QUALITI (NCRM) COMMISSIONED INQUIRY INTO THE RISK TO WELL-BEING OF RESEARCHERS IN QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

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Executive Summary

ES1. This inquiry, into risks to the well-being of qualitative researchers, was commissioned by Qualiti, the Cardiff node of the ESRC-funded National Centre for Research Methods. It has the following components:

- A literature survey.
- Two focus groups on gender issues.
- Semi-structured interviews with persons concerned with the institutional management of researcher risk (e.g. university insurance managers).
- Semi-structured interviews with persons in institutions where employees run cognate risks to researchers (e.g. aid agencies).
- A phpbb bulletin board website where persons could submit evidence (reports of experiences, viewpoints, or both). Eighty-six submissions were received.
- The draft report was commented upon by an international panel of readers and benefited from an extended debate at the Oxford Methods Festival.

ES2. The literature review covers both professional guidelines and the academic literature. Among the professional guidelines, we single out for commendation the code of practice on researcher safety issued by the Social Research Association (2006), which includes not just safety tips, such as working in pairs and scheduled reporting back to base, but also good research management practice, especially the early planning of researcher safety to allow the factoring of safety costs into project budgets. The extensive academic literature may be subdivided into physical risks, emotional risks (the largest category), institutional risk management and gender and risk.

ES3. The literature on physical risks includes reportage of deaths to fieldworkers such as Ken Pryce and Myrna Mack. While anthropologists face the greatest risks of injury and disease, physical risks have been reported in a wide range of research settings, including home interviews. 'Edgework' entails researchers putting themselves in the dangerous position of the research participants (such as white-water rafting enthusiasts) on the understanding that the experience of risk is an essential component of the project. Much of the literature is concerned with maintaining researcher safety through skilful fieldwork technique – this is a valuable contribution but may inadvertently also foster a romantic myth that research is a pursuit undertaken by a lone individual devoid of any institutional context – the context of funders, grantholders/supervisors, insurers, ethics committees, safety officers, and the rest.

ES4. The literature on emotional risks suggests that, in the course of the very proper concern of researchers to protect research participants from harm, researchers have neglected to protect themselves. Establishing and maintaining good fieldwork relationships requires emotional labour and such labour can be draining. Empathic relationships may generate distress. Quasi-therapeutic relationships may generate role conflict. Being privy to accounts of distressing

events may in turn generate distress for the auditor. Fieldwork can generate anxiety and feelings of isolation. Writings on safeguards against emotional harm have discussed the efficacy of counselling, peer support, reflexivity and (most importantly) advance preparedness.

ES5. The literature on institutional support is much more limited. Safety training is reported to be inadequate. Grantholders and PhD supervisors are frequently thought to be too remote from the immediate dangers of fieldwork.

ES6. Although the website was organised into different sections – physical risk, emotional risk, gender and risk and institutional risk management – in practice the postings were often cross-cutting in their concerns and tended to be posted to that section of the site which was currently the most active. Registration was necessary to limit spam postings, and while this may have been a barrier to some, many people registered under pseudonyms and posted anonymously. The number of accounts of actual physical risk was small but sufficient to substantiate the claim that such dangers are not illusory. Emotional damage was much more widely reported and many of those submitting to the website clearly felt that these risks to researchers were being insufficiently attended to. The damage suffered in some instances had led to projects remaining incomplete. The management of distress was the most commonly addressed topic on the website, but there was no consensus on appropriate management. Likewise, a small number of accounts reported ethics committee and university safety officer involvement in projects, but with varying judgements of their value.

ES7. In respect of the institutional context of social research, the central impression from our interviews was that, while there appear to be substantial formal structures in place in the universities to protect researchers and respond to experiences of harm, it is difficult to say how effective these structures are because they are hardly used by managers of social research. Although most (if not all) university insurance policies require prior notification of unusual risks and may involve an additional premium, an insurance manager at a large provincial university had never been approached by a researcher to get a costing for such an additional premium and a senior manager in a funding agency had no experience of being asked to fund such an additional premium. While it is clear, from the literature and from postings to the website, that project risk assessments are being conducted more frequently than in the past, a university occupational health and safety specialist had no direct experience of working with social researchers on risk assessments. A university Human Resources manager had not dealt with a single case of research-related harm to a social researcher in the period 1995-2006 and the manager of a counselling service could recall no cases of research-related harm presenting to her service. Research ethics committees were willing to deliberate on matters of researcher safety and reported a concern that PhD supervisors and principal investigators sometimes appeared not have addressed the issue.

ES8. Enquiries about risks to journalists in a media organisation and to fieldworkers in an international aid agency revealed that both organisations had undergone very substantial changes in recent years in relation to the ways in which such risks were responded to. This was

partly a matter of mandatory checked risk assessments, security training for senior, as well as junior, staff, compulsory debriefings, and so forth. But most importantly, both organisations laid stress on the need for line managers to *manage* risks. It may be the case that relatively poor institutional management of researcher risk in universities is a case of 'cultural lag'.

ES9. We consider that gender issues are an important aspect of research-related harm, although they were often underlying, rather than explicit, in both the reviewed literature and the website postings. It is not that gender produces distinctive risks per se, but rather that gender may amplify existing field work risks in particular settings. Additionally, in relation to women researchers, the evidence suggests that the performance of emotional work is undertaken disproportionately by female researchers, partly because feminist methods stress the value of close and trusting relationships with research participants, and partly because traditional gender role expectations lead research participants to expect female researchers to act as confidantes and to be sympathetic.

ES10. We conclude, that while research-related harm thankfully remains comparatively rare, the evidence (both from the literature and from the postings to our website) suggests that it is a more common phenomenon than the absence of formal complaints would suggest, with emotional harm posing particular problems. Formal structures are available in the universities to address such problems, but they are under-used. Under-use appears to be related to inadequate line management by principal investigators and PhD supervisors.

ES11. We believe that there are practical remedies available which could at least mitigate the problem. Our recommendations are as follows:

- **Postgraduate research methods courses should include researcher safety in their curricula.**
- **ESRC should consider whether provision of safety training in postgraduate research methods curricula should be a factor in determining whether those methods courses receive ESRC recognition**
- **University in-service training courses for PhD supervisors and principal investigators should include content on researcher safety.**
- **All university departments should be subject to periodic health and safety audits, which would include examination of provision for researcher safety.**
- **All funders should require principal investigators to comply with the SRA (or similar) safety guidelines.**
- **All funders should formally invite referees to comment on researcher safety issues, where salient, as part of their assessment of applicants' research methods.**
- **All university ethics committees should accept formal responsibility for oversight of provision for postgraduate student safety, with safety issues being addressed in the context of a specific question on the application form and of the guidance notes on form completion.**

Section I: Introduction - Establishment of Commissioned Inquiry

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 Phpbb '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.

Section II: The literature review

It is intended that the literature review will complement and orient the other components of the overall inquiry by identifying areas of concern to qualitative researchers. In addition it is hoped that the literature review may prove to be a useful resource for the qualitative research community in its own right, both as a summary of work to date and as a partial bibliographic resource. It is not claimed that the review draws on the totality of research in the area, but it is hoped that it is a wide-ranging overview of recent literature addressing concerns about the well-being of researchers in qualitative research.

The review also contains a précis of guidelines drawn up by the Social Research Association (Social Research Association 2006) and the British Sociological Association (British Sociological Association 2006). Further, it contains an examination of the institutional guidelines of two large UK universities.

In addition to the institutional guidelines and recommendations, the review will address literature pertaining to four substantive areas: physical risk; emotional risk; institutional risk management; gender and risk in relation to researcher well-being in qualitative research settings. The rationale for dividing the overall topic into these four sub-topics is stated below.

Physical risk

The risk of physical harm is the most obvious manifestation of risk when undertaking certain types of qualitative research, and is also an issue that immediately springs to mind when discussing researcher well-being. Studying people, especially in settings that may carry a degree of uncertainty or volatility often carries with it an element of risk of physical harm to the researcher. In the detailed discussion of literature examining physical risk to researchers, we have included examples of situations where researchers have either become aware of their physical health being compromised, or have suffered an injury as a result of the research they have been undertaking. Such risk is identified as being particularly acute when undertaking research in times of social upheaval or conflict. The point is also made that situations that may appear hazardous from the outside are not. This requires that research commissioning and risk assessments are sensitive to local research settings, perhaps utilising on-the-ground experience, rather than reliance on generalised expectations of the hazards to be found in particular environments.

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.

Overview of professional guidelines

British Sociological Association

The British Sociological Association has produced broad guidelines for good practice in sociological research. The scope of the 'Statement of Ethical Practice for the British Sociological Association [March 2002 – updated May 2004]' (British Sociological Association 2006) is wide-ranging, as it is intended to provide an ethical framework that can be applied to the great array of social research that currently takes place in the UK. Many of the guidelines relate directly to the safety of respondents, or participants, in social science research and there is relatively little on the safety, or well-being, of researchers themselves.

The Statement is divided into 61 short points of principle, or guidelines, which outline the responsibility of researchers in social science research. The BSA, reasonably enough, has given first priority to protecting the interests of research participants and funders or sponsors. An appendix offers an extensive reading list and links to other websites (including that of the Social Research Association), but only one of the 61 'statements' is devoted to researcher safety:

8) Social researchers face a range of potential risks to their safety. Safety issues need to be considered in the design and conduct of social research projects and procedures should be adopted to reduce the risk to researchers. (British Sociological Association 2006)

Social Research Association

The Social Research Association (SRA) has produced a code of practice specifically addressing researcher safety. It is designed for use by 'research funders, employers, research managers and researchers carrying out fieldwork' (Social Research Association 2006).

Despite being a relatively short document, it covers a range of topics, suggesting measures to minimise the risk to well-being of researchers. It is designed to be of assistance to social researchers who are 'conducting research in the field on their own'. The topics covered in the code of practice are as follows: *Clarifying responsibilities; Budgeting for safety; Planning for safety in research design; Assessing risk in the fieldwork site; Risk and respondents; Setting up fieldwork; Interview precautions; Maintaining contact; Conduct of interview; Strategies for handling risk situations; Debriefing and support after the event; Making guidelines stick.*

An important element that is re-iterated throughout the code of practice is the concept of a 'duty of care' that employers have to employees. Very early on it is pointed out that 'safety at work is a dual responsibility of the employer and the employee', establishing the principle that safety is not the responsibility of the researcher alone. There is a contractual obligation for employers to ensure that researchers are, as far as possible, protected from harm through effective research management and robust lines of communication between employer and employee.

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 onto 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 *Interview precautions* 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 had been clearly established, and as broad a range of potential hazards as possible had been thought about and were being managed appropriately. However, a particular problem with these sorts of recommendations is, as the SRA say *making guidelines stick*. The SRA suggest four steps to ensuring that guidelines such as these are adopted:

- Safety issues should feature in the training of all new research staff, and guidelines should be included in induction packs and staff handouts.
- There is a need for continual reminders and reinforcement throughout a researcher's career.
- Supervisors and research managers may need to take staff through procedures with each new fieldwork period.
- Support staff responsible for setting up fieldwork arrangements should be trained in the procedures. (Social Research Association 2006)

As is implied by the requirement for supervisors and research managers to take the initiative in informing staff of procedures, in order for such guidelines to be effective, they have to be given a high profile at all levels of research. Whilst the SRA guidelines are undoubtedly highly regarded by those that have come across them, it is probable that awareness of the guidelines among researchers and research managers is currently low.

Institutional guidelines – University 'A'

Guidance on safety in fieldwork…/interim guidance for lone workers issued 15/02/05
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 *Fieldwork planning; Supervision and training; Conduct of fieldwork; Health matters and emergency action.* The guidelines document itself is 31 pages long and draws on the same literature as the SRA code of practice – notably *Personal safety at work: guidance for all employees* 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. There is also a moral duty that the teacher has towards the pupil. (University 'A' Occupational Safety, Health and Environment Unit 2004: 4)

It is then explained that it is through a system of 'line management' that the University's statutory requirements are expected to be met. In University 'A' formal responsibilities for issues of fieldworker safety are delegated to Heads of Departments. It is therefore for the Head of Department to ensure that the risk assessment for the fieldwork is made and to ensure that safe systems of work have been established for all staff and students. Frequently the Head of Department will delegate this duty to a particular member of staff as Departmental Safety Officer, or to different research managers – PhD supervisors and Principal Investigators.

Institutional guidelines – University 'B'

Safety and Environmental Protection Services (SEPS) – *Health and Safety Note: Safety in Fieldwork* 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 *Background* 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 fieldwork* – '

> 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 activities. (University 'B' 2006)

The remaining sections are *Insurance; Risk Assessment; Supervision and Emergency Procedures and Reporting Accidents.*

As with University 'A', it is the Heads of Departments who are explicitly referred to as having line responsibility for a range of protocols. It is the Head of Department that is responsible for ensuring that fieldworkers are adequately insured, and, with the 'expedition leader' are responsible for ensuring appropriate risk assessments have taken place before fieldwork commences. The guidelines refer only to the CVCP code of practice in support of their statement.

The most obvious features of the University 'B' guidelines is that they are very brief, there is no clear definition of terms (for example there is no guidance as to a formal process for 'organisers' to appoint field 'leaders') and they have not been revised since 1995.

Introduction to presentation of issues arising from recent literature

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.

Risk to the Physical Well-being of Researchers involved in Qualitative Research

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-Treweeek 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 Fieldwork*, 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 researcher she had to, as Vail puts it, 'perform incompetence' (Vail 2001: 713):

> …rather than acknowledging my familiarity with these norms I had to assume the ignorance of a stranger (Palriwala 2005: 156)

While the above accounts were produced as a result of the conduct of projects that were completed there are other cases (under-reported for obvious reasons) where projects are terminated after encountering unanticipated risk. Gill writes:

> I am reminded of an American colleague who recently left Morocco because he received death threats, a Palestinian ethnographer wary about continuing a project in Israel, and a Welsh colleague fearful in Yemen during terrorist attacks. (Gill 2004)

A feature common to all these reports of insecure research environments is that research management – planning, preparation and risk assessment – had been deficient.

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 Guatamalan 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)
>
> *(Fincham 2006: 198)*

Anecdotally, the authors know of people that have fallen from ladders, capsized whilst interviewing on a yacht, and been involved in a road accident as a result of worrying about expensive equipment during periods of fieldwork. Such events are generally under-reported and are passed off as 'narrow escapes' – all part of the 'fun' of doing fieldwork! This is perhaps indicative of the fact that many researchers feel that risk should be accepted as an inherent part of fieldwork in 'real' settings, however, some risks are avoidable given appropriate management and on occasion risks may be considered to be unacceptably high.

Risk of physical illness is obviously greatest for those researching in developing countries (with hepatitis and malaria being particular dangers) but can be present in a range of research settings. Systematic reports of illness contracted in the course of fieldwork are rare and the danger of disease may be (inadvertently) represented as integral to the research process. In a paper devoted to definitions of danger in conducting and teaching ethnographic research, Peterson confines himself to the following few laconic sentences on disease:

> 'There is also the physical damage that comes from disease. For instance, I contracted Hepatitis A and was laid out for six weeks during my research, and during a [fieldwork teaching] course in Nicaragua most of my students spent time in a private clinic at one stage or another. One even lapsed into a coma state, and at one point we had difficulties finding a pulse' (Peterson, 2000: 184).

Such accounts seem indicative of the low priority accorded to health concerns in fieldwork contexts.

There is a distinction between qualitative research in environments where hazards emerge as part of the experience of the field, such as those which have hitherto been the focus of discussion, and qualitative research where part of the focus of the research is an intentional interrogation of the experience of dangers previously identified in the field.

The development of a branch of ethnography described as 'edgework' entails researchers putting themselves in dangerous positions where they consciously enter the field in order to experience, at first-hand, dangerous situations. In terms of studies of employment, Jack Haas's work on high steel ironworkers (Haas, 1977) and Lee Monaghan's studies of door-work by security staff (Monaghan, 2002a; 2002b) are among those that reflect these sorts of methodological and situational considerations. Many participant ethnographic studies that involve strong themes of risk are concerned with crime (Becker, 1963. Ferrell, 1998), marginal communities – e.g. the homeless (Arrigo, 1998), drug users (Jacobs, 1998) – and, recently, sensation seeking recreational pursuits – e.g. white water rafting (Holyfield, 1999), parachuting (Lyng, 1998), motorcycling (Lyng, 1998).

Hamm and Lyng have developed the methodological framework for 'edgework' studies. Both of these researchers have undertaken ethnographic studies of what they call 'marginal'

populations where activities are at the edges of conventional acceptability, be they 'criminal', 'irresponsible' or 'dangerous'. They have coined the term 'edgework' to describe what they view as a distinct methodology. Vail summarises the main characteristics of edgework according to Lyng:

> Lyng's (1990) defining statement on edgework focused on three important characteristics. Edgework activities "involve a clearly observable threat to one's physical or mental well-being or one's sense of an ordered existence"; they often require specialized skills that allow the edgeworker to test his or her limits; and they are directed at edgeworkers' attempts to control "a situation most people would regard as entirely uncontrollable". Edgework is, in short, activity that tests the physical, emotional and intellectual limits of the edgeworker. (Vail 2001: 719)

Akin to the edgework method proposed by Lyng and Hamm, Monaghan, with his work on bouncers and the night time economy was interested in a phenomenology of an employment where there is an expectation of violence (2002a; 2002b).

The point of edgework is for the researcher to put his, or her, self in the risk position of the research participants with a full understanding that risk will be an essential component of the project. This, Lyng and Hamm argue, separates edgework from the incidental dangers described in the previous section of this review. We would argue that there is a further difference between studying voluntary risk takers and people involved with dangerous work. The way in which risk of injury is framed between voluntary risk takers and risk at work is that the role of risk in the two communities' lives is very different, and thus has different ramifications for those wishing to study either. For example part of the thrill of white water rafting is the veneer of risk (Holyfield, 1999), in such cases the ethnographer will be involved as much as the participants. Safety equipment, legislation and expertise are often of paramount importance to those taking part in 'extreme' leisure pursuits. However, people who work in dangerous environments appear to suppress the acknowledgement of high risk and as a result may not take precautionary steps to mitigate risk. As Monaghan says:

> Such risks are not simply taken by those engaged in a calculative search for monetary gain. Similar to boxers, doorstaff may spend little thought on the thought of personal bodily harm given the pragmatics of their work. Additionally, their 'self-contained web of social relations' offers interpretative frameworks 'that tend to "screen out" awareness of physical danger' (Wacquant 1995: 85) (Monaghan, 2002a: 10)

It is apparent that there are differing implications to studying voluntary, recreational risk taking and risk taking as a consequence of work. The association between voluntary risk taking and Stephen Lyng's 'edgework' thesis are strong (Vail, 2001: 706), but the processes of gaining access to a marginal social world, recording data, maintaining trust relationships, gaining credibility and 'performing incompetence' (Vail, 2001: 713) all resonate strongly as pertinent

methodological issues across studies. This is despite the implicit *in*voluntary 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 material to be gained from Geertz's 'thick descriptions' arising from such encounters with risk. Several writers who deal with risk or danger corroborate this idea that there is a need for researchers to have an experiential understanding of their field. Peterson argues that, despite risk and danger having not been seen by social scientists as a 'proactive way of being able to frame experiences in the field' (Peterson, 2000: 195), there is a central research validation in feeling danger:

> …the researchers feelings of threat or vulnerability may indicate that they are closer to understanding an important aspect of the field than perhaps when things are going well. (Peterson, 2000: 195)

It is notable that discussions of 'edgework' research make no mention of the institutional context of the research. All research occurs within an institutional context of funders, employers, supervisors, ethics committees and others. The lone researcher is a very rare bird.

Research under suspicion

Whilst edgework involves researchers choosing to undertake risky activities in the course of their research, a number of studies are necessarily located in risky settings where researchers may find themselves a focus for suspicion and consequently at some unanticipated risk. Belousov et al. (2006) report on the implications for the research team of the death of a gatekeeper - the unsolved shooting of Captain Mikhael Sinelnikov in St Petersburg in 2003. While Belousov and his colleagues are doubtful whether the murder was directly related to Sinelnikov's participation in the research, it did highlight a number of extremely important issues for the research team. Sinelnikov had been recruited as a key gatekeeper for the project, granting researcher access to many parts of the port of St Petersburg. They explain that initially the researchers' presence provoked an active interest from those working in the port. However, after the murder there was barely concealed annoyance at the researchers' continued work in the port. The impact of this sudden breakdown of tolerance became recognised as a form of 'fatigue syndrome' on the part of respondents (Belousov 2006: 165). A major impact of the murder was that people became suspicious of the research itself. Belousov et al. report that the port workers began to assume that the intention of the research was to 'reveal deficiencies in work activity, corruption, incompetence, poor organisation, and things of this nature' (Belousov et al 2000: 166). Obviously these suspicions fuel feelings of antipathy towards researchers, making them vulnerable to, at best being ignored, and at worst the possibility of attack from the people that they are studying.

In his paper *Participant Observation in Violent Social Contexts* Jeffrey Sluka relates the story of an American anthropologist working in Belfast in the mid 1970s who was shot and injured when he aroused suspicion amongst Northern Irish Republicans. According to Sluka the anthropologist had 'failed to allay natural suspicions' that he was working against the interests of that particular community. The question of identity management is an important factor in managing risk for Sluka. The maintenance of a credible identity in the eyes of a population potentially hostile to the researcher is essential for staying safe. In many research settings, research participants will be unfamiliar with fieldwork as a research activity, equating 'research' instead with laboratory work , or at best, with the administering of structured research instruments. In such settings, the mis-identification of an enquiring fieldworker as a 'spy' – for the police, for the government, for 'the management', for a corporate competitor, or whatever – is perfectly natural. It is a moot point whether skilful identity management will always be proof against such mis-identification. Certainly, the statement of the anthropologist J.A. Barnes that an anthropologist in politically charged situations must be 'a man [sic] of integrity' (Barnes 1967) now has a complacent old-fashioned ring about it.

With a few notable exceptions (Sluka 1990) much of the ethnographic work undertaken in war zones or former war zones (Hoffman and Lubkemann 2005; Hoffman 2005; Jackson 2005; Utas 2005; Dudwick 2000) seems to involve differing levels of 'screening out' by the researcher

(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 Dillenburger (Dillenburger 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 couriering, the researcher did not have to voluntarily attempt manoeuvres that *obviously* 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).

Risk to the Emotional Well-being of Researchers involved in Qualitative Research

The largest literature concerning risks to researchers' well-being in qualitative settings is that which addresses the emotional impact of doing qualitative research. There is concern that, for many years, the distress and upset to researchers that can be caused by research was not acknowledged. As a result strategies for the management of support for researchers undertaking troubling research were absent, leaving people to either develop their own strategies or struggle with the potentially emotionally damaging issues arising from the research process. Indeed there are examples where researchers have found themselves victims of what Pennebaker calls 'vicarious traumatisation', where repeated exposure to research participants' traumatic experiences have had debilitating effect on them (Pennebaker 1990: 118). There are many examples of studies where researchers have had to cope with emotionally disturbing data. Research projects involving interviews with victims of sexual abuse, cancer patients and bereaved children have all been discussed in terms of the impact on the researcher (Burr 1996; Scott 1998, Cannon 1989, Rowling 1999, Grinyer 2004, Campbell 2004, Rager 2005). The face-to-face proximity of the researchers to people whose stories are heavy with sorrow, loss, disappointment or grief make it easy to understand that there will be an emotional cost to undertaking these kinds of studies.

Role Conflict

A major concern for many researchers is that of role conflict. Whilst the remit of research may well be explicit from the outset, the desire to gather data, combined with a methodology that may incorporate elements of self-disclosure on the part of the researcher (Dickson-Swift et al. 2006: 856), draw the researcher and the research participant into a closer relationship than may have been anticipated. The ways in which these relationships are then managed by both researcher and research participant appear to fall broadly into two problematic categories. The first is where the researcher begins to feel, or even behave like a health care practitioner and the second, when the researcher behaves like a friend.

The urge to adopt a position of proxy counsellor or emotional helper to research participants who are in distress is strong. It is very difficult to spend time with somebody who is obviously upset and not 'offer' anything (Copp 1993; Kvale 1996; Alty and Rodham 1998; Ridge, Hee and Aroni 1999; Johnson and Macleod 2003; Allen 2006; Dickson-Swift et al 2006). Allen's work in fertility nursing raised particular issues for her, being a trained nurse herself. She reports that 'if things were busy or the need arose' she would assist with nursing duties (Allen 2006: 405). Similarly Copp reports that she found herself assisting in a 'sheltered workshop' for adults with disabilities, a consequence of which were feelings of guilt when she felt that she collaborated in treating participants like children (Kleinman and Copp 1993). In Johnson and Macleod Clarke's work with researchers, the conflicting position of researcher-practitioner

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 said to anyone. (Johnson and Macleod Clarke 2003: 427-8)

Dickson-Swift et al. dedicate a section of their 2006 work, on boundaries in qualitative research, to the question of 'when does research begin to more closely resemble therapy'. They assert that a reason for this focus is that the skills employed for each are very similar, with an emphasis on empathy and listening skills in both. Dickson-Swift et al report that whilst some researchers suggest that there is a beneficial effect to allowing people the space to talk about their experiences (858) others were extremely uneasy.. For example, Kvale warns researchers that they may enter 'quasi-therapeutic relationships, for which most research interviewers have neither the training nor the time' (Kvale 1996: 155). Hubbard et al warn of problems that arise from empathic statements. In one instance one of the authors used phrases to an interviewee such as '[I] really understand' and regarding a particular situation, 'I've been there too' which 'resulted in the respondent to some extent putting the researcher in the role of a sounding board and advisor' (Hubbard et al 2000: 130). Dickson-Swift et al also identified a concern that some researchers had about the therapeutic role they felt they had adopted lead to deeper worries that they may be damaging the participants in some way (Dickson-Swift et al 2006: 861). The concern is that the more vulnerable the research subject, the more likely it is that both subjects and researchers slip into quasi-therapeutic relationships, but that the very vulnerability of subjects makes it all the more important to avoid such relationships. This very complex management of relations arose for Ridge, Hee and Aroni in their study of suicide prevention evaluations with young people (Ridge, Hee and Aroni 1999: 25). Further, whilst the researchers were mindful of the chances of falling into a quasi-therapeutic relationship with participants they felt powerless to control the 'genuine relationships' that were established with 'emotionally fragile young people' outside of what they call carefully planned and considered' disengagement from the field (25). These concerns are also reflected in Burr's work with family members of critically ill people (Burr 1996: 176).

Another aspect of role conflict is highlighted by Hodgson et al (2006). Their experiences with Civilian Detention Officers when conducting research into drugs testing in the criminal justice system illustrate the potential of researchers to find themselves compromised because of tensions in relationships and the need to gather data. They report that researchers were asked by police officers to perform duties that went far beyond their research remit. Whilst the

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 with the people that became funders.

Relationships develop throughout the research process and the extent to which these are allowed to develop depends on the researcher, the research subject, topic or epistemological approach. As has been discussed with regard to edgework, there are a number of strategies that researchers have adopted in order to develop such relationships. But these relationships can become problematic. Hochschild's concept of emotional labour (Hochschild 1983) becomes a lived experience for those who find themselves maintaining difficult relationships with research participants over long periods of time.

The extent to which individual researchers will feel compromised by relationships that they feel they must propagate in order to get data, or maintain access to research sites varies. However, there are examples where the amount of compromise one makes causes great anxiety and soul searching. Hubbard et al. describe having to maintain a relationship with an informant who the researcher describes thinking of as a 'bastard' (Hubbard et al. 2001: 128). The relationships a team of women researchers had to maintain with Civilian Detention Officers who they suspected had very little time for them also sounds particularly difficult for the individuals involved to manage (Hodgson et al. 2006: 259)

Anxiety

There is a growing literature on the sense some researchers have of an emotional or moral unease with gathering data from people who are distressed, traumatised, or hold views contrary to the researcher's. Implicit in much of these works are ideas of exploitation of somebody else's unhappiness for research purposes or compromise in the case of maintaining relationships with people whose views or practices challenge the researcher's moral sensibilities. Johnson and Macleod Clarke interviewed researchers who gathered sensitive data and identified the possibility of such feelings being aroused in researchers working in the areas of cancer, HIV/AIDS, dying and death (Johnson and Macleod Clarke 2003: 423).

An example of where the researcher felt exploitative and challenged is Chris Coulter's study in Sierra Leone. In her article on girl's initiation ceremonies she describes the confusion she felt about witnessing female circumcision rites. She describes tears running down her face for the girls, and reflects on her own status as a mother (Coulter 2005: 431-2).

> I feel I am torn between my desire to get close to my informants, to participate and not only to observe – and the realization of my sometimes brutal alienation. I don't really speak the language, I am not circumcised, and I have not experienced the war first hand (Coulter 2005: 441)

An author who reflects on the personal impact of studying an upsetting research topic without the face-to-face interaction with the subjects of her research is Moran-Ellis (1997). Strikingly, her moral sensibilities were stirred by empathy for a people that she never met. She writes of her experience of interviewing professionals involved with child protection, and experienced what she dubbed 'pain by proxy' during this study of child sexual abuse. Her account sounds similar in emotional terms to those experienced by one of the authors of this review who was involved in a study of suicide. Having been immersed in literature and data she says:

> I felt appalled by what I was finding out, and I felt much pain by proxy for the children who had been subjected to what amounts to physical as well as emotional and sexual assault. I could barely contemplate the pain they had felt… And yet I found I couldn't not think about it. (Moran-Ellis 1997: 181)

Hubbard *et al.* observed that most of the existing accounts of emotionally-laden research have regarded emotion as a problem to be overcome, whereas those authors themselves believe it is important to consider 'emotionally-sensed knowledge' as part of the analytic process.

It is perhaps unsurprising, that in these interactions with professionals who have to deal with the consequences of great hurt or upset, researchers pick up on the difficulties of such work without the opportunity to fully routinise or normalise those feelings – however unhealthy that might be. In a study on suicide (Scourfield, Langer and Fincham) a coroner's secretary was asked whether she still found some aspects of her work upsetting, she replied 'you get used to it'. However, after a period of time the secretary subsequently contradicted herself, explaining that she still got upset and particular cases would make her cry. The experience of the researchers resembled an accelerated version of her reaction to her working environment, where particular deaths stayed with them, but where they were unwilling to confess, preferring to tell colleagues that they were 'getting used to it'. Scourfield and colleagues', initial reaction implies a management of emotion and a professional façade, a feature which relates closely to the sort of institutional emotional management described by Arlie Hochschild (Hochschild 1983: 48-50). It should be noted that a consequence of high levels of emotional management is often mental fatigue or exhaustion (Burr 1995; Ridge, Hee and Aroni 1999; Campbell 2004).

There are occasions when feelings that have been provoked by researching sensitive topics prove to be so problematic that they actually make people ill. Probably the most common manifestation of this is feelings of depression and anxiety resulting from interviews in

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.

Whilst working with battered women in Greece, Sevaste Chatzifotiou felt isolated both geographically and because of the nature of her subject matter. She explains that she would have found it beneficial to talk to somebody, another research student, working in a similar field in order to exchange stories and off load. Interestingly however, she says 'unfortunately, in my case this could not happen because the fieldwork was taking place in another country' (Chatzifotiou 2000: 8.4) and in doing so absolves institutional support mechanisms for leaving her alone, away from home, coping with working with distressed people and distressing material.

Issues of isolation were pertinent to Sampson and Thomas' description of research on board deep sea cargo vessels. They describe how, in planning for the research, on remote ships without access to independent communication and with no possibilities for leaving research sites, risks, including emotional risks, were generally overlooked. They go on to suggest that this kind of approach is 'symptomatic of the research culture in which we operate' (Sampson and Thomas 2003: 171). This view appears to be supported by Johnson and Macleod Clarke who, whilst analysing researchers working in very different environments to Sampson and Thomas, report that their study showed researchers feel unsupported. For them this relates to meaningful supervision (Johnson and Macleod Clarke 2003: 431), whereas for Sampson and Thomas it relates to more realistic assessments of research environments. The point that emerges from both accounts is that there are researchers who feel isolated and who feel that there are institutional solutions to such problems – for example closer supervision or more effective risk assessment procedures.

Resistance

There are two manifestations of resistance to researchers documented in the literature. One relates to unwillingness on the part of potential research participants to cooperate, and to be obstructive, and the other relates to unco-operativeness on the part of those connected with research participants – for example 'gate keepers'. For anthropologists the separation of these two sites of resistance is often complicated, as in a study of a particular community there might be no distinction between a participant and a gate keeper.

In the social sciences there is increasingly an assumed right that research participants are able to withdraw their consent to be involved in a study at any time. This is not the sort of resistance that we are talking about. Resistance in the field can take sinister turns, where a research site suddenly turns into a very threatening environment and the researcher feels as though their safety is compromised irrespective of whether they had initially been welcomed or not.

For example, Katherina Schramm recounts an incident (mentioned previously) at a women's conference in Ghana, where she was doing fieldwork around issues of homecoming. Suddenly during the conference she found herself being verbally abused because of her colour, she is white:

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).

Institutional risk management

This review has uncovered relatively little literature directly pertaining to institutional risk management in connection with fieldworkers undertaking qualitative research. Perhaps the romantic view of the lone researcher in the field persists in the minds of those charged with reporting their research. It might also be that most fieldwork passes off without the need for any overt involvement from the institution managing fieldworkers. However, as is demonstrated by several postings to the Commissioned Inquiry website, there are certainly instances where people have felt unsupported or isolated whilst in the research environment. Worryingly some of these reports come from researchers reflecting on experiences as post-graduate students. While Belousov et al are right to suggest that 'clearly social research is rarely an independent activity undertaken by a lone scholar; being more typically a team activity supported by higher education institutions and funding bodies.' (Belousov et al. 2006: 12) nevertheless there are still accounts by researchers who feel they have been left to undertake work in isolation.

Roberts and Sanders are unusual in their explicit observation that qualitative research takes place in an 'academic environment' where there should be a clear structural context (Roberts and Sanders 2005: 296). Researchers are institutionally bound, and reciprocally institutions have responsibilities towards 'their' researchers.

There are a few examples of studies which have explicitly addressed issues of institutional risk management. Amongst these are Belousov et al. Following the murder of a key 'gate keeper' in their study at the port of St Petersburg, they explain the reaction of various 'stakeholders' in the management of the project. In the immediate aftermath of the murder the concerned project grant-holders got in touch with a group of professional security advisors in the UK and Russia., and were told that the fieldworkers lives 'may well be at risk'. The research leaders were then faced with the conundrum of deciding to what extent the independent security advisors knew the specific research arena and how great the risk to life actually was. The Russian-based fieldworkers were asked to carry out a risk assessment and the lead grant holder visited the local project team and discussed their assessment of the safety of researchers in the field. A set of procedures for the conduct of the research was subsequently agreed. Belousov et al report:

> A schedule of special precautions, such as all fieldwork being carried out in pairs, was agreed in order to increase fieldworkers' security. Some further restrictions on reporting and dissemination of research findings… were adopted in order to provide additional security to the fieldworkers. Eventually, with the consent of the project's (UK based) funding body, which had been kept informed throughout, it was decided to resume fieldwork. (Belousov et al. 2006: 12)

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 these recommendations from Gill to anthropology departments. However, she does question the perception that difficulties in the field are a 'rite of passage' fuelled by the 'hardened bravado' of field workers who are often encouraged to ignore hardships and get on with their tasks. She concludes that with appropriate precautions and with ethical considerations made explicit in training that there is a middle ground where safety and risk can be balanced encouraging the conduct of valuable research in difficult environments (Gill 2004: 8).

Hubbard et al. are concerned that the role of grantholders and project managers is too remote from ongoing research. Whilst they may be heavily involved in the setting up of the research, once it is underway grantholders and managers are argued to be remote from the fieldwork itself. Hubbard et al. recommend routine reflection on the part of everybody involved in the process to the level of ''would I like to do this interviewing?', 'have I faced anything like these fieldwork challenges before?', 'would I be able to cope with this fieldwork?' (Hubbard et al. 2001: 133). In addition many authors have noted that undertaking sensitive research may require more than 'standard' social science research methods training (Carter and Delamont 1996; Lee-Treweek and Linkogle 2000), indicating the need for academic institutions to provide such training.

Most of the themes identified in this literature review are taken up once more in the succeeding sections of the report. However, the gender dimension of research-related risk seems to us to be of such importance that a separate section of the report draws together literature, website submissions, focus group discussions and interview material to attempt an overview of gender and risk in qualitative research.

Section III: Commissioned Inquiry Website

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
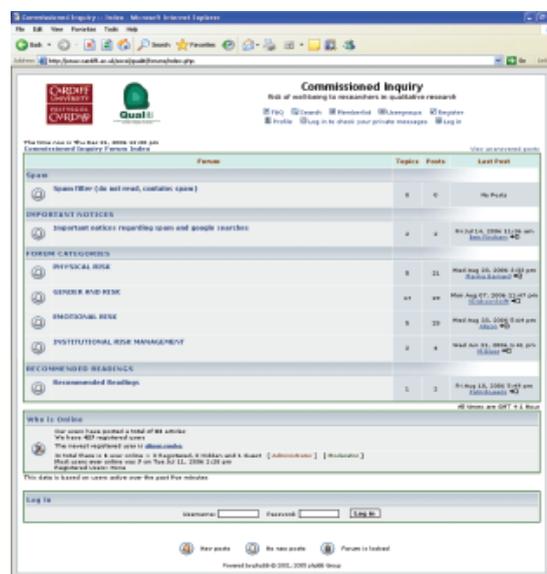
The categories were further divided into sub topics (figure two), and it was within these sub topics, generated by the board users themselves, that submissions to the inquiry took place.

Figure Two: Example of theme divided into sub topics
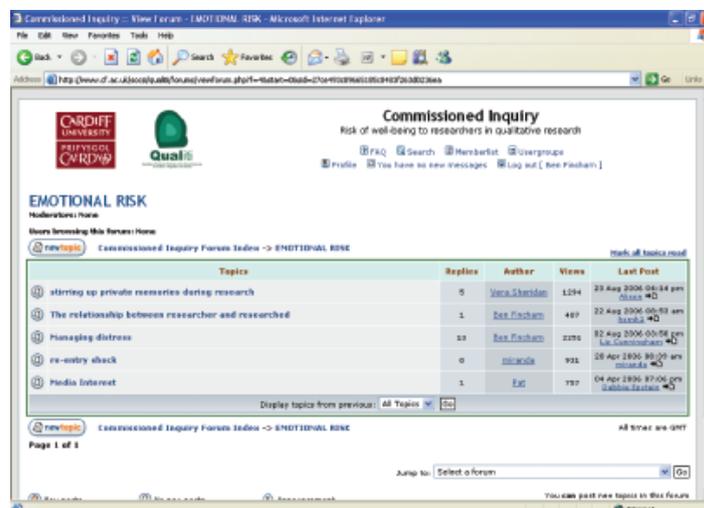
It should be noted that there were two distinct usages of the board. The first was active participation in the data gathering by posting to the site. This activity is indicated in the replies to topics column illustrated in *figure two*. The second was an inactive participation where people simply viewed postings. The level of this activity is indicated by the number of views generated by any particular topic. For example, in *figure two* the section on 'managing distress' generated 2251 views, whereas the section on 'media interest' generated 757 views.

The following discussion is drawn from submissions to the website and organised under the general headings that were established from the outset of the Inquiry. However, we have assured anonymity to contributors and, as a result, will report findings in very general terms.

Physical Risk

In many of the submissions to this section of the website there was a paradoxical concern with a desire to see research being more systematically 'risk' aware, through robust procedures, balanced against a wish for research to remain independent and free from a process of sanitisation – where researchers are prevented from engaging in difficult and possibly dangerous areas of social life. It appears that most researchers accepted that qualitative research would always carry with it an element of risk and that part of the strength of the approach is, as one respondent put it, 'meeting people on their own terms'. This often involves being in places that are perhaps unfamiliar and to a certain extent unsafe for the researcher. However, there was a general concern with the lack of effective risk assessment in ethnographic research in particular and a more general lack of awareness of qualitative researchers as to their position in insurance terms.

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

about how could these situations have occurred and the likelihood of others finding themselves in similar situations. In both instances issues of poor risk assessment and inadequate communication were huge factors in the resultant predicaments. One suggests that risk assessments by research supervisors and research managers, especially for PhD students, become mandatory for the protection of researchers. It is interesting to note that one of these researchers also highlights the fact that there had been a number of previous fieldtrips of exactly the same type and that this may have led to complacency on the part of the entire team in revisiting potential risks to the researchers on this particular project. The robustness of procedures in other related fields, in particular media and aid agency work highlighted to one of these researchers the antiquated nature of the procedures in universities.

With regard to PhD students, several contributions highlighted the ambiguous position of research students when it comes to the requirements of PhD research and risk to well-being. It is often the case that a precondition of PhD funding in the social sciences is that it is original research. In some instances this means that the specific research arena has not been previously entered. Therefore the potential risks in such research arenas are, to certain extent, untested. In these circumstances it is inevitable that PhD students become their own risk assessors and the least experienced in research can find themselves in the most exposed positions when it comes to potential harm.

There were a number of contributions regarding the worth of putting oneself in positions that are obviously potentially harmful. These fell broadly into two camps. The first being that it is part of the ethnographic tradition to get as close to the research subject as possible, by immersing yourself into a research environment wholly – danger and all. The other, that putting oneself in obvious danger will lend little to the outcomes of research – as one correspondent put it, while his research participants often hurt themselves he did not feel it necessary to get himself hospitalised in the name of intimacy. Whilst the differences between these two positions were quite stark, there was an observation that research settings often offer a range of possible research roles, demanding varying degrees of safety and intimacy with the setting and that our responses, as researchers, to approaches that are appropriate would be better made with more explicit guidance and advice.

Gender and Risk

The categories in which submissions to the gender and risk section of the website were placed were derived through a series of focus groups convened in the late summer of 2006. In these groups researchers were asked to discuss the issues that they felt were foremost in consideration of risk to well-being in qualitative research in relation to gender. The specific brief of the focus groups was to devise the categories for the website.

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 three: 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 humour in the hope that it would stop. This highlights the problem of researching arenas where different levels of acceptable behaviour inevitably operate. In settings where women are regarded as socially inferior citizens, where they are subject to sexual harassment and potentially assault, researchers are likely to find it difficult to establish themselves as genderless and are likely to be subjected to the same behaviour as the women participants around them. Not only can this place women at physical risk, it may also cause them to be at some emotional risk as exposure to such behaviour, directly or indirectly, may cause women researchers to re-evaluate their whole understanding of male-female relations with unanticipated consequences.

Emotional Risk

By far the 'busiest' section of the website was dedicated to *emotional risk*. The level of discussion on the board suggests that this is an area that many researchers feel has been seriously overlooked. The section was organised around themes posted by the website users themselves and addressed issues of memories, the research relationship, re-adjusting to 'normal' life after extended or deeply affecting periods of fieldwork, and the potential impact of the misrepresentation of qualitative research.

The discussion surrounding the evocation of memories by particular research experiences was interesting for the levels of self disclosure and honesty the issue appears to demand of researchers. There were several correspondents who explained that the inevitable empathy the researcher feels with particularly upset or distressed research participants, becomes problematic when the issues being explored reflect experiences in the life of the researcher. There were instances where memories were stirred by particular research experiences, forcing researchers to evaluate their position in relation to the research. There was a suggestion that, as a way of minimising the damage that stirring some of the memories has inevitably caused some researchers, there might be a case for instituting some sort of mechanism for reviewing the researcher's relationship to the topic at the outset of any study. Those contributing to this particular area of the board related the impact of memories summoned up into the present by research, as manifesting themselves in feelings of anger, outrage, resentment, shame and injustice. These are serious observations and obviously affected the current relationships of those researchers in ways that many appear to have underestimated. For some this highlighted the need for formalised, regular, risk-aware supervision as standard practice.

Related to this is the suggestion that those charged with supervisory responsibility in research settings are required to receive some sort of formal training. Current practice across the University sector appears to involve varying degrees of training depending on institution.

There were many submissions regarding the management of relationships between researchers and participants. The difficulties of maintaining 'appropriate' research relationships with people with whom researchers may be sharing intense emotions is documented in the literature on the emotional well-being of researchers and was also reflected here. The issue of compromise was brought up by two respondents with regard to making public what was once private. They were not talking about explicit breaches of confidence but a feeling of unease about revealing details of 'testimonies' that were offered as part of trusting relationships that had built up over a period of time. One thought that this was a particular problem in institutional research settings, where the researcher effect may resonate a long time after the withdrawal of the researcher.

The section of the site that received the most views concerned the management of distress. There were numerous submissions from a wide array of settings using a variety of qualitative methods. The first thing to note about these submissions is the extraordinary range of distressing topics and arenas researchers appear to be working on and within. Aside from detailing specific experiences, there was general consensus about the need for more formal mechanisms to minimise the impact of distressing research. These concentrated, in the main, on counselling strategies or other methods for researchers to offload troubling aspects of their experiences in the field. Whilst peer support within research projects was deemed to be important, there were recommendations that mechanisms for minimising the impact of distressing research arenas outside of the research site, and even outside of academia altogether, could be more widely utilised. It was also suggested that it should be routine in research grant applications to incorporate counselling as part of costs in submissions.

To return to peer support, one set of colleagues relayed their experience of group psychotherapy as part of a strategy to minimise the damaging emotional impact of particularly upsetting research. This submission was particularly useful as it highlighted not just the benefits but also the relatively ineffectual nature of the psychotherapy for the researchers at particular times in the research process, suggesting that a catch-all strategy at the beginning of a research project may not be appropriate at all times in the research process.

Other areas covered by submissions to this section of the board included: the repression of particularly disturbing material; guilt induced by consequences of research – from exploitation of the upset of research participants and the exploitation of public funds for ultimately unused research; and the belief that, by reporting findings, researchers were in some way objectifying the lives of people that they considered friends. The last item was reported in various sections of the board, and obviously caused considerable disquiet for some.

There was discussion of what one contributor called 're-entry shock'. This was described in relation to both returning to a research site, but also adjusting back to a 'normal' life after extended periods of field research. One researcher reported the isolation they felt when trying to readjust to their life after particularly intense fieldwork.

The final area of discussion in the emotional impact involved the possible damage done by the misrepresentation of results, particularly in popular media. Once again the need for specialist training and awareness programmes to be provided through institutions was highlighted.

Institutional Risk Management

The section on institutional risk management was the part of the board least visited, or submitted to. The submissions to it provoked questions to be addressed within the university sector, rather than proposals on appropriate future conduct.

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 submissions to the website. The concentration on the emotional impact of undertaking qualitative research is of obvious concern, as is the requirement to stay physically safe when in the field. It is notable that two areas which did not generate huge amounts of discussion on the website were the gendered experiences of qualitative fieldwork and institutional responses/responsibility to qualitative fieldwork.

It should also be noted that there were a limited number of submissions to the website calling for caution when addressing issues of risk and research. These submissions were particularly concerned that increased regulation and control would damage the integrity and vitality that has been the hallmark of qualitative research for many years.

Section IV: The Institutional Context

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 vulcanologists 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

pay such additional premiums as part of a costed research proposal. It is therefore essential, if a project is thought to involve unusual risks, that enquiries about possible insurance premiums (with an accompanying risk assessment) are made at the research planning stage when a proposal is being costed. Yet, if this happens at all, it happens very rarely. The insurance manager of a large university reported that in the previous two years:

> 'I certainly haven't had anyone coming to see me and saying that I'm putting in a [social] research proposal and I need an indication of what the [additional] insurance costs will be….'

Similarly, an experienced research manager working in a social research funding agency knew of no instance where his agency had been asked to fund an additional premium, although he did make the point that, if the additional premium in question was small, then the applicant may not have thought it worthwhile to cost it separately in the research proposal.

Risk Assessments

Even where a project involves no exceptional risk, it is highly likely the university's insurance policy will require a formal risk assessment to be conducted for every research project. If there is no documentary evidence of a risk assessment being undertaken, then the policy may be invalidated: researchers would need to seek redress from the university in the civil courts for any harm that they suffered. While it appears that risk assessments are now being conducted more frequently than in the past (see, for example, Adams 2006), it is clear from the literature, from postings to the website, and from discussions with colleagues, that many recent social research projects have been embarked upon without proper risk assessments being conducted at any stage.

The responsibility for ensuring that risk assessments are conducted is devolved to university heads of department. While some university departments in the natural sciences might have a designated member of staff in the department to undertake the necessary assessments, heads of social sciences departments would normally expect grantholders and PhD supervisors to undertake the necessary assessments themselves. As was evident from postings to our website, conscientious Principal Investigators who do undertake the assessments may be disillusioned to discover that the standard risk assessment forms available are not particularly suitable to social research. One posting from a PI concerned a research project that involved transporting children in local authority care to a research site and to the university in private cars and there was thus 'a theoretical potential of being accused of harming a child or young person.' However, the risk assessment form was:

> …almost entirely geared towards physical hazards. This meant that our risk 'score' came out very low, which was reassuring, but possibly quite meaningless in terms of the kind of risks we had identified.

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 present, levels of practical collaboration between PIs and safety officers are very generally very low. This may, however, increase in the future, where universities are introducing audits (conducted by university safety officers) of departmental safety procedures. In the absence of audit systems, some interviewees clearly felt that there was a lack of oversight. As this Human Resources manager put it:

> Q: Are you happy with the way that risk assessment processes operate within the university?
> A: I think they could be enhanced. I don't think we're as joined up in our thinking as we should be. And I don't think we take it as seriously as we should, if I was being honest […]. I wouldn't be confident because it's not something that the institution requires […]. We've got , in essence, an advisory body, which says, 'It's a hard job, get on with it'. And says, 'There's resources there if you need to access them'. But there's no real enforcement. There's no managing or policing to make sure it is happening.

Funders

As reported above, although funders are willing to pay additional insurance premiums as part of costed proposals, one experienced research manager at a prominent funding agency said that he had no experience of such a payment being requested for any research project that he had been responsible for. However, he could recall one project on child prostitution where additional counselling support for the researchers had been costed into the research budget, and which the funder had been happy to pay.

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 because the universities contract with them to conduct the research on their behalf. A funding agency manager to whom we spoke *had* previously raised the issue of researcher safety in a couple of research projects for which we was responsible, but he had the opportunity to do so because his funding agency exercised oversight of projects through project advisory committees, which he chaired. He commented as follows:

> ….As an organisation we duck responsibility because the university will be responsible for the welfare of its employees. But as a caring organisation I think probably all the research managers here are looking out for the welfare of the researchers that we have contracted, you know, the researchers that are working on our research projects. So there is no official responsibility […] but I know I have discussed this with members of staff within [the funding organisation]. I think it is something we all keep an eye on.

Research funders lack formal responsibility for researcher safety and so, by and large, any initiatives by funders to promote researcher safety are independent initiatives by concerned research managers. However, it is probably the case that funders could do more, in a procedural sense, to encourage PIs to take their responsibilities more seriously. For example, the peer review of funding applications offers an opportunity to seek the comments of experienced researchers on the possibility of research-related harm and the adequacy of arrangements to minimise that harm. But we are not aware of any agency funding social science research that explicitly asks peer reviewers to comment on safety issues. Likewise, other agencies could follow the Joseph Rowntree Foundation's lead in asking PIs to follow the Social Research Association 'Ethical Guidelines' in research conduct: JRF sends out a copy of the guidelines with every funding letter. Note that this is not the detailed document on researcher safety reviewed in the earlier part of this Inquiry Report, but it does contain a section on 'ensuring safety and minimising risk of harm to field researchers' (www.the-sra.org.uk/documents/pdfs/ethics03.pdf).

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 an absence of such harm; the absence of case law in this area has already been noted.

Nevertheless, it is perfectly possible for researchers and postgraduate students to seek help for research-related harm without the knowledge of Human Resources. Indeed, some universities have set up out-sourced, firewalled, counselling services for their employees, so that no information whatsoever on who is receiving counselling (or for what problem) is divulged either to HR or the employee's line managers: no referral is necessary, would-be attenders simply call a publicised helpline number. However, here too, we see no evidence of substantial numbers of cases. The manager of one such service, although dealing with large numbers of cases of employees from a large university alleging stress, harassment, and the like, could recall no cases of research-related harm presenting to her service for counselling. Similarly, a student health service had no evidence of health-related harm to postgraduate students, although it should be born in mind that many postgraduates are registered with practices other than the university health service.

Of those persons reporting research-related harm on the website, only one person stated that they had attending for counselling. In this case, the counselling wasn't found to be all that helpful, as the fieldwork was nearly complete at the time of attendance for counselling and she had started to talk about the difficulties with her partner. She stated that:

> Things might have been different if I had this type of support in place from the beginning – and would recommend that this becomes policy so […] not to burden friends and family.

Another posting also suggested factoring into the project financial provision for specialist counselling support, and an interview with a funder suggested that this sort of cost would be acceptable. See also Corden et al (2005) reporting on the exploratory use of professional therapeutic support for researchers interviewing recently bereaved parents. Such dedicated counselling support would only be justified, of course, on those projects where the topic and the methods suggested the possibility of research-related harm. University-supported counselling services for employees would still be necessary to deal with unanticipated difficulties in relation to seemingly less risky research.

Some researchers are sceptical or hostile to counselling and more than one posting suggested that mutual self-help groups for researchers could be more helpful than professional counselling. One of the postings described how the three researchers working on a suicide

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 applicant should submit a risk assessment along with the ethics committee form. Although he took the view that committee members would be alerted to risks to researcher safety from a reading of the research protocol, paradoxically he did not believe that ethics committee members were well-trained to address researcher safety issues:

> …I sometimes think we don't put enough time in our training on what are really good practical ethics and we spend too much time on procedures and legal issues.
> Question: So is the issue of researchers' safety addressed at all in the training as far as you know?
> I think the short answer is probably not much. I mean, if it's addressed at all, it's addressed almost incidentally.

An early report of this inquiry was presented at the Oxford Methods Festival in 2006 and was the subject of an extended discussion attended by 68 people. The issue of ethics committee oversight of researcher safety was one which divided the discussants. The danger here is that ethics committees may have a natural propensity to over-interfere, a view that was expressed well by an ethicist interviewee:

> So you are faced with 12 to 18 people sitting around a table and coming from different backgrounds, sort of well-educated, well-meaning people, who want to do things and I think the result of that – psychologically - is that the temptation to meddle and to tinker is completely irresistible. And the people will put up a good case for why they think this phrase ought to be improved, or, you know, etc, etc. And they cant resist it […] the REC thinks they can do it better and I think this must drive investigators spare at times…

In respect of researcher safety, there is therefore a possibility that this natural propensity of ethics committees towards over-interference may result in excessive risk aversion and the prohibition (or at least the refusal of ethical approval) for certain kinds of fieldwork. However, from our own limited enquiries it appears that, on the limited number of occasions when ethics committees have raised issues about researcher safety, they have contented themselves with requiring the applicants to state what procedures they intend to put in place to ensure researcher safety. Ethics committees have not, to date, intended to prohibit certain fieldwork practices such as home interviewing, but rather to ensure that mechanisms are in place to safeguard the home interviewer.

One issue raised by ethicist interviewees was that a lack of attention to ethics committee applications by PhD supervisors and principal investigators betokened a likely failure by supervisors and PIs to address researcher safety concerns seriously. In most university ethics committee systems the formal responsibility for submitting the ethics application lies with the

postgraduate student. Thus, where issues of researcher safety were not addressed in the application, committee members may fear that the supervisor has not advised the student on these matters:

> ….sometimes there are concerns, because whilst you might not expect the student to anticipate these issues through lack of experience, you would expect the supervisor to anticipate them.

In the NHS research ethics committee system it has been common for committees to require supervisors to attend ethics committee meetings where postgraduate research applications are considered. However, the requirement for PIs to attend MREC (Multi-site Research Ethics Committees) meetings has had to be relaxed, since an MREC may now be asked to deliberate on an application from outside its regional area. The result has sometimes been that junior researchers attend the MREC meetings in the absence of a PI, an experience that is both daunting for the researcher and unsatisfactory for the committee in exercising any oversight of researcher safety.

Risk Management in Other Organisations

One person posting to the website drew an unflattering comparison between university research supervision and the supervision she had previously received from her team leader when working within the probation service, 'which featured issues of risk among other aspects of professional practice [as] part of the professional culture of the organisation'. We address the alleged lack of an appropriate cultural orientation to researcher risk below, but we thought it apposite to enquire about how employee risk was handled in cognate institutions. Accordingly, we made enquiries about risks to fieldworkers in a large international aid agency and about risks to journalists and others in a large media organisation.

It was clear that some years previously, in both organisations, risks to staff 'in the field' had been dealt with in ways which approximated to those found in universities today. Thus, a senior manager in the aid agency (who had previously been a fieldworker who had been robbed at knife point, been caught up in an armed invasion and undergone aerial bombardment) was able to say that procedures to assess and protect fieldworkers had 'changed tremendously' in the past 12 twelve years.

In the media organisation, all staff going out on assignments must attend a basic safety course. A risk assessment has to be completed for every programme; these risk assessments are tailored to address particular potential hazards and are checked by a safety officer. Advice is taken from persons in the organisation with specialist and local knowledge. Decisions on high risk assignments are undertaken by a special high risk team, and those going on high risk assignments have to undertake specific training, with a refresher course every three years.

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.

Section V: Gender & Risk

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 research managers, then they might inadvertently reinforce a view that

shipboard research should not be conducted by women. They referred to the 'macho' research climate present in many Universities and saw their own behaviours in initially underplaying problems of harassment, as reinforcing such cultures. Similarly, a female sociologist on the website referred to 'macho attitudes by some PIs towards certain kinds of fieldwork' which discourage junior female staff from raising safety issues: in such cases gender and status are conflated to silence safety concerns.

Dealing with sexual harassment often becomes another form of emotional labour (see following section). As one female anthropologist, working in a Latin American male prison put it on our website:

> I do have to deal with occasional compliments and declarations of love [from key informants]. This is awkward but not dangerous.

However, sexual harassment can also, on occasion, lead to more than felt awkwardness. Weseley (2006) reports how the sexual harassment she experienced in the car park of a lap dancing club, in the course of her fieldwork on exotic dancers, made her feel degraded. But she realised that those feelings of degradation were felt by her interviewees in the sex industry on a regular basis. So she decided to disregard the advice of a mentor to 'Be careful what you reveal of yourself in your writing' and to make herself vulnerable by writing about her experiences. She concluded:

> I suggest that it is of the utmost importance to pay attention to the effects of a study like this on the feminist researcher because these effects are difficult, and they directly affect the willingness to continue the work. We need to continue to investigate issues that recall us to our own bodies and our objectification, our privilege and our disadvantage, and consequent identity negotiations because this can reveal much in the study of gender, identity and oppression. If feminist researchers are not permitted the space to talk about our lived experiences in this regard, we too are silenced; just as we give voice to those without the privilege to speak of their experiences, we need to be able to identify how we are vulnerable to these voices (Weseley 2006: 161).

The risks of contracting most physical illnesses during fieldwork are not gendered, however postings to the website suggested that researchers believe that risks of physical injury as a result of non-sexual assault, may be gendered. In a website posting, a male researcher described how, in a pub he used as a fieldwork site, which was also used by drug dealers, he was threatened in the gents toilet because people were suspicious of his claims to be a researcher (on a topic unrelated to drug dealing): in that environment, he believed, males were more likely to objects of suspicion and more likely to be subject to violence. A similar point is to be found in the research literature. Peterson (2000), who lived with his wife (also conducting fieldwork) in a low income area in Guadalajara, Mexico, noted that his wife was protected on the streets by key

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.

Emotional Risk

It is a commonplace observation in methods texts that the quality of fieldwork data depends on the quality of fieldwork relationships, on establishing relationships of intimacy and trust. Nor is it enough to simply establish such relationships: relations of trust need to be recurrently attended to and maintained (Johnson 1975). The work of establishing and maintaining relations of trust with research participants has been repeatedly likened (for example, by Young and Lee 1996) to 'emotional labour', as described in Hochschild's famous (1983) study of air stewardesses: fieldworkers may find themselves curbing censorious thoughts, under-reacting to unpleasant opinions, burdened with confidences, offering time, sympathy and support to a draining degree, and so forth (see, for example, the discussion in Hubbard et al. 2001). As Dickson-Swift et al (2006) have noted, such emotional labour can be associated with a range of psychiatric and physical symptoms (insomnia, nightmares, exhaustion, depression, headaches and gastrointestinal problems). Dickson-Swift et al (2006) also interviewed a group of health services research workers many of whom recounted emotional difficulties arising from their fieldwork relationships

Emotion work is undertaken by both male and female researchers. However, it seems that the performance of emotion work is undertaken disproportionately by female researchers. This is partly because feminist methods stress the value of close and trusting relationships with research participants (Oakley 1981), and partly because traditional gender role expectations lead research participants to expect female researchers to act as confidantes and to be sympathetic (Padfield and Proctor 1996), just as patients prefer to consult female GPs rather than male GPs for mental health problems. For example, Sampson and Thomas (2003) instance how, during their seaboard fieldwork, seafarers confided in them about very distressing family bereavements which they had not reported to any of their shipmates. Since female researchers are disproportionately burdened by emotion work, so too are they more vulnerable to the distress that may be associated with that burden. Not all emotional labour may be burdensome: researchers have frequently been inspired and heartened by intimate associations with research participants. However, both the literature and submissions to the inquiry website provide multiple instances of emotional harm to female researchers.

The following instances of emotional distress to female researchers were posted on the website:

- Being 'overcome' at having to keep confidential the harrowing stories of refugees' experiences.
- The unwelcome recall of difficult events in the researcher's own past, where that recall was occasioned by fieldwork experiences.
- The leakage of feelings about fieldwork experiences of male violence into a researcher's private life, particularly leading to changes in a relationship with a partner and to potential difficulties in that relationship.
- A sense of isolation and a need to periodically 'unload.'

- 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 award 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.

Section VI: Conclusions and Recommendations

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 Grid' – high adherence to rules	'High Grid' – high adherence to rules
'High group' – high integration into group	Hierarchists	Hierarchists
'Low group' – low integration into group	Fatalists	Fatalists

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:

Recommendation 1: postgraduate research methods courses should include research safety in their curricula. 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.

Recommendation 2: ESRC should consider whether provision of safety training in postgraduate research methods curricula should be a factor in determining whether those methods courses receive ESRC recognition. 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.

Recommendation 3: university in-service training courses for PhD supervisors and principal investigators should include content on researcher safety. 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.

Recommendation 4: all university departments should be subject to periodic health and safety audits, which would include examination of provision for researcher safety. 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.

Recommendation 5: all funders should require principal investigators to comply with the SRA (or similar) safety guidelines. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation already does this, dispatching a copy of guidelines with every award letter.

Recommendation 6: all funders should formally invite referees to comment on researcher safety issues, where salient, as part of their assessments of grant applicants' research methods. 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.

Recommendation 7: all university ethics committees should accept formal responsibility for oversight of provision for postgraduate student safety, with safety issues being addressed in the context of a specific question on the application form and of the guidance on form completion. 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:

- It's already happening. Some ethics committee forms already include a question on researcher safety. Our enquiries indicate that, even where no question about researcher risk or safety procedures appears on the ethics committee form, ethics committees believe that they have a responsibility to address these issues, where alerted to potential problems by the research protocol or by the methods section on the form. If it already happening willy-nilly, then it is best that issues of risk and safety provisions be addressed *systematically*. They may be addressed systematically, firstly through a question on the ethics committee form about whether or not there is any risk of harm to the researcher, and – if so – what procedures have been put in place to minimise the risk; and secondly, through a statement in the guidance notes on form completion that, if there is a substantial risk, it may be appropriate for the applicants to attach a risk assessment to their ethics application.

- Neglect of researcher safety is not wilful, it arises out of inattentiveness. The requirement to respond to a question on risk and safety procedures may provide an occasion to reflect on issues that have previously been unconsidered.

- Structural change can lead cultural change. It is already a mark of a competent investigator to be seen to complete successfully a submission for research ethics approval. Where ethics approval is seen explicitly to embrace issues of researcher risk and safety, then it may also become seen as the mark of a competent investigator to be able to address successfully these issues. Attendance to researcher safety may become a routine accomplishment of culturally competent members of the academic community.

- While peer review of funding applications (see recommendation 6 above) offers the prospect of a check on research-related harm to research associates, it does nothing to check harm to postgraduate students. Where peer review fails, the only possible remaining institutional check on research-related harm to postgraduate students is through the ethics committee system. Thus university ethics committees should recognise that they have a particular responsibility for student safety.

In addition, we have previously noted a number of good practices which we commend but see no need to address by further recommendations. Thus, we have noted the willingness of funding agencies to both accept additional costs to increase researcher safety and to provide counselling support. We have noted the willingness of safety officers and occupational health and safety specialists to work collaboratively with social researchers to develop locally tailored risk assessments. We have noted the provision of confidential counselling services. And finally, we have noted the value to research associates and postgraduates of informal mutual support.

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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