



Introduction

In recent years there have been increasing concerns about the safety of researchers undertaking market and social research. While employers have a duty of care under the terms of the Health and Safety Act and the Management of Health and Safety at Work, safety is a dual responsibility of the employer and the employee. Researchers should therefore take steps to ensure and improve their own safety whilst undertaking research.

This guideline has been prepared to help you consider your personal safety whilst undertaking research. Much of the information included is based on common sense, but it can be helpful to be reminded of the benefit of sensible planning and precautions which can be taken to protect yourself and your belongings.

This document has been informed by the guidelines provided by the Market Research Society, the Suzy Lamplugh Trust and the Social Research Association. The overriding message for all researchers on this topic is to **PLAN** ahead.

PLAN

Plan the research process in advance:

Think about safety issues when deciding on your research design and method of data collection. For example, consider whether home interviews are necessary for the research, if it is possible to use pairs of researchers, or if you can telephone respondents in advance of home visits.

If interviewing away from your place of work, ensure that you have informed someone where you are going and what time you expect to return. Discuss in advance with the person you have told what they should do if you fail to return home or to the office. For example, how long should they wait before they a) call your manager b) informed the police. It is also good practice to contact your office before and after the interview, so that someone knows your whereabouts at all times. Remember before you arrange to visit someone in their own home to check the council's register of dangerous persons.

Wear sensible, smart clothing suitable for the area in which you will be working. Avoid carrying valuables and wearing expensive jewellery. Avoid carrying a handbag, but if you do, keep your house and office keys in your pocket, together with a little money. Make a note of the telephone number to contact to cancel your credit cards. Do not keep this number in your purse with your credit cards. Carry a mobile phone with you during your fieldwork. If you don't have access to a mobile phone, carry a phone card or coins, to use in an emergency.

If you are carrying recording equipment or a laptop and someone tries to snatch it – let it go. Do not attempt to struggle or give chase. Remember your safety is more important.

Avoid going by foot if you feel vulnerable. Use convenient public transport, private car or a reputable taxi firm. Plan the route in advance and always take a map.

Look confident:

Stand tall, look alert. Try to avoid walking around with a map in your hand. Plan your journey in advance, and ask others about unfamiliar areas before you depart.



Try to make sure you are seen entering an interviewee's home. Greet porters or caretakers, ask in a local shop for directions or use other ways of ensuring your presence is noted. However take care not to compromise interviewee confidentiality.

Avoid risks:

In multi-storey buildings, think about safety when choosing lifts or staircases.

Think when parking your car in the daylight consider whether the area is adequately lit after dark. Make a note of the street name.

Household dogs may make some researchers uncomfortable. It is reasonable to ask the owner to put the dog in another room until you have left.

Never assume: That 'it won't happen to me' or 'that people are as they seem'.

References and additional information sources:

Arksey, H. and Knight, P., (1999), Interviewing for social scientists (Ch. 9), Sage, London.

Paterson, B.L., Gregory, D. and Thorne, S., (1999), 'A protocol for researcher safety', Qualitative Health Research, Vol. 9, No. 2, March:259-269.

The Social Research Association. [A Code of Practice for the Safety of Social Researchers.](#)

Suzy Lamplugh Trust, (2003), Personal safety at work: guidance for all employees, Suzy Lamplugh Trust, London. Or visit the Suzy Lamplugh website <http://www.suzylamplugh.org/personal-safety/>

Market Research Society (2002) IQCS: [Health and Safety Guidelines](#)

What next?

If you would like to know more about this topic or any other aspect of research or consultation, please contact us:

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