping moments. Getting wedged between two buses going in opposite directions being the highlight. Actually that did scare me. (Field diary, 09.05.2003)

It was during this period of study that I was knocked from my bicycle by a taxi on the street mentioned in the previous extract:

At the end of Oxford Street a taxi pulled to the kerb as if to stop and as I was passing, pulled a U-turn straight into me. My left leg took the brunt of the impact but somehow I was thrown free. I watched my bike disappear under his wheels. He then reversed back over the front wheel. (Field diary, 20.05.2003)

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methodological issues across studies. This is despite the implicit *involuntary* nature of risk taking as an economic necessity at work. The researcher working in such environments is also exposed to involuntary risks.

There are issues inherent in researching in an environment that may have challenged the researcher. Vail points out that there is sometimes a requirement to step back from ‘intense emotions like fear, repulsion, or ecstasy’ when analysing data (Vail, 2001: 716). He suggests this stepping back process is part of an emotional management technique, where the intensity of the fieldwork may cloud the eventual analysis, but there is another potential pitfall in the reporting of potentially dangerous fieldwork situations; namely that the risk is exaggerated. As Holyfield points out in her ethnography of white water rafting:

...many of us want only the *appearance* of fatefulness, thus obtaining some of the glory with very little of the risk (Holyfield, 1999: 5)

There are persuasive methodological reasons for putting oneself in a similar embodied risk position to one’s informants. There is rich evidence of this in the research of Vail (2001) and Holyfield (1999). Vail (2001: 716) suggests that this is part of an emotional management technique, where the intensity of the fieldwork may cloud the eventual analysis, but there is another potential pitfall in the reporting of potentially dangerous fieldwork situations; namely that the risk is exaggerated. As Holyfield points out in her ethnography of white water rafting:

(Wacquant 1995: 85). The ways in which many researchers write themselves into accounts of potentially violent contexts is as independent outsiders. Their struggle is not how to keep themselves safe but how to give justifiable accounts of the events they witness or the people that they meet. It is unlikely that all of the above researchers felt completely safe at all times during fieldwork and, whilst it should be noted that their reactions to the field are not the express point of the pieces cited, it is difficult to understand why there is such an absence of reflection upon themselves as vulnerable beings in volatile situations.

Gender and broader aspects of identity plays a role in risk to researcher well-being. Examples from the literature suggest that there are a variety of ways in which a researchers' gender alters their situation in the field when it comes to well-being. This can range from being undermined by male participants, or colleagues (Hodgson et al. 2006), and being subject to general gender-based hostility, to sexual assault (Moreno 1995; Willson 1995; Coffey 1999, Sampson and Thomas 2003).

There are several instances in the literature where the threat of sexual harassment or sexual assault has been part of women researchers experience in the field. As Coffey explains these can range from 'sexist language, gender joking, innuendo and inappropriate, unwelcome touching' (Coffey 1999: 93) to serious sexual assault (Moreno 1995). In Moreno's case she was subjected to a horrific sexual assault by a 'local field researcher'. Reflecting upon the position of researchers in the field she makes the vital observation that there is a collapsing of the 'professional' and 'personal' self. They are one in the same and that identity is gendered – the 'fiction of the genderless professional' does not exist during fieldwork (Moreno 1995: 246-7).

Loftsdóttir reiterates this point, highlighting the need for increased vigilance when away from 'home':

We should not forget that sexual harassment and violence are part of most ethnographers' social environment at 'home'. If it becomes more acute during the fieldwork, it is due to them being cut off from their normal net of protection, in addition to being in a new environment and thus less able to minimise risks. To my best knowledge, it has never been adequately explored to what extent a woman's vulnerable position minimises her relationship of power (as derived from her whiteness or position of privilege) in relation to those subjected in her research. (Loftsdóttir 2002: 309)

Staying Physically Safe

Sluka's observations about staying safe in fieldwork (Sluka 1990) are echoed in recommendations made by Nancy Howell in the United States in the same year (Howell 1990), and they still resonate for researchers involved in research in potentially dangerous settings. A key component for both is anticipation of potential hazards during fieldwork. Their recommendations also remind us of the wider contexts of research. Sluka, as well as noting that a realistic evaluation of possible dangers before entering the field is essential, suggests things like investigating 'sources of funding'. As he points out, there have been instances where researchers have taken money from research groups that research subjects, if they had known, would have found objectionable, possibly placing the researcher at risk, an observation also made by Dillenburg (Dillenburg 2006). Sluka highlights the need for means of exiting the field – in his case a credit card that permitted him to purchase airline tickets quickly. Howell makes a point re-iterated by others, in particular Sampson and Thomas, about emergency communication and transportation being major factors in making others aware of a potential dangers and possible escape from dangerous situations (Howell 1990: 187; Jamieson 2000; Sampson and Thomas 2003: 184). A major part of Sluka's advice involves openness and honesty wherever possible, remembering that research subjects will interpret such honesty in their own peculiar ways. However, he does talk about the requirement to profess neutrality in some situations as a 'danger management strategy'. So whilst being honest and open about what a researcher is doing, expressing opinions about a topic where there are open divisions may not be wise – this will be irrespective of the strength of feeling a researcher may have about one position or another. Other recommendations include managing authorities that may be wary of the presence of researchers and the unintended association of the researcher with the community that they are studying – Sluka's examples being homosexuals or drug users (Sluka 1990: 122-3). Whilst many recommendations reflect the risks associated with various research sites Langford illustrates the need to be mindful of dangers brought to sites by research participants. He outlines a safety protocol for working with battered women which involves assessing the likelihood of women being stalked to interviews or focus groups (Langford 2000: 136). Whilst much of the protocol involves steps for keeping participants safe, Langford is clear that the nature of research is such that both the research subject and the researcher could be at risk of attack from an abusive partner. Drawing on earlier work, he suggests not leaving interview sites with interviewees, conducting only one interview per participant and paying honoraria in cash in order that nothing can be traced.

The social networks that are built up during the research process can also be important in establishing, and maintaining, a safe environment in which to work. This is a point effectively made by Loftsdóttir when talking about women researchers:

Trinh T. Minh-ha's book title, *Woman, Native, Other* (1989), refers to other dimensions of otherness and marginality. Following Peggy Gould's edited volume, *Woman in the Field*,

many writers have explored the various dimensions of gender in fieldwork situations. Several studies have emphasized the difficulties of women ethnographers in relation to sexual assaults (Moreno 1995; Willson 1995), leading to the need to situate themselves within the community of study with protectors. (Loftsdóttir 2002: 308-9)

The recommendations described above relate to studies where the management of risks are integral to the research setting. However there are other studies where it is the participant aspect of participant observation that requires risk management strategies. Whilst a highly participatory approach is very attractive, there are negative aspects that must be considered when undertaking such work. In the event of having to withdraw from the participant area of study there needs to be consideration of possible alternative methods. In the case of an embodied ethnography of bicycle messengers (Fincham 2006) there are measures one can take to protect against injury. When Monaghan talks about ‘the possibility of such harms manifesting themselves in the materiality of the body’ being ‘attenuated, minimised or avoided by individual agency’ (Monaghan 2002: 6-7), he is saying that there are a certain number of choices that we have about where we put our bodies, and what we do with them. With the example of bicycle couriership, the researcher did not have to voluntarily attempt manoeuvres that *o ious* endangered his corporeal well-being.

Whilst there are research scenarios that need obvious attention to risks, there are others that may initially appear mundane or routine. The risks are not obvious and, as Adams graphically illustrates, even when an established protocol is followed – for example two researchers conducting interviews in respondents’ houses – there will be occasions when the protocol will be found wanting. After Adams and a colleague’s unnerving experience in an interview (where a respondent started behaving in a threatening way and then called others in from an adjoining room) Adams developed a set of recommendations. These include: role-play in safety training; location-specific risk assessment (with location-specific exit strategies); risk assessment of materials to be used in research (for example checking for questions that may be inflammatory); ensuring that people know where you are and when you should have left an interview; agreeing a code word that safety contacts and the police are aware of in case of difficulties in exiting research scenarios; de-briefings and, in the light of debriefings, research design revision (Adams 2006: 9-10)

As several researchers have reflected, there are occasions when unpredictable and unmanageable risks may emerge as an unfortunate consequence of the research process. However, there is a feeling amongst some that there are systemic barriers in academia to a proper evaluation of risks to researchers. These may include for example:

... the prevalence of a male dominated and competitive research in institutions of higher education, a culture which is often reflected in accounts of risk and bravery in the field [Patrick, 1973] (Sampson and Thomas 2003).

became apparent when talking to health professionals who found they had an opinion about things respondents were telling them in the course of interviews. They use a particularly illuminating example of this conflict from their data. One researcher reported the following:

I was really concerned about one person... in fact it's still unresolved and I don't know what to do... she told me she was taking Tamoxifen®... and that was OK until later on she talked about starting a family... and I just felt she didn't realise that this drug could... actually probably would stop her ovulating. She didn't say she was concerned so it was difficult for me to chip in. But then I came away and felt I should mention it to the breast nurse... but how could I? I promised her I wouldn't talk about anything she

researchers were in the area of the custody suites solely to allow them to interview people arrested and tested for drugs, they found themselves with keys and escorting prisoners to cells. As Hodgson et al. say:

This could be seen as positive, in that custody staff trusted us to carry out their duties. However, in practice it was unprofessional and put researchers in a difficult situation. If they refused to comply their fragile relationship with custody staff would be further jeopardised. If they complied, without proper training in custody procedures, researchers risked making grave errors. One researcher described being 'severely reprimanded' by the Inspector after allegedly failing to return a detainee to the custody desk 'correctly'. (Hodgson et al. 2006: 259)

In addition to the obvious problems that these kinds of situations caused the research team, they complicated their relationships with the people they wished to interview. While carrying keys, a powerful symbol of control, the researchers were viewed as being part of the apparatus incarcerating the prisoners. For the interviewees this altered the dynamic of the interview, from being one between arrestee and independent researcher, to arrestee and police interrogator. The researchers in this project were put into positions that were both stressful and isolating, and where they felt compelled to do things that could be thought unethical and were possibly dangerous.

As has been suggested, there is methodological justification for developing close relationships with research participants who are in difficult situations. Much of the writing about the benefits of developing close relationships, involving the researcher disclosing personal details and behaving empathically, comes from feminist research, where the acknowledgement that emotions are an unavoidable, and potentially illuminating, feature of the research process has sat comfortably with research design and execution (Oakley 1981, Lee and Renzatti 1993). For example Goode considers that as part of a commitment to 'feminist praxis', openness is essential. In her work with drug and alcohol using mothers she explains that where 'respondents were interested in discussing my personal background, I answered all questions fully and honestly' (Goode 2000: 6.3). However, Hubbard et al warn of the dangers of what they call 'over-empathising' (Hubbard, Backett-Milburn and Kemmer 2000: 129). Empathy, the intimation of friendship and high levels of disclosure can lead to rapport inappropriate to research objectives and, as Beynon and Stacey suggest, involve a deceit where the intimation of friendship is merely a strategy for gathering data (Johnson and Macleod Clarke 2003: 422). Hubbard et al are concerned with 'professional detachment' being compromised, but for many feminist researchers there is no such thing as 'professional detachment'. Goode notes that questions of how involved she should become in people's lives made her actively wonder whether research participants might become friends or to what extent she should offer help in the way of 'baby sitting' or 'helping with transport, as an acknowledgement of respondents' assistance with research' (Goode 2000: 6.1). She then reports that during the research she supplied respondents with cigarettes, telephone cards and baby-sat for one participant. Further,

after the research was complete she took one respondent and her child to a circus and accompanied another to solicitors and to a court hearing (Goode 2000: 6.5).

Anne Grinyer describes the process of being commissioned to do research by close friends of hers related to the death of their son from cancer. Her observation that the acknowledgement of possible impacts on research participants does not have a researcher interest equivalent (Grinyer 2005), was made even more complex for Grinyer as a result of her existing friendship

particularly sensitive or upsetting areas (Chatzifotiou 2002: 8.1). Dickson-Swift et al. identify an alarming array of emotional and physical ailments that have dogged researchers who are working with sensitive topics:

A number of authors have stated that researchers can be negatively affected emotionally and physically by research on sensitive issues (Alexander et al. 1989; Burr 1995; Cowles 1988; Dunn 1991; Gregory, Russell and Phillips 1997; Lee 1995; McCosker, Barnard and Gerber 2001). Some of the possible negative outcomes include gastrointestinal problems (Dunn 1991), insomnia and nightmares (Cowles 1988; Dunn 1991; Etherington 1996), headaches (Dunn 1991), exhaustion and depression (Ridge, Hee and Aroni 1999) and threats to physical safety (Langford 2000; Lee 1995). (Dickson-Swift et al. 2006: 857)

Isolation

Johnson and Macleod Clarke identify feelings of unpreparedness and ‘fear of the unknown’ as a cause of anxiety and stress within their sample of researchers working in sensitive areas (Johnson and Macleod Clarke 2003: 425). The realisation of researchers that they are not on familiar ground, or do not feel as though they are comfortable with the terrain in which they are expected to work impacts in all sorts of ways from worrying that they may do research participants damage if they are unable to respond appropriately to their needs (Dickson-Swift et al. 2006: 859) to feeling unsafe (Palriwala 2005). The problems associated with working in unfamiliar terrain can change over time in the setting. Palriwala’s initial fears for her safety in a village in Rajasthan dissipated only to be replaced by a deep gloom, also associated with her unfamiliarity with life in the village:

Speculation was rife as to how I could live and sleep alone. I swallowed my bile, despair and tears and every morning forced myself to leave my room. (Palriwala 2005: 157)

Working in unfamiliar settings can also heighten a researchers’ sense of isolation. It is inevitable that there will be times, especially in extended ethnographic studies away from home, that researchers will feel lonely or isolated. However, there are occasions when these feelings stop being brief periods of loneliness and impinge more systematically on a sense of well-being (Palriwala 2005).

There are also circumstances where the nature of the subject matter that the researcher is working with can have an isolating effect (Moran-Ellis 1997; Campbell 2004). Studying emotionally demanding, unfamiliar areas without adequate spaces for reflection and off-loading can lead to feelings of social isolation. The inability to share or talk through difficult issues that the researcher has encountered during the research process has emerged as a major issue for people in emotionally demanding qualitative research, however, it is not frequently acknowledged in either the literature or in practice.

That I could be hated like that – seemingly because of my colour alone – was a new situation for me. It was the inability to explain myself, or to enter into the debate on a basis that would not be marked by race as an essential and insurmountable category that I considered most distressing. It was a slow, painful process to realise that my colour was not a neutral or irrelevant feature of myself, but rather infested with a meaning of its own, beyond my definitional control. (Schramm 2005: 176)

In quite a different context Hodgson et al. give an account of a particularly uncomfortable nineteen months he and his team of researchers spent attempting to interview arrestees in police custody suites immediately after being tested for drugs. Despite the research being part of an evaluation of a Home Office pilot scheme exploring drug testing in the criminal justice system, the research team encountered obstructive behaviour and hostility from many of the police officers with whom they had been asked to work. Researchers felt excluded from, and uncomfortable in, spaces they had been instructed to work in, one researcher reporting in a field diary ‘I felt very much like an intruder’ (Hodgson et al. 2006: 256). Despite the research being sanctioned by various senior officers, the researchers found that less senior officers, on whom the team relied on for access to informants, were often deliberately obstructive. They would not inform the researchers of the presence of potential interviewees, they openly undermined them, and were openly hostile to them, in front of arrestees (Hodgson et al. 2006: 256-8).

The levels to which people are prepared to obstruct research raises questions about how far researchers should go in pursuit of data (Johnson and Macleod Clarke 2003: 425). However, to feel as though you are under threat of physical or verbal assault because research is your job suggests an inappropriate prioritisation of research requirements over personal well-being.

Unanticipated long term impact of research

Whilst the immediate impacts of certain types of research may be obvious, and therefore relatively easy to militate against, there is evidence to suggest that the possibility of longer term harm is generally ignored. Whilst the literature focuses on immediate risk there is not much written about longer term risk although there are some salient examples (see Rowling [1999] on bereavement research).

Staying emotionally/psychologically safe

The process of ‘pain by proxy’ described by Moran-Ellis (Moran-Ellis 1997: 181) appears to have resonance for many researchers. The emotional strain of having to deal with distressing situations or narratives can be acute. It should be noted that there is also a literature concerned with the emotional impact of disturbing data on those not directly involved with the gathering of the data. Transcribers and PIs have been singled out as particularly vulnerable to this effect (McCosker et al. 2001). Hochschild’s description of ‘deep acting’ (Hochschild 1983: 42-3), may mask levels of upset or even trauma suffered by researchers who feel their professional integrity would be brought into question if such upset were acknowledged. However, increasingly there is recognition that the issue of emotional well-being is of great importance to researchers, research institutions and the integrity of qualitative research itself.

A recommendation that the authors of this report have heard with increasing frequency over the last couple of years, but which is only referred to explicitly by a limited number of recent articles involves opportunities to talk through research experiences with unconnected professionals such as counsellors (Rager 2005; Corden et al; 2005). Researchers have noted, in particular when discussing quasi therapeutic relationships with research participants, that in conducting studies they did not always feel qualified to deal with emergent relationships.. When researchers need somebody to talk to it can be argued that their colleagues in universities may be unqualified to help and that professional counselling is appropriate.

However, Corden et al point out the limitations of counselling as a catch-all for fall out from distressing research. For example it needs to be responsive to the potentially differing needs of researchers, especially when working in teams. Corden et al.’s experience of one model of group therapy is reported as being of limited use (Corden et al. 2005).

Related to recommendations for counselling is the idea of peer support and the utilisation of other social support networks (Dunn 1998; Chatzifitou 2000; Rager 2005). Again the idea of formal peer support – built into research designs - is one that has been related to the authors of this report anecdotally and only referred to a couple of times in recent UK-based literature (Corden 2005; Rager 2005). There is a suggestion that the situation regarding provision of counselling specifically in the UK is underdeveloped. In other countries the situation may be further advanced. For example the Australian National Health and Medical Research Council has issued a national statement on ethical research which includes the following:

Adequate support for both researchers and participants should be available as needed. This might include debriefing for the interviewer and counselling for the participant, particularly in studies investigating sensitive areas such as physical or psychological trauma or abuse, death, dying and grief. These support strategies should be available to both parties at the point of disengagement and termination of the research relationship. (National Health and Medical Research Council 2002: E131)

Such statements are useful reminders of such issues to principal investigators, professional bodies, ethics committees and others. However the levels of disquiet amongst the academic research community uncovered during the course of this Inquiry suggests that such statements are not necessarily acted upon by those co-ordinating or funding research.

With a lack of formal mechanisms for receiving support there are recommendations from several researchers that less formal arrangements be considered (Grinyer 2005; Rager 2005). Reflecting upon her work with women with breast cancer, Rager recounts that the support that she received from her immediate family was essential in ‘maintaining balance’, ensuring that her life was ‘more than just a dissertation’ (Rager 2005: 26). Whilst it is inevitable to a certain extent that there will be off-loading at home, the formal exploitation of informal networks – for example building them into research designs - is not deemed appropriate, and such strategies do not absolve research funders and institutions of their responsibilities to researchers.

The role of reflexivity is also discussed by a number of researchers (Grinyer 2005; Allan 2006; Dickson-Swift et al. 2006). The ability to reflexively conduct research implies a degree of flexibility in research design. This allows for changes in research practice and can be helpful in ensuring that well-being is preserved. One reflexive practice that researchers have reported as being beneficial is journal or diary writing (Dunn 1998; Rager 2005). Journals allow researchers to obtain a reflexive distance from the experiences they document and can also be used as a ‘space’ for off-loading.

Clearly one effective way of mitigating harm to researchers is to ensure that they are fully prepared for any particular research site before they enter it. However there is a concern in the literature that training is inadequate for some of the sorts of research currently undertaken and that many researchers find themselves unprepared for the situations in which they find themselves. The need for appropriate training in aspects of emotional protection is highlighted in several studies (Johnson and Macleod Clarke 2003; Gill 2004; Dickson-Swift et al 2006). Whilst reflexive practice is, of course, an essential component of recognising that things may need to change within research projects, there is an argument to say that if training and guidelines were routinely updated and, more importantly, read, that the need for high levels of reflexivity and flexibility would be drastically reduced. Worryingly Johnson and Macleod Clarke report that participants in their survey of researchers working in particularly sensitive areas felt ill prepared for the situations in which they found themselves (Johnson and Macleod Clarke 2003). They felt as though in their ‘preparation’ there had been an undue emphasis placed on accessing research participants but ‘little or no orientation to the kinds of difficulties and concerns they might encounter during the research process’ (423-4).

Finally another obvious but seldom-utilised resource is that of previous research experiences. By familiarising themselves with research that involved the potential for similar emotional responses – rather than methodological or empirical content – researchers can build strategies into research designs that may help to avoid difficulties faced by researchers in previous projects involving distressing subject matter or situations (Puwar 1997; Chatzifitou 2000).

Whilst the responses of the various funding bodies and stakeholders appear in this case to have been appropriate and proportionate, and the fieldwork was completed without further incident, this example does highlight the problem of the extent to which those who are institutionally responsible for research, especially abroad, should rely on seemingly independent un-situated perspectives of danger and how these should be weighed in the light of locally situated knowledge.

Hannah Gill's experience appears to have been much more solitary. As has been explained elsewhere Gill arrived in the Dominican Republic anticipating a study of music and immigrant Dominicans. However, from her very first few days in her research site it became clear that the research was going to have to incorporate the extreme levels of violence that she encountered. In terms of any institutional involvement in situations such as hers, Gill suggests:

There are a number of obstacles that keep fieldwork methodology training a low priority in academic anthropology departments. It may seem redundant for already overworked professors to lecture on apparently obvious methods such as emailing notes back home, maintaining confidentiality of informants, and securing equipment. (Gill 2004: 7)

This is interesting as the status / myth of the solitary fieldworker is not challenged by any of

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Establishment of the website

The idea of using some sort of online data gathering resource was formulated in early discussions on what the inquiry might look like. It was decided to use Phpbb (bulletin board) software. Despite being designed as discussion board software we thought that it could also be used as a qualitative data gathering resource. The advantage of using such software is that it is very easy to moderate and that postings appear immediately on submission. We did not wish to discourage discussion if it were to occur, however, this was not the explicit remit of our Phpbb board. It was to be a qualitative data gathering resource.

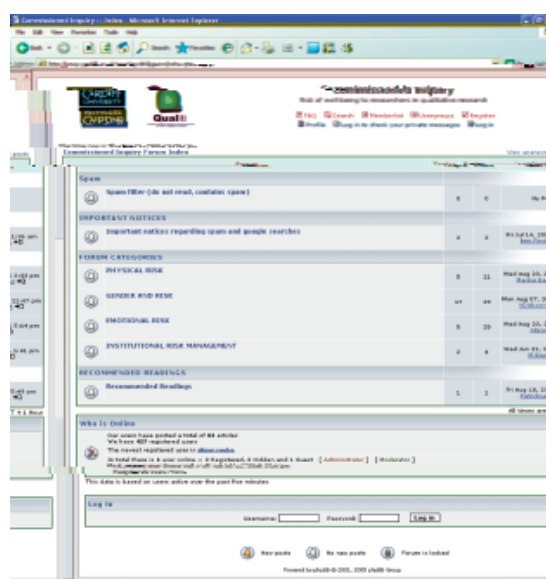
In order to stop unsolicited postings (spam), people wishing to submit had to register to the site. It later transpired that many people found this a distinct disincentive to posting as their anonymity, especially when posting sensitive material, would be compromised. However, many people registered under pseudonyms and posted anonymously.

The board was launched on 9th February 2006 and closed on 1st September 2006. By the close date we had a total of 62 members who had submitted 83 articles or narratives.

Appearance and usability

As *figure one* illustrates, the board was split into four key sections, namely physical risk, emotional risk, gender and risk and institutional risk management. These categories were derived through discussions between the Inquiry team, and reflected anticipated outcomes. As will become apparent however some of these expectations were realised and others were not.

figure one Front page of Phbb Commissioned Inquiry web page



The balance between responsible project management and excessive risk aversion was a theme that cropped up in several postings, and in different discussion streams. A number of researchers felt as though advice that was given to them, either by supervisors or by ethics committees, had been unrealistic in either direction. In some instances researchers felt as though their personal safety had been compromised by a poor understanding of the research site by superiors and in other instances researchers reported that research had been stifled by unrealistic demands for the management of risks that were not present. However, it was felt by a couple of contributors that it was problematic for the issue of risk management to be left to the discretion of researchers, in situ, altogether. One correspondent pointed out that researchers carrying out fieldwork are often relatively young and inexperienced, and are possibly the worst placed individuals within the academic workforce to effectively assess risks.

In contrast to concern that researchers were being left to their own devices, there were also submissions concerned about the use of external safety consultants. The feeling appeared to be that they are at the extreme end of risk aversion and liaising with such agencies can produce a stalemate between lead researchers' assessments of situations and consultants' views that there are potential catastrophes at every turn.

The role of ethics committees generally has been a contentious issue throughout the inquiry and this was also true for the website submissions. Whilst there was disquiet about the usefulness of potentially uninformed bodies sanctioning or restricting research, there were a couple of examples cited where ethics committees responded sensitively to concerns about particular research, and usefully encouraged practice to resolve such concerns. One committee stipulated that a period of initial review of a research site abroad would be appropriate before any research was undertaken. During this period a researcher examined issues of safety, made sure of their legal position with regards to the institution and the country they were in and were visited whilst carrying out this review by a research supervisor.

The practicalities of staying as safe as possible were referred to in many of the postings. The point made was that there is never going to be a time when researchers are immune from the potential for harm. However practical suggestions were made for the protection of researchers which included ideas such as working in pairs (especially when conducting interviews in people's houses) and the provision of two mobile phones to researchers, in anticipation that in risky situations one might be taken from them. Telephones appear to be considered a major tool for researchers in the field and suggestions were made in relation to the set-up of speed dialling facilities on them and the entry of local police numbers.

There were postings concerning serious issues such as the unintended incarceration of researchers whilst abroad. The narratives posted to the website were particularly harrowing and those using the board could not fail to be moved by the accounts offered. In two of these, in particular, the sense of isolation and desperation researchers experienced raises questions

The front page of the gender and risk section of the board is illustrated in figure three below. Whilst the discussions in the focus groups were extremely illuminating, this particular section of the board did not generate as much activity as we had anticipated. Nevertheless some important concerns were highlighted.

Figure 3 Topics as presented on front page of gender section of website

Topics	
	Gender and emotional labour in research
	Gender and the management of personal risk and security
	Sexual harassment and emotional risk
	Emotional demands by participants
	Biography and autobiography in qualitative research
	Risk of assault
	Being silenced
	Difficulties in understanding social research
	Controlling emotions
	Preparation for the field
	Leaving the field
	Consequences of research on personal life
	Identifying/discussing gender related risks in institutions
	Gender and expectations (performance)
	Embodiment
	Sexual Orientation/Sexuality
	Perceptions of male researchers

It is thought that there was a high level of cross-over between submissions that were posted elsewhere on the board and those posted in this section. As other parts of the board were more active, people tended to post submissions to those parts of the board, when they could have equally posted the same submission to the gender and risk section. This is not to suggest that there was no activity on this section of the board, but that we had anticipated that it might be the busiest and this turned out not to be the case.

There were a number of postings contrasting the experiences of men and women in research settings. Several people commented, perhaps counter-intuitively, that they felt it was often male researchers who were more at risk of physical assault than women, but the perception is that men are less at risk. This was highlighted by the experience of one male researcher who discovered that there were a series of safety measures that had been arranged for a female colleague that were not afforded to him, despite doing the same research with the same population in the same geographic location. This points up the tensions between personal/professional judgments about safety and bureaucratised responses to risk. Whilst the

researcher felt as though there was no substantive difference in the levels of risk he and his female colleague faced, the institution behaved in accordance with the misconception that men are ‘safe’ in the field and women are not. The contextual nature of the way risks play out was highlighted by a couple of other respondents with regard to gender when researching closed institutions. One woman researcher reported that she felt safer in a male closed institution than in a female closed institution. Note, however, the discussion in the research literature, recapitulated in the previous section of this report, where it is argued that ‘ambient’ risks may exacerbate ‘situational’ risks for female researchers in some settings.

There was much discussion of good practice, and examples of techniques used on various research projects by people submitting to the board. Several people reported the obvious benefits of working in pairs. One person pointed out that, whilst often touted as a practice that increases physical safety, it also can provide an instant opportunity to talk through difficulties that might have arisen in the particular research activity immediately after the event. In this sense the researcher in question felt that working in pairs provided the opportunity for support in managing both the physical and emotional risks inherent in qualitative research.

The relationship between the individual and the institution underpins much of the discussion on all four of the major sections of the website, but it is in this section that there was the clearest discussion about the institutional level guidelines and the requirement for a culture of good practice, with particular reference to peer support. Whilst this discussion occurred in relation to gender and research it obviously has resonance for the other sections of the discussion board.

There were postings that raised concerns about the sexual harassment of female researchers. The remoteness of some research sites and the choice of key informants or gatekeepers were seen as key to the likelihood of there being a problem with sexual harassment. One posting highlighted the extent to which some female researchers ‘put up with’ milder endemic forms of sexual harassment in order to facilitate their studies dealing with verbal harassment using

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As with elsewhere in the inquiry, questions were raised concerning institutional responses and procedures when things go wrong in the field. While it is acknowledged that there are a range of consultants available for researchers or project managers to liaise with, there is an inherent difficulty in assessing risk when different bodies have different levels of risk aversion. It was noted that University personnel departments are notoriously risk averse. This may act as a disincentive for involving them at any stage of project development, and execution, for fear of unwarranted restriction or interference.

Questions regarding the responsibilities of grant holders were also raised as an area that needed clear guidelines. How grant holders should manage risks, with particular reference to associated researchers – contract researchers for example - is made complicated by the network of relationships involved with the funding and carrying out of qualitative social research. It may be this complicated web of competing interests that has led to the university sector being less pro-active in establishing best practice protocols than its counterparts amongst the broadcast media and overseas aid agencies.

Many researchers (and some research managers) are unclear about their insurance cover and unclear about who to contact for clarification. For example, while travelling on fieldwork abroad, the partner of a researcher became very ill, and it was only then that it was discovered that there was apparently no operative insurance cover. Fortunately, the problem was eventually resolved. The question for them was: how could they get so far without there being any institutional check on their insurance status, let alone a risk assessment? For clarification, it is the university's responsibility to provide insurance cover, and it is normally the case that funding bodies will fund the costs of any extra premium, if asked. The example highlights the lack of understanding in departments regarding insurance – the researcher claiming that both the supervisor and the head of department should have been aware of insurance and risk assessment issues – and the lack of communication between departments and funding bodies.

Conclusions and relation to rest of report

The major concerns highlighted in the recent literature appear to be broadly reflected in the

INTRODUCTION

Introduction

The days of the lone researcher are passing: most social research is conducted by teams and within an institutional context; it is overseen by managers, supported by specialist services and governed by formal procedures. This section of the report addresses the structures within which qualitative researchers work. We report here on insurance matters, risk assessments, counsellors, funders and ethics committees, as they pertain to qualitative social research, drawing on documentary evidence and on semi-structured interviews with relevant specialists – university insurance managers, safety officers and occupational health & safety specialists, human resources managers, counsellors and chairs of ethics committees. We also report in this section on semi-structured interviews with persons in the media and in aid agencies in order to establish how risk is managed in other institutions where workers are exposed to risks similar to those faced by qualitative researchers.

We should note here that this inquiry has not sought legal opinion in respect of researcher safety. Our laymen's understanding is that the legal position is not entirely clear, in the sense that there is an absence of relevant case law. Nevertheless, there seems to be substantial agreement that the provisions of the Health & Safety at Work Act probably apply to postgraduate research students in the same way as they apply to university employees. There is a particular duty of care in the management of young and inexperienced workers. Sub-contractors obviously have less protection, but even here it appears that the university has a legal duty to supply those sub-contractors with sufficient information to enable them to conduct their own risk assessments.

Insurance

Insurance policies obviously vary to some degree between different HEIs, but all universities' policies provide cover for harm experienced by employees and students in the course of their employment or their studies. However, these policies will usually have a clause requiring prior notification of the insurer of any unusual risks undertaken. This notification in most cases will simply result in the insurer wishing to see a copy of a formal risk assessment, but in some instances the insurer may also require an additional premium in order to provide the necessary cover.

While these provisions have clearly been designed to cover, not social research, but volcanologists studying live volcanoes or marine biologists diving off reefs, it is clearly possible that certain kinds of research activity (such as that of anthropologists visiting war zones or criminologists investigating drug dealing) may involve substantial additional premiums. In our enquiries with funders we have established that they are typically willing to

The university occupational health and safety specialists we interviewed were aware that a ‘one size fits all’ approach to risk assessment was unsatisfactory. They expected individual departments to take general guidance from university health and safety services and ‘translate that into their own policies and their own procedures’. Moreover, the safety specialists we interviewed were happy to offer support to PIs and others in developing risk assessments that were tailored to the special circumstances of their own research projects. However, an occupational health and safety specialist employed in one large university told us:

I don’t have any direct experience of work with social researchers.

Only one website posting mentioned collaboration with health and safety specialists. In this case, the university safety office was asked to comment on a research unit’s ‘lone worker’ policy. The comments that came back suggested a number of additional precautions such as:

...preliminary visits to the [fieldwork] area and checking police and other records. In the event we did not adopt that; it was felt to be unrealistic.

It seems clear that, at pr

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The only posting to the website to mention funder involvement was that posted by the chair of the inquiry, Bloor. He posted that he felt obliged, as a PI, to inform his funders of the murder of the gatekeeper of the Russian component of a cross-national study. In that instance, the funder was quietly helpful, simply asking to be kept informed of developments and offering to fast-track an amended application, if the PIs decided it was necessary to switch the fieldwork to a different site.

The reality is that funders only have a minor role in researcher safety licWBL.¹² niversities

Counselling

A Human Resources manager at a large provincial university could not recall a single case of research-related harm to a social researcher being brought to the attention of his department between 1995 and 2006. Another HR manager felt that the absence of HR involvement in issues of research-related harm betokened a reluctance of victims to seek formal redress, rather than

study had started to operate an informal de-briefing system among themselves and this had had the beneficial effect that they no longer felt the need to burden their partners with upsetting research details. The researchers in question were fortunate that they were part of a largish research team: other burdened researchers will often be quite isolated. It was suggested that the inquiry website itself could fulfil this mutual self-help function, but the need to regularly remove spam postings meant that the moderating costs were considerable.

Nevertheless, we should note that some researchers will always be reluctant to discuss emotional harm with their supervisor (no matter how sensitive the supervision) or with a self-help group: they may equate silence with (as another posting put it) maintaining an 'impression of professional competence.' Confidential counselling services may represent the only acceptable option to such employees.

Ethics Committees

Ethics Committees are potentially influential agents in securing researcher safety. However, there are differences between committees over whether researcher safety should be a matter for committee scrutiny. Dickson-Swift et al (2005) undertook a content analysis of the ethics forms used by the major Australian universities and found that only a minority asked any questions about researcher safety. The Central Office for Research Ethics Committees form (probably the most widely used ethics committee form in the UK) *does* ask whether there is any likelihood of researcher harm: 'What is the potential for adverse effects, risks or hazards, pain, discomfort, distress or inconvenience to the researchers themselves?'. The COREC guidance on this question specifically instances 'risks for lone researchers visiting participants at home' and asks applicants to 'describe the measures proposed to address such issues' (www.corec.org.uk).

The chair of a faculty ethics committee in large UK university reported to us that her committee took the view that researcher safety was not a formal part of their remit (and no question on researcher safety appeared on the ethics committee form), but in practice their wider duty of care required them to address the issue of researcher safety wherever they felt it was problematic. Another interviewee with twenty years experience of ethical review of research took a less nuanced view, believing simply that 'the prime job of ethics committees is estimating potential benefits versus harms in the most general sense'. However, he took the view that having a question on the ethics committee form on researcher safety was largely immaterial to his committee's deliberations, believing that committee concerns about safety usually arose out of scrutiny of the research protocol, submitted alongside the form.

The same ethicist was sceptical of the view that a formal requirement to conduct a risk assessment would be of substantial value in promoting researcher safety. The committee which he had chaired had never requested a risk assessment be conducted, and because the risks associated with most social research are relatively small, he felt that a blanket requirement for a

formal risk assessment would not be particularly helpful. He suggested that the formal guidance associated with form completion could suggest that, where there was a possibility of researcher harm, then – if the risk might be thought considerable (‘a serious issue’) – then the

In the aid organisation, formal risk assessments also played an important part, but our interviewee stressed the importance of good security training, making a particular point of the need for senior and experienced staff to be trained, despite the fact that they may not agree that they need the training:

The eye-opener for me was doing formal security training with [a specialist security training provider] where we were helped to think about different scenarios and how to deal with them and even go through a simulation exercise and then evaluate our performance. This then allowed me to review previous experiences and better understand what had been done well and why, could have been done better or had been almost criminally neglectful – by today's standards! It has also helped me since then, when dealing with security issues, but most of all to take security – my own and my staff's – seriously.

There were similarities between the two organisations in the stress laid on the need for line managers to manage risks. Of course, persons in the field were expected to be risk aware and take measures to safeguard themselves, but they were also expected to subject themselves to responsible risk-averse decisions from above:

...the staff person has no right to refuse to leave or change their itinerary should the senior manager decide to pull the plug. Equally imperative, the senior manager cannot require the staff person to go or continue the trip should they decide to cancel or cut short.

In the media organisation, with larger teams in the field, one member of the field team (in addition to his/her field duties) will be designated safety co-ordinator, with local line management responsibility for security issues.

The aid agency went further than the media organisation in making debriefing compulsory following certain types of fieldwork:

...policy is now that all staff travelling to countries of high risk are obliged to do a formal debrief – out of house – on their return. This is a condition of them being allowed to travel. [The agency] also retains the right to request that a staff person undertake a proper debriefing if they have been involved in any sort of incident. Staff also have the right to organize a debriefing if they feel the need. They are reminded of this during every pre-trip security briefing.

Only a relatively small proportion of social science fieldwork can be said to be as hazardous as fieldwork for an international aid agency, yet institutional mechanisms to secure fieldworkers in that aid agency were until recently poorly developed; they are now much superior to the university sector. Similarly, only a small proportion of the work of a media organisation involves work in high risk environments like Iraq and Afghanistan, but the media organisation's security procedures embrace the entire programming spectrum. Institutions outside the university are actively managing risks to their employees in ways which universities are not.



Introduction

There is a gender dimension to most of the issues of researcher risk covered in this report. For the most part, it is not the case that risks associated with gender are distinctive, but rather that those risks may be amplified. Therefore, in order to ensure that this gender dimension to research risk is captured adequately in the inquiry report, we have devoted a section wholly to gender and researcher risk, drawing together material from the literature review, interviews and postings to the inquiry website. This section also benefits from the output from two focus groups, composed of researchers from across the UK, which the inquiry conducted on aspects of gender and researcher risk.

Physical Risk and Harassment

Gender related risks occur in various guises and may merely be an extension of general risks associated with fieldwork. However, there are particular risks that are associated with gender relations and particular settings where gender may amplify the risks faced by researchers. Rapes and physical assaults are only rarely reported in the literature (e.g. Moreno 1995). However, the under-reportage of rape and of fear of rape or physical violence is a familiar theme in the feminist literature and the particular reluctance of female researchers to make such reports can be readily surmised.

By way of contrast, sexual harassment in research settings is reported to be relatively widespread (although still possibly under-reported). In Stanko's survey of female criminologists, in 1992, one in three respondents reported sexual harassment in the field and contemporary criminological studies continue to report the harassment of female researchers. Sampson and Thomas (2003) reported on personal experiences of sexual harassment in the field and emphasised that the isolated setting of their fieldwork amplified the risks that could be associated with gender and research. They similarly suggested that the context of their research made it far more difficult to manage sexual harassment when it arose than might otherwise have been the case. Sexual harassment may be unintended by research participants meaning to flatter or seeking to initiate consensual close relationships, particularly when research is undertaken in cross cultural contexts. However, on occasion there is no ambiguity about intention as harassment shades into threats, assault and even rape. In such cases however under-reporting is likely to be manifest.

Factors associated with under-reportage by researchers are discussed both in the relevant literature and in postings to the inquiry website. Thus Sampson and Thomas (2003), reporting on their shipboard fieldwork, state that they were concerned that, if they raised problems of sexual harassment with r

informants, but his research participants showed no concern for his (Peterson's) safety on the streets, despite hearing his tale of being confronted late at night by a drunk with a knife:

...As a male, the street was considered to be my natural element and I was expected to take care of myself (Peterson 2000: 190)

One of the postings on the website from a female anthropologist makes the same point:

.....being a woman can be protective. I conducted my PhD fieldwork in a very-low-income area of Mexico City where there was a great deal of street violence. Because the area was widely considered to be very dangerous, I was often escorted by male friends. It was very easy for them to insist on accompanying me because this was what they would do for any woman. It allowed me to see the area at night [...]. At street parties, I think I was also far safer as a woman. Most men were very careful to be 'respectful' toward women (foreign or other wise) because lack of 'respect' could quickly lead to violence.

However, the extent of this differential protection of women from physical harm is obviously variable across cultures and across settings and even the reduced exposure of female researchers to violence may be unacceptably high: recall Gill's experience of violence in Santo Domingo (Gill 2004, reported in the previous section) where she had take cover from a shooting and run to escape a knife-fight in the course of her first three days of fieldwork.

Moreover, there are also certain situations where gender identity may mean that researchers are at *greater* risk of physical harm. Lee's (1995) overview of dangerous fieldwork makes a distinction between 'ambient risks', those risks that derive from the hazardous environment (e.g. a war zone) in which the research is located, and 'situational risks', those risks which are evoked by the researcher's presence or actions (e.g. asking questions about sensitive topics). Clearly researcher risk is greatest where situational risk is combined with ambient risk (e.g. asking questions about drug dealing at drug dealing sites). In some situations of ambient risk, as Sampson and Thomas (2003) point out, being of a specific gender may contribute to situational risk. They argue that ambient risks may amplify such situational risks and could for example promote violence and or aggression and hostility.

Whilst the sexual assault of males is likely to be even more under-reported than that of females it is likely to be the case that women are in greater danger than men of sexual attack. This awareness may contribute to appropriate anxiety on the part of female researchers conducting research in particular contexts. In a website posting for example, a female researcher who had conducted repeat interviews with imprisoned sex offenders reported feeling very concerned that an interviewee who had made sexual remarks to her in the interviews was being released and (thanks to a mistake by the prison) knew her whereabouts.

- The burden of being the recipient of confidential pupil disclosures.
- The distress of interviewing young people who had experienced serious sexual abuse (the young people received counselling, but the interviewers didn't)
- The 'heartbreaking' experience of attempting to interview psychiatric patients on a locked ward about the Approved Social worker service but finding that the interviewees only wanted to talk about their own distress – repeatedly asking the researcher if she could ensure their release or help them see their children. And a parallel concern that the interview process was doing the interviewees harm.

Relatedly, the distress associated with immersion in fieldwork is sometimes paralleled by a distress felt on leaving the field. Again, this is well-reported in the literature (e.g. Cannon [1992] reporting her distress at the deaths of her patient-interviewees), but was also the subject of postings to the website. For example, one researcher never finished her PhD, having felt 'very lonely' and 'very alienated' after returning to academic and private life and leaving behind an immersive fieldwork experience. Aune (2004) reports on how her immersive fieldwork meant that she was spending more time with her research participants than with most of her friends and family. She cites Turner's (1969) work on 'communitas' to explain the warm ties that may develop between the fieldworker and research participants, despite structural barriers and differences of outlook. Clearly, the loss of communitas can be experienced as a distressing deprivation.

Institutional Responses

It will be argued elsewhere that, while HEIs appear to have appropriate systems in place (insurance policies, requirements for risk assessments, ethical oversight, counselling facilities) these systems are frequently not operating effectively to protect qualitative social researchers. This is because, where responsibility is devolved down to grant holders and PhD supervisors, these persons are sometimes insufficiently aware of their responsibilities and the relevant university procedures and supportive facilities. However, there is little indication in the literature or in the submissions we have received that this institutional response is gender-biased: where it fails, it fails men and women alike. It is true that the silencing of researcher concerns and inattention to researcher risk may sometimes be associated with what one person posting to the website called 'macho attitudes by some PIs towards certain kinds of fieldwork'. And it is also true that the employment profile in universities is such that the senior members of research teams are more often male and the junior members of research teams (who carry the main emotional burden of the research) are more often female, and research managers are failing to manage emotional risk (Hubbard et al. 2001). However, in the previous section of the report, we argued that evidence on the institutional management of risk outside universities (in the media, in aid agencies) indicates that poor risk management in universities is attributable less to gender-biased attitudes than to cultural lag: universities have simply failed to keep pace with the enhanced management of risk now found in comparable institutions.



While the experience of harm is not commonplace, both the research literature and the postings to the website suggest that there is a definite risk of physical and emotional harm to qualitative researchers. Emotional harm is a particular problem. Female researchers may be particularly exposed because of the emotional labour involved in qualitative methods and because of the associations between emotional labour and gender. The extent of such physical and emotional harm cannot be accurately ascertained. However, it is evident that it is much more common than would appear from formal complaints.

There are formal structures in place in universities to protect researchers and respond to any harm that occurs. At present, we cannot know how effective these structures are because it appears that, frequently, the structures are not being used by research managers: many grantholders and PhD supervisors are unaware of the insurance position, and/or do not plan and cost for researcher safety at the design stage of projects, and/or do not conduct risk assessments, and/or do not establish appropriate safety procedures for fieldworkers, and/or do not draw to the attention of fieldworkers the university's counselling services. Others have come to similar conclusions: 'grantholders at the inception of the research project need to think about how the research team as whole can support the fieldworker who is involved in face-to-face encounters with respondents' (Hubbard et al. 2001: 133). Of course, there are plenty of examples of good research management practice and some of them were reported on our website. But there are enough examples of poor management safety practice for research management itself to be viewed as a potential hazard to junior staff and postgraduates. Even since the website was closed, we have been notified of recent cases of poor management safety practice.

Further, it is clear that some other institutions where employees face cognate risks (we instance international aid organisations and media organisations) do a much better job of protecting employees. Ironically, some of the expert resources that these other institutions call upon to protect their employees are drawn from the university sector.

Table 1: Mary Douglas's 4 different cultural orientations to risk

'High group' – high integration into group

If there are structures in place in the universities that are not being used ('I don't have any experience of work with social researchers' – consultant occupational physician working for a university health service), then poor safety performance is more likely to be a cultural problem than a structural problem. Mary Douglas's work on different cultural orientations to risk (Douglas 1985, 1992; Douglas and Wildavsky 1982) is well-known. Variations in risk recognition, assessment and response are the product of local cultural variation and differential socialisation in various sub-cultures and social institutions. Variations in risk behaviour can be represented by their location in a two-by-two table (see Table 1) whose two axes represent, firstly, the variable degree to which the individual is integrated into bounded groups ('group'), and secondly, by the variable degree to which those groups require adherence to group norms of conduct ('grid').

Douglas's 'grid/group' approach has been the subject of certain criticisms (Bellaby 1990; Bloor 1995), but it was rightly described by the Royal Society Report on risk analysis, perception and management as 'revolutionary' (Royal Society 1992: 112). Rayner (1986) has applied the grid/group approach to occupational health and safety, investigating different occupational groups' orientations to radiation hazards in US hospitals. He noted that while radiological technicians had a rigid and routinised approach to radiation hazards, the radiologists were 'competitive individualists' seeking the rewards of professional acclaim and the marketplace, wishing to innovate, impatient of delay and willing to cut corners. Rayner described at length the potential hazards faced by hospital maintenance staff such as plumbers who, knowing little of the risks, must maintain fume cupboards and a clear blocked wastepipes through which radioactive materials may have been disposed. These are the 'fatalists' in the grid/group:

[they] lack the qualifications or control over goods and services necessary for participation in the individualist framework, or are without access to the established institutions of decision making within a bureaucracy. People in this category tend to be the most vulnerable in any social system (Rayner 1986: 576).

We leave it to others to decide how far, within qualitative research, junior researchers correspond to Rayner's plumbers and grantholders correspond to Rayner's radiologists.

If it is indeed the case that researchers' vulnerability to physical and emotional harm is magnified by an individualist cultural orientation among some grantholders and supervisors, this need not imply that remedies must wait on cultural change: structural changes can call forth cultural changes. Accordingly, we suggest both structural and cultural changes in our recommendations below:

R ... The absence of safety training was commented upon in the some website postings. Most methods courses already include some content on research ethics and a session on researcher safety would seem the natural corollary of ethics training. Such training should include familiarisation with risk assessments and with Social Research Association (or similar) safety guidelines, as well with the management of fieldwork relationships.

R ... **RC.** ... **RC.** ... As the leading funder of postgraduate social science training, and as an assessor of quality in research training, ESRC has an important potential role in promoting greater awareness of researcher safety issues.

R ... Those PIs who would most benefit from them are unlikely to attend specialist safety courses, unless the courses are made compulsory. It may be better therefore to include an element on researcher safety in other courses, such as in-service courses on postgraduate supervision. Again, the content should include the conduct of risk assessments and safety guidelines.

R ... It is insufficient for safety officers and university health and safety specialists to simply make themselves available to assist in risk assessments and the like. Safety specialists must be more proactive in identifying poor researcher safety practice when it occurs. Periodic departmental safety audits (already carried out by some universities) would both detect bad practice and raise awareness. The audits would be primarily audits of departmental systems but should also include some spot-checks with selected postgraduates and research associates.

R ... **RA** (... The Joseph Rowntree Foundation already does this, dispatching a copy of guidelines with every award letter.

Peer review of funding applications is the only point in the research process where fellow qualitative researchers have an opportunity to comment on inadequate safety provision and risk of research-related harm to research associates. Therefore, incorporating a specific request to review safety issues in the funder's referee report form could potentially act as a stimulus to improvements in safety practice. Parenthetically, we note that some funders' referee report forms already include an invitation to the referee to comment on ethical issues: a change to requesting comments, in addition, on safety issues would not be particularly burdensome for referees. However, the potential effectiveness of such a change is diminished because funders lack any formal responsibility for researcher safety. And, more seriously, peer review of safety issues in grant applications would only contribute to the diminution of risks to research associates, not to postgraduate students.

We expect this recommendation to be contested. In an early presentation on this inquiry at the Oxford Methods Festival, a proposal along these lines, to support research ethics committee oversight of researcher safety, sharply divided the large audience. We summarise the case against this proposal as follows:

- It is recognised that obtaining research ethics approval has become a major hurdle in the conduct of social research, requiring a considerable investment in time and effort by applicants. These investment costs are already tending to discourage undergraduate and masters dissertations on topics that require ethics approval. We should not lightly add to those investment costs.
- Relatedly, there is an understandable tendency (recognised by ethicists themselves) for ethicists to be overly interventionist and risk averse. There is therefore a future possibility that ceding ethical oversight of researcher safety may result in certain kinds of research topic (e.g. drug dealing) or certain kinds of data collection (e.g. home interviewing) becoming proscribed.
- There is a world of difference between competence in form completion and the establishment of a genuine safety culture.

While the case in favour is as follows:

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In the 1960s Laud Humphries noted down the license plates of men stopping off at a ‘tearoom’ or cottaging site for anonymous sex with men. He then asked a contact in the police department to trace the men’s names and addresses and went on to interview them, ostensibly for a community survey, but actually to obtain socio-demographic information on the ‘tearoom trade’ (Humphreys, 1970). An eminent British criminologist of the day, Donald West, in his foreword to Humphreys’s book, shamefully described the methods as ‘enterprising’. Without a shadow of a doubt, Humphreys’s research methods would today be judged wholly unethical. In the last thirty years there has been a cultural shift in the protections qualitative researchers routinely provide for their research participants. In recent years there have been a ‘small number of voices calling for a refocus of the issues of research ethics to reflect the necessity to protect both the research participant and the researcher’ (Adams 2006). We believe other cognate institutions (the media, aid agencies) have been experiencing a cultural change in the protections they afford to staff working in the field. We hope that the universities will soon experience a similar shift in the protection of their own fieldworkers. And we believe that the practical recommendations listed above, if carried through, will provide a framework to encourage that cultural change to reduce the risks of research-related harm. If our expectation of future change proves false, then we may face serious future consequences. As a senior aid worker told us:

If you haven’t prepared for the worst, you’ll be up the creek when it happens.

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