



University of Sussex

School of Social Sciences and Cultural Studies, Graduate School

**LOCAL RULES FOR THE SAFETY OF SOCIAL RESEARCHERS**  
*Undertaking Fieldwork or Loneworking*

2007

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**Abbreviations**

USO	University Safety Officer
H&S	Health and Safety
HoD	Head of Department
HSE	Health and Safety Executive
LR	Local Rules
MHSW	Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999
OHA	Occupational Health Adviser
OHS	Occupational Health Service
PG	Post-graduate
PPE	Personal protective equipment
HSEO	Health, Safety and Environment Office

## 1 Definitions

**Local Rules** (LR) are a set of arrangements for safe working and organisational structure to be applied throughout a department.

**Fieldwork** is regarded as any work or research carried out by staff or students in places not under the control of the University but where the University is responsible for the safety of staff and students and others who may be affected by their work.

**A Lone worker** is generally regarded as someone who works entirely alone. However, a lone worker may also be a person who is with a group of other people but is out of communication with them, or, as in these Local Rules, who is visiting another person off campus for the purpose of interviewing them, or who is conducting a one-to-one interview on campus isolated in a laboratory or interview room.

## 2 Duties and responsibilities

### Supervisors

Supervisors are responsible for ensuring that risk associated with fieldwork is assessed as required by current legislation; this must take into account the experience, health and ability of the worker (staff or student (both under-graduate (UG) and post-graduate (PG))). The Supervisor should maintain a list of all staff and students who are currently working or have worked on their projects, and ensure that adequate training is given (Appendix 1). In addition, the Supervisor must regularly monitor and review all risks and staff and student lists.

It is advised that all those responsible for the personal safety of lone workers are trained in the management of these risks (Appendix 1).

### Staff and students

Both staff and students should inform their Supervisor of any medical conditions or treatments which may affect safety either in the field or whilst working alone on campus. They should ensure that they agree with and have understood the risk assessment and carry out their assigned task in the manner agreed with their Supervisor. No changes should be introduced unless it has been discussed and agreed with the Supervisor.

### The Health, Safety and Environment Office (HSEO)

The Health, Safety and Environment Office is responsible for advising on all aspects of health, safety and the environment in the University (including the administration of the University Emergency Response Team). Further information regarding the HSEO may be found at <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/hso/>

### University Safety Committee

The University has an established Health, Safety and Environment Committee. Further details may be found at: <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/hso/1-2-10.html>

## **Occupational Health Service (OHS)**

The OHS provides impartial advice and support to managers and individual members of staff, on all matters relating to the health and well being of employees of the University.

The Service focuses on the relationship between work and health and is not a substitute for General Practitioner or local health and treatment services. The Occupational Health Adviser (OHA) is a trained nurse with a specialist qualification in occupational health, and is required to work within the ethical and legal constraints of the healthcare profession. This means all occupational health records remain confidential to the OHS, and details would only be disclosed to Managers or Personnel with the individual's specific consent, in order to protect the health and well being of workers.

Any member of staff with a health concern affecting their work, whether caused or made worse by their work, should arrange to see the OHA.

## **Health and Safety Law**

The University and its employees have duties under Health and Safety law.

The University must ensure 'as far as is reasonably practicable' the health, safety and welfare of all employees, without putting at risk any person who may be affected by the work activity. Employees must take reasonable care of their own H&S and that of others who may be affected by their work activities, co-operate with the University to ensure that it can meet its statutory obligations and not intentionally interfere with or misuse anything provided for their health, safety and welfare.

On 16<sup>th</sup> March 2003 The Universities and Colleges Employers Association published a guidance document entitled "Guidance on Safety in Fieldwork". It represents what is considered to be good practice and contains much relevant information, not only for HoDs and Supervisors but also for research workers. The HSEO sent a copy to all HoDs in 2003, the document can be found at

[http://www.ucea.ac.uk/index.cfm/pcms/site.Publications.publications\\_home/](http://www.ucea.ac.uk/index.cfm/pcms/site.Publications.publications_home/)

## **3 Arrangements**

### **3.1 General Rules**

Supervisors must ensure that workers are aware of all aspects of the Local Rules and Code of Practice. A copy of these must be made available to all those involved in work for which these Local Rules are appropriate. Acknowledgement of receipt of is required, electronic read receipt is acceptable. A copy of the risk assessment relevant to their particular work must also be shown to the worker who must read it and sign to state that they have understood and accept its content.

Supervisors must ensure that all staff and students under their control receive appropriate training to the tasks they are instructed to undertake, and are supervised at a level which is appropriate to their level of competence and experience. A documented record of all training should be kept. All Supervisors should maintain records relating to their research which should include staff lists, risk assessments, accidents and incidents.

## 3.2 Record Keeping

### Accidents and Incidents

Record keeping will be devolved to individuals reflecting their roles within the Department and University. All accidents and incidents must be recorded and sent to the HSEO and the School Health and Safety Officer. A copy should be kept on file within the School.

### Risk Assessments

A copy of all risk assessments must be kept and be accessible to all relevant workers. The following personnel should keep records as appropriate:

- Supervisor(s)
- Researcher
- Designated Officer

## 3.3 Training and Supervision

All those undertaking research involving interviews with members of the public must be familiar with this Code of Practice, the Local Rules and with correct procedures for use of interview facilities and equipment. A documented record of all training must be kept. New inexperienced staff and students should not be allowed to conduct interviews on or off campus until they have received the appropriate training for that research project.

### Staff

it is strongly advised that staff attend courses in Personal Safety at Work and crisis/anger management techniques. **For discussion**

*NB Training is currently available from the HSEO, this training could be tailored to suit Schools / Depts*

The Project Supervisor is responsible for ensuring that those persons under his/her supervision are instructed in the nature of potential hazards and in the practical use of special procedures, techniques and safety equipment. Inexperienced workers must be closely supervised and alternative supervision arranged in the event of the absence from the University of the principal supervisor. Such workers must be informed of their alternate Supervisor. The closeness of supervision is dependant on the level of training of staff or students working under the project supervisor. Supervisors should not assume competence until it has been demonstrated.

It is strongly recommended that researchers undertaking off campus or out of hours interviews be trained in personal safety issues (Appendix 1).

#### **4. Planning**

All fieldwork that involves enhanced levels of risk above those encountered in everyday life is subject to a risk assessment. The worker should be involved in the risk assessment process which must be discussed and agreed between workers and their Supervisor **BEFORE** starting the work. Safety should be built into the design of research proposals and should consider:

- Choice of methods e.g. methods of answering questions – questionnaire or interview
- Interview site e.g. on campus, public place, respondents home
- Working with children
- Staffing requirements, and choice of interviewer e.g. paired in preference to individuals, gender, experience, capabilities and health (e.g. diabetes, epilepsy, asthma, disabilities)
- Recruitment methods e.g. by telephone or letter
- Time-tabling e.g. to avoid tiredness, avoiding evening/night time
- Measures to be taken to minimize potential for false accusation and risk to professional/personal reputation.

You are reminded that all research involving human participants requires prior approval of the Research Governance Ethics Committee. Guidelines for Ethical Approval may be found at: <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/soccul/1-5-15.html>

##### **4.1 Assessing fieldwork risks**

When the fieldwork site had been identified it is advisable to reconnoitre the area before the work commences to ensure the least potential for a dangerous event. Things for consideration include:

- Reliability of public transport, reputable taxi companies
- Safe access, good lighting at night, potential for car theft
- Local tensions – racial or cultural division, is there a need to meet with local leaders?
- The need to notify or gain approval of local authorities in advance of a study in certain countries or regions.
- Health risks
- A fuller list of fieldwork risks is available at Appendix 3.

##### **4.2 Setting up fieldwork**

Researchers should try to find out as much as possible about the characteristics of the people they will be interviewing and their housing and living environments. Reconnoitre the area first, if this is not possible then study a map of the area to help to evaluate its character - e.g. rural, suburban or inner city, plan car parking and to plan routes for leaving dense housing areas to prevent getting lost. Consider the need for accompanied interviews, shadowing and pre-arranged pickups. If at all possible telephone in advance to assess the respondents and find out if any other members of the household will be present during the interview. If researchers must 'cold call' in risky areas travel in pairs to set up interviews. If the security of the researcher is in doubt then arrange alternative venues that have already been assessed for safety.

### **4.3 Risk from respondents**

Topics for discussion in social research interviews may provoke strong feelings in respondents and prompt angry reactions for example, bereavement, unemployment, social exclusion, relationship breakdown. Other research topics may directly increase the risk of violence such as working across sectarian divides, investigating criminal behaviour or studying homophobic violence. Risk from the threat of violence may also be increased if interviewing people with a history of psychological disturbance or violent behaviour. Issues of race, culture and gender can similarly increase risk levels; lone female researchers are generally more vulnerable than males and non-ethnically matched interviewing may also be more hazardous.

Risk situations such as these may be avoided by contacting respondents in advance to ask about preferences and expectations. Researchers should also be given information from previous interviews, where relevant, in order to minimise risks and understand precautions that may need to be taken

#### **Interview precautions**

Supervisors should instruct researchers to take precautions to minimise risk in the interview situation and to follow the Code of Practice for personal safety (Section 5) when working off campus.

#### **Conduct at interview**

Although a risk assessment may have been undertaken, risk situations can still arise during an interview. Issues in race, culture and gender may precipitate hostile reactions.

To avoid inappropriate or provocative behaviour researchers should:

- be briefed on cultural norms
- appreciate the use of body language and the acceptability or not of body contact
- establish the right social distance.

### **4.4 Risk handling strategies**

In addition to the information given above and the risk handling strategies outlined in the Code of Practice Section 5) employers should also ensure that researchers are trained in techniques for handling threats, abuse or compromising situations. Training should also enable researchers to spot signs that the respondent is becoming upset or angry and allow them to make informed decisions to acknowledge and contain the situation or to end the discussion and leave after offering an appropriate reason. A decision to withdraw should be quick and decisive. Decisions to return should only be made after consultation with the supervisor. Refresher training is essential to keep the issue and skills learnt alive. Training and refresher training applies to supervisors as well as researchers.

### **4.5 Notification and maintaining contact**

Lone workers are at greater risk than group members therefore an effective method of communication should be arranged. Any Code of Practice or safe system of work should have in place arrangements which allow supervisors or their nominee to ascertain the whereabouts of lone workers and to make regular checks with them.

This information should include details of the researcher's itinerary, appointment times and overnight accommodation.

#### **4.6 Debriefing, support and counselling**

Interviewers must have the opportunity to discuss difficult situations with their supervisors and to receive counselling if it is required. A Counseling Service is provided for students offering professional and confidential support. It is not part of the academic structure and no information is passed to Schools of Study or other sectors of the University without the student's permission. For more information see the Psychological and Counselling Services website at:

<http://www.sussex.ac.uk/Units/stuserv/pcs/counselling>

#### **4.7 Out of hours working**

Work undertaken between 7.00 p.m. and 7.00 a.m. weekdays, at weekends and bank holidays is considered to be out of hours. For further information see

[http://www.sussex.ac.uk/hso/documents/microsoft\\_word\\_-\\_lone\\_working\\_policy.pdf](http://www.sussex.ac.uk/hso/documents/microsoft_word_-_lone_working_policy.pdf)

### **References**

Recent articles published by the Social Research Association (SRA)

[www.the-sra.org.uk](http://www.the-sra.org.uk)

The Universities and Colleges Employers

[http://www.ucea.ac.uk/index.cfm/pcms/site.Publications.publications\\_home/](http://www.ucea.ac.uk/index.cfm/pcms/site.Publications.publications_home/)

## 5 Code of Practice

### Fieldwork

1. Always carry identification, a letter or a card, authenticated by University and giving the researcher's work address and telephone number. Respondents should be invited to check the authenticity.
2. Researchers are strongly encouraged to carry personal alarms, and mobiles.
3. Journeys should be planned IN ADVANCE to ensure safe modes of transport are available. Always take a map.
4. A contact system should be established if the risk assessment identifies the need for one.
5. An emergency plan should be developed for situations where contact is not maintained or return times are missed.
6. Researchers should be given information from previous interviews where relevant.
7. If Researchers are concerned about a visit in advance then, if possible, they should arrange to be accompanied or to be phoned during the visit. Supervisors and Researchers should decide what procedure to follow if the phone is not answered or if the researcher feels unsafe.
8. All accidents and incidents must be reported and investigated promptly. They should be reported to the HSEO and the School H&S Officer.
8. Researchers should reduce the number of valuables they carry (credit cards, cheque book, house keys etc.) and avoid wearing expensive jewellery or watches.
9. If possible small change and a phone card should be carried for emergency calls – even if mobile phones are available as they may not always work.
10. Dress for safety on visits - wear appropriate shoes and dress appropriately to the circumstances.
11. If an item is grabbed – let go!
12. Avoid going by foot if feeling vulnerable. Use convenient public transport, private car or a reputable taxi firm.
13. Where 'cold calling', assess the situation before beginning the interview and if in doubt re-arrange the interview for another time when it can be conducted more safely.
14. When visiting an interviewee's home a contact system should normally be established. In addition try to make sure you are seen entering the home, greet porters, caretakers or use other ways of ensuring your presence is noted. But



take care not to compromise interviewee confidentiality.

15. If in the light of prior information there is any doubt about personal safety consider the following:

- Arrange to be accompanied by a co-worker
- Arrange to conduct the interview by telephone
- Arrange for the interview to take place at the University or in a safe public location.
- Let the interviewee know that you have a schedule and that others know where you are.
- Stratagems include arranging for a colleague or taxi to collect you; making phone calls; arranging for calls to be made to you. Leave your mobile phone switched on.

16. Be aware of your surroundings and the potential to leave quickly if the need arises. If interviewing in a private dwelling, stay in the communal rooms, try to avoid a situation in which your exit route is obstructed, including by the interviewee.

## 17. Appendix 1

### **Suggested training Topics**

For staff, postgraduate students and induction of new staff members - where applicable

Topics to be confirmed by SDU and HSEO

## Appendix 2

Only complete this section if the study involves risks to the researcher above those encountered in everyday life

<b>1 Research project / off campus work to be assessed:-</b>					
Start date.....			SUPERVISOR NAME:		ASSESSED BY:
Finish date.....					
<b>2 Identify the hazards: tick those that apply and add your own where necessary</b>					
1	Lone working	9	Psychological trauma to researcher or respondent	17	
2	Alcohol / drugs	10	Manual handling	18	
3	Time of day [e.g. night, waking]	11	Infections / other health hazards	19	
4	Compromising situations	12	Trips, slips and falls	20	
5	Noise, temperature, air quality	13	Transport (e.g. public, private, University cars etc.)	21	
6	Natural hazards	14	Location (e.g. areas known for violence), Security/political threat	22	
7	Violence/aggression	15	Accommodation	23	
8	Physical threat or abuse	16	Animals (e.g. aggressive dogs)	24	

<b>3</b> REFERENCE (1, 2 etc.)	GIVE DETAILS OF:- WHO IS AT RISK.....  THE HAZARD WHEN IT WILL BE PRESENT	WHAT CONTROLS MUST BE PUT IN PLACE TO LIMIT THE RISK TO THOSE CONCERNED. STATE WHETHER THE CONTROL IS ALREADY IMPLEMENTED.	RISK (AFTER CONTROL MEASURES HAVE BEEN IMPLEMENTED)			
			HI	MED	LOW	NONE

THIS ASSESSMENT WAS MADE BY .....(NAME),

SIGNED.....

DATE.....

**4**

RESEARCHER(S) SIGNATURE.....SUPERVISORS SIGNATURE .....