

The Department of Health Sciences

Guidelines for students and staff undertaking interviews or other research in participant's homes.

1. INTRODUCTION

This is a summary of the Departmental policy on lone working when undertaking research. This is primarily aimed at the early career researchers however even experienced researcher should be familiar with the policy of what to do if a problem does occur. Beyond this guide additional information is available from the staff intranet (see link below) and from your research group lead, research project lead or the group research administrator.

<https://hswebstaff.york.ac.uk/docs/committee/staff-meetings/#tab-4>

2. UNDERTAKING LONE WORKING: ESSENTIAL SUMMARY

- Research groups with lone workers will set up a formal contact arrangement ('buddy' system) where a friend, colleague or line manager is informed about the fieldwork timetable, including who the researcher meets, where the meeting takes place and for how long (detailed in the next bullet point). An updated itinerary will be communicated before each interview/fieldwork trip so that the buddy is aware of any changes in plans.
- Information about each interview will be recorded in advance on a Lone Working Contact Sheet (see Appendix A). The day before the interview this will be forwarded to the contact person and the supervisor; a copy will also be left in the researcher's home. The Lone Working Contact Sheet will include the mobile number of the researcher for use in case of emergency.
- The researcher will carry a personal alarm (see section 8) throughout the fieldwork trip and interview situations in case of emergency.
- On arrival to the interview location, the researcher will text or call the contact person. When the interview is finished, the researcher will again call them to confirm safety. If more than two hours have passed after the first call and the interview is still ongoing, the contact person will call the researcher to confirm that the researcher is safe. When the interview is finished, the researcher text/calls the contact person to confirm the completion of the interview and her/his exit from the home. A further text will be sent when the researcher returns home.
- If no interview completion (or home arrival) text is received within the expected timeframe for the interview (journey home), then the contact person must immediately contact the supervisor / line manager. At the same time, they must make every attempt must to locate and contact the researcher, including alerting the police.
- All Lone Workers Contact Sheets will be destroyed after each fieldwork trip is concluded to safeguard the anonymity of the participants.



3. PREPARATION FOR THE VISIT

- Gather all available information about the participant/family.
- If colleagues have met with the participant, check with them about the safety of a home visit.
- Make an appointment with the participant, and inform them of the visit
- Where possible have a mobile phone that is used solely for the research project, and only give participants this number or a University number. Never give your personal phone number.

4. VENUE

- Check the address.
- Consider the geographic area and know as much about it as you can. If the location is considered high-risk for violence or substance abuse, consider taking a colleague with you, or have a driver (colleague / taxi) wait outside during the visit.
- Check ahead whether there are any dogs in the house and whether these will be tethered or not during the visit; if concerned about an animal you should not enter/withdraw.
- Know exactly where you're going. Check weather conditions and be prepared appropriately.
- If driving be familiar with route (see below).
- Look as confident as you can and try to blend in as much as you can. Try not to look as if you are not sure of where you are going.
- Remember localities can be very different places at night than they are during the day.

5. BEFORE SETTING OFF

- Check equipment.
- Dress appropriately in a way that does not make you stand out. Try avoiding being too obvious about carrying equipment, such as lap top computers.
- Remember to leave your itinerary and notify colleagues of any changes. Set up a Buddy system to ensure that someone (line manager, co-worker, group secretary) has responsibility for ensuring that you have completed the home visit safely. For students, the supervisor must monitor the visits. The Buddy or supervisor should know where you are going, the time your visit starts and the expected time that it will finish.
- They should have your contact details (including next of kin) and always know where you are. Arrange to let them know when the interview has finished and that you are safe.
- The Buddy must know and agree to take on this role, and contingency plans must be in place to cover absence of the Buddy (see above)
- Agree action with the Buddy to be taken if you have not phoned in by an agreed time and do not answer a call to your mobile phone. This will include a set of escalation procedures to alert more senior management (if applicable) and the police. This is essential and must be done.
- Consider whether a code word system would be useful. This means that you can alert your Buddy / colleagues via a text or brief call that you need to be phoned so that you have an excuse to leave, or that you are in an emergency situation.
- Have some change and/or a phone card available in case you need to use a public phone. It is not always possible to get a mobile telephone signal.
- If possible, access training in recognising aggression and using de-escalation techniques.

6. THE VISIT

- When on public transport or walking from your car, carry your keys and mobile phone in your pocket, so that if your bag is snatched you can still drive home / get into your house. (Keys can also be used in defence if necessary).
- Remember you have a choice. If in doubt don't go in. Exercise extreme caution if you think that substance misuse may be occurring at the time of the visit, or if anyone in the household is obviously under the influence of alcohol/drugs.
- Do not show interest in people's property or whatever else is inside the house / surrounding area.
- Be aware of any delicate issues involved with discussions or interviews.
- Follow the participant in, noting locks and access and try to dissuade participants from locking you in.
- Note the layout of the house, in particular the way out and always try to sit between the participant and the exit. When offered a seat try to sit in a position that gives you access to the door.
- Before asking questions, explain why you need to know certain things and ensure people know who you are and what you are doing.
- Remember your own behaviour can trigger or prevent aggression, treat participants courteously and allow them to retain optimum control and dignity; you are a guest in their home.
- Be prepared to show some form of identity if asked.
- Consider issues of Child Protection and vulnerable adults.
- Do not underestimate the importance of body language. Avoid an aggressive stance. Crossed arms, hands on hips or raised hands will challenge and confront. Keep your distance.
- Bring the interview to a halt if the situation changes at anytime. Do any of the family members give cause for concern?
- Remember the dynamics of the visit can change; such as if someone else comes into the house or room.
- If violence is threatened, leave immediately.

7. TRAVELING BY CAR

- Make sure the vehicle is in good working order before setting off (and that it is insured for business use).
- Plan your journey in advance and tell someone which route you mean to take.
- If possible, and if travelling to areas that you do not know, consider using a satellite navigation aid (although this must be packed out of sight when parking).
- Do not leave valuables visible in the car, even when you are in it, and keep bags out of reach of open windows.
- When parking in daylight, consider what the area will be like after dark. If there is a chance that it will be dark when you return to your car, park near a street light if possible.
- When returning to the vehicle, quickly look around it to make sure there is no-one waiting for you.

- If you are forced to stop by another car, stay in the car, lock the doors and speak through a slightly open window.
- Make sure you know what to do if the car breaks down (i.e. who to phone, where to phone and so on).

8. TRAVELLING BY PUBLIC TRANSPORT

- Before setting off, have a timetable of the route using online resources such as the <https://www.gov.uk/search?q=planning+your+route> which allows you to plan routes using public transport. A copy of this should be given to your Buddy and if you need to vary your route, inform them.
- If possible, wait for your transport at a busy, well-lit stop or station. If this isn't possible, be vigilant at all times.
- On buses, sit downstairs near the bus driver, in an aisle seat if possible. On trains sit near the emergency alarm and familiarise yourself with the emergency procedures.
- Avoid upper decks on buses, or empty compartments on trains and also avoid these if there is only one other passenger.
- If threatened by another passenger, alert the guard/driver as soon as possible.
- Always carry the numbers of local taxi companies, as a backup.

9. HIGH RISE FLATS

- Always use the door entry system so that the participant knows you are on your way up.
- Be confident and know what floor you want before you get in the lift.
- Do not get into a lift if you feel unsure about its condition, e.g. doors not closing properly or the lift or lights aren't working correctly.
- Trust your instincts; do not get into a lift with a person you feel unsure about.
- If someone gets into a lift and you do not feel safe get out even if it's the wrong floor.

10. EQUIPMENT

- Be prepared to give up equipment/bags without a fight, things can be replaced, you can't.
- Keep a list of emergency contact numbers, including those for out of hours.
- Make sure your mobile phone is charged and that you know how to use it. Mobile phones should also be programmed for the local police number and your base number.
- Remember the limitations of mobile phones; they are unlikely to work properly in basements, lifts and high rise buildings.
- Always carry a personal alarm (available for the Department, free of charge.), check the battery and remember it is useless in the bottom of your bag.

11. MANAGING AGGRESSION

- Talk yourself out of problems; placate rather than provoke. Do not turn your back on someone who is behaving aggressively. Stay calm, speak gently and slowly. Do not be enticed into an argument. Never try to touch someone who is angry – this will not calm the situation.
- Recognise the limits of your own ability to deal with a situation and the time when it becomes prudent to leave; trust your instincts.
- Keep your eye on potential escape routes.
- Try to get away as quickly as possible. Move towards a place where there will be other people. Be prepared to use your personal alarm. Set it off as close to the aggressor's ear as possible and then throw it out of reach. Shout and scream – shout something practical like 'call the Police!' or 'Fire!'

12. ACTION FOLLOWING AN INCIDENT

- Allow yourself time to recover; seek practical support from your colleagues and manager.
- Contact the police, if appropriate.
- Seek proper medical attention for any physical injuries.
- Contact your manager.
- Report all incidents through the formal reporting procedures, including informing the Head of Department and Director of Research. This must be done.
- Share information with others who work in the area or who are likely to visit that particular address.
- Even after very minor incidents, feelings may be difficult to control and may affect your ability to deal with any further problems that arise. This is a perfectly natural reaction; if in doubt, take time out.
- Ask for a de-briefing and further counselling if necessary.
- Try to identify where control was lost and how, so that practice and training can be improved accordingly.

For more comprehensive guidance on these points see the HSE <http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg73.pdf> and the NHS Lone Working Guide which is available from <http://www.nhsbsa.nhs.uk/4248.aspx>

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Appendix A. Lone Working Contact Sheet (Use a separate sheet for each interview)

Researcher's details

Researcher's name:

Researcher's mobile numbers:

Researcher's home number and address:

Personal/home details of contact person

Name:

Mobile number: Home number:

Academic supervisor contact

Name:

Mobile number:

Interview details

Date of lone working:

Names of research participants (interviewees):

Full address of participant (or interview location if not interviewee's home):

Travel plans and transport arrangements:

Mobile contact number during interview:

Estimated time of departure from home:

Estimated time of arrival (at interview location):

Estimated time of departure (from interview location):

Estimated time of arrival at home (from interview location):