

## **RESEARCHER SAFETY: RISK ASSESSMENT DISCUSSION POINTS**

In discussions with project students, supervisors should ensure that students are aware of all the potential risks (however unlikely) that they might be taking in carrying out their research, and that for each risk, they have thought through the procedures for (a) minimising that risk, and (b) ensuring that they have clear procedures to be operationalised in case of emergency. These procedures are merely precautionary.

N.B. Often when thinking about risk, we employ stereotypical gendered notions about who is at more/most risk. In helping students to identify potential risks, we should not make assumptions that women will be at greater risk than men, etc. *Anyone* may be at risk. However, if for any reason we as supervisors felt that a student's proposed research posed too greater risk to their safety/well-being, then we would obviously discourage them from carrying out that particular study.

### **Potential risks**

- Actual or threatened violence, psychological harm, unwanted sexual advances, etc.
- Injury or fatality travelling to/from research venue.
- Allegations that researcher acted violently/inappropriately (e.g. made sexual advances towards participant; threatened participant, etc).
- Being implicated in illegal activities.

N.B. If you arrive at a research venue (e.g. a person's home) and you feel unsafe, or if your safety or wellbeing is threatened/undermined at any point during the research, you should feel free to discontinue the research on that occasion.

### **Suggestions for good practice**

- Do not give personal details (e.g. home address or phone number) to participants.
- Think carefully about methods for recruiting participants (e.g. what is the potential for the participant to turn out to be someone other than who they claim to be?)
- Where possible, schedule research activities during the day or early evening.
- Where possible, carry out research in venues where other people are around (e.g. on-campus; at the person's workplace; volunteer organisation's centre; etc)
- Ensure that you can get safely to and from venue (e.g. car is safe to drive; not walking alone; how frequent are buses/trams/trains?)
- Put details of where you are going into a sealed envelope (to maintain participant confidentiality), and on the outside of the envelope put (1) expected time of arrival, (2) time you expect to finish, and (3) time you expect to be home. Give this to someone you can trust and are able to contact easily. Call this person before entering this venue; call again when leaving venue; and if not returning to the same household as that person, call to let them know you have arrived home safely. Make sure your contact person is aware that you will be contacting them, and knows what to do if you do not get in touch at these times. (e.g. I leave my mobile phone switched on during the research, and instruct my contact person to call me at the specified times, if I have not called first). Ensure that you collect the envelope from them as soon as practicable afterwards. The envelope should only be opened by your contact person in the event of an emergency.
- It is advisable to have a fully charged mobile phone with you (If this is a prepay mobile, ensure that there is plenty of credit on it). If you do not have one, consider borrowing one. If for any reason this is not possible, consider taking someone with you (even if they sit outside in the car for the duration).