Fieldwork: Some Guidelines for Risk Reduction

Introduction

The set of guidance outlines a series of steps that should be put into place prior to any research data being collected in the fieldwork conducted in the UK. Additional procedures need to be followed for fieldwork in other countries (the first point of call for further advice is the School's International Officer, Helen Quinn). The guidance has been approved and adopted by the Research Strategy Group of the School of Healthcare in September 2006 to aid best practice.

First Principles

1. The 'safer' procedure for data collection from the researcher's and the interviewee's point of view would be to arrange for all interviews/data collection to be held/gathered on an official site – e.g. at the University or in a health care office. This would mean that the data could be collected in an environment where the researcher's colleagues or other health care professionals, and ultimately the local University/Trust security system.

2. It is a necessary requirement for ethical fieldwork that the location of fieldwork must be 'safe' from the point of view of the researcher, and if interviews are being conducted the interviewee as well.

3. Where home/hospital/outside visits are to be undertaken these visits must have been correctly identified in the research project's ethics proposal and must have been passed by the correct authorities both internally and externally.

4. It is the *responsibility of the researcher's Principal Investigator (PI) (or for a PhD researcher, their supervisor(s))* to ensure that a risk assessment is undertaken prior to any fieldwork, *and* to conduct a post-fieldwork review (to check on both procedures and ways to enhance these).

5. The *researcher and/or PhD researcher should also take responsibility* to ensure that any concerns that he/she might have are addressed by the PI / supervisor prior to undertaking any such fieldwork.

Some General Points to Consider

Key points for the researcher, post-graduate researcher, PI and supervisor to bear in mind when determining the level of risk include the following:

- **Area** – is the area that the researcher is entering known to be risky, transport options, accommodation if needed?

- **Risk from the respondents** – is the interviewee known to be 'difficult', is the researcher to cover sensitive topic areas, how will the interview be worded/handled?

- **Actual interview precautions** – minimise all risks where possible, pre-check travel arrangements, dress codes (cultural awareness of expected codes of dress), are there entry phones access codes needed to buildings, ensure the researcher has own correct identity badges for University or health care facility.

- **Contact with base** – visits that are to occur during the normal working day and require no over night stays will be covered by RRF plan. If the project requires data collection in areas that will entail the researcher staying away from the University the researcher should organise check in times with hotel/accommodation personnel or (depending on the project Social Services/Police). A schedule of times and itinerary may need to be drawn up, and explicit contact plan (and what to do in emergencies) worked up.

- **Conduct through interview** – the researcher should agree/pre-arrange with interviewee whether or not interview to be taped then transcribed, notes taken by the researcher during interview, questionnaires expected to be completed etc

- **Debrief** – after interview the researcher if necessary should de-brief with the PI / PhD supervisor any concerns/issues that arose during interview that the interviewee may re-contact the University about

An Outline Flow Diagram of the Recommended Risk Related Fieldwork Process

The following page outlines a recommended process to follow. It is intended as an aide memoire.

Further guidance and the University fieldwork risk assessment form and approval form are available at: http://www.leeds.ac.uk/safety/fieldwork/

Risk Related Fieldwork (RRF)

The process of risk assessment should be managed by PGR supervisor or PI for the particular Research project. If no PI, then the researcher should initiate the process with the Research Director.

Supervisor/PI in consultation with Student/Researcher agrees a level of assumed risk

No Expected Risk

e.g. interviews to take place at University of Leeds

Minimal Risk

e.g. interviews to take place in a controlled environment such as NHS Hospital/Clinic

Moderate or Higher Risk

e.g. interview to take place at interviewee's own home.

If small, moderate or higher risk, check-in procedure must be agreed and implemented. The researcher must provide the PI / Research Administrator, or other agreed nominee, with details of the:

- Name and address of interviewee
- Contact phone number of interviewee
- Date and time interview to take place
- Length of time needed to interview
- Mobile phone number of researcher or School mobile

Researcher will agree with PI/Administrator a 'check-in' time for contact post interview

PI/ Administrator provides Researcher with a 'check-up on' time if researcher not contacted post interview (e.g. 15 mins)

Researcher & Administrator agree further 'check' time (normally another 15 mins)

If researcher not checked in by agreed time, Research Administrator will;

- Try to contact researcher on mobile
- Ring interviewee's home
- Check to see if contacted any other member of staff
- If high risk area – contacts the Police

Researcher completes RRF Contact Chart and passes to Administrator. Administrator keeps in secure/confidential place ensuring designated deputy aware of proposed visits, RRF Contact Chart , where Chart can be located and 'check-in'/'check-up-on' times.

As each interview completed and Researcher 'checked-in' interviewee details can be marked off the RRF Contact Chart. At end of all interviews, the Chart should be passed back to the Researcher to keep all interviewee contact information secure.