

## Lone worker guidance for conducting research in the field

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## 1. Introduction

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

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

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

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

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

The guidance covers:

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



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

The PI/AS is required to:

- Identify the risks associated with undertaking the research and ways in which these risks could be reduced;
- In consultation with the research team, develop appropriate procedures as necessary in line with the identified risks associated with undertaking the project
- Consider the need for purchasing appropriate technology, for example mobile phones

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

## 9. Conduct of interview

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

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

## 10. Strategies for handling risk situations

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

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

## 11. Debriefing and support after the event

- Support staff responsible for setting up fieldwork arrangements should be trained in

## Appendix 1 –Procedure for working alone

### Background:

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

### General procedure

1. Ensure that the ~~co~~worker who will be tracking your movements has your contact details by the researcher or student filling in Appendix 2 (staff details), many phones may be able to be tracked using a “find my phone” app, if your phone is able to use this facility you should down load the app with instructions and give it to your tracker.

7. If you have any concerns on arrival at the property or at any point during the visit, leave the situation and report back to the tracker. Your safety is more important than data collection.
8. If your coworker has not heard from you by 30 minutes after the anticipated

## Appendix 2: Contact Form staff

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

### Contact Details for your “CWorker”

Name	
Mobile phone number	
Office phone number	
Home phone number	
Car Number Plate Make & Model of Car (to be used for number plate recognition in the event of an emergency)	

Required for students:  
Supervisor authorisation:  
(Name, Signature and date)

### Appendix 3: Participant details form

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

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

Date/time of  
appointments      Name of Participants

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

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

Date & Time	Contact	Number	Outcome of telephone conversation
	Member of staff on mobile		