GUIDELINE FOR MANAGING SAFETY RISK TO RESEARCHERS

In assessing applications for ethics approval, the HREC requires due consideration to be given to the risks to researchers. Accordingly, the supervisor or Chief Investigator must assess the risks to the safety of the researcher(s). This should include consideration of risks associated with research location; geographic, social and political context; participants; research topic and research methodology. Any risks must be identified in the application for ethics approval, and the proposed measures to manage the risks must be presented for HREC review.

Where risks to a student researcher are identified, a safety protocol must be developed and submitted to the HREC for review with the application for ethics approval. The HREC may also require a safety protocol to be submitted in situations where there is significant risk to a staff (or other non-student) researcher. If in doubt, a conservative approach is recommended and a safety protocol should be submitted.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE SUPERVISOR

The safety protocol should be agreed between the student (where applicable) and the supervisor, and written agreement from the supervisor to the terms of the safety protocol must be included in the application to the HREC. The supervisor is responsible for implementing the safety protocol as approved, and should maintain documentation during the research project to demonstrate how the terms of the safety protocol are met. The supervisor must notify the HREC in writing as soon as practically possible of any material breach of the safety protocol and advise on actions to remedy the breach.

GENERAL GUIDE FOR SAFETY PROTOCOLS

The following are points for consideration, to assist in the development of a safety protocol for student researchers. Where the researcher is not a student, the points should be adapted accordingly.

This guide is by no means prescriptive, and not all points are likely to apply to all research projects. It should be used as a starting point only, and the safety protocol tailored to the individual circumstances of the research, the project and the researchers. Examples of safety protocols for different types of research are provided at the end of this document.

1. For research taking place off-campus and within Australia, consider the following points:

   - Awareness of the supervisor as to when and where students will be conducting the research.
   - Agreed schedule for students to contact their supervisors during conduct of the research, including emergency contact. Students to carry a mobile phone.
   - Dress appropriate to the research context and culture.
   - Safety during interviewing (where applicable). Consider whether safety would be improved by one or all of the following, if appropriate to the research project and practical to implement within the context of the research:
     - Conducting interviews during daylight hours
     - Conducting interviews in a public area
     - Operating in groups
     - Practising interview techniques before commencing research, including how to respond to rejections and unpleasant reactions
     - Initially conducting ‘pilot’ interviews with a staff member present
     - Wearing a University name tag, if appropriate

2. For research taking place outside Australia, the following should be considered in addition to the points listed above:

   - Relevant travel advisories from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (http://www.smartraveller.gov.au/).

---

¹ This guideline refers to the supervisor, as most instances where safety protocols are required involve a student researcher. However, the person responsible for the safety protocol may be the Chief Investigator in instances where the researcher is not a student.
• Any necessary visas for travelling or conducting research in the particular location.
• Any required ethics approval to conduct research in the location.
• Appropriate travel/health insurance.
• Emergency contacts in the country where research will be conducted.
• Clearly planned ‘exit strategy’ including the availability of emergency funding, transport, knowledge of local emergency services and support centres.

3. The researcher may wish to provide details to the HREC of any of the following points that may help to mitigate the identified safety risks:

• Previous experience in travelling, working or researching in the area to be visited.
• Familiarity with, or expertise in, the local language(s).
• Knowledge of the culture and society in which fieldwork is to take place, including familiarity with local customs, laws and norms of behaviour appropriate to the gender, ethnicity and age of the person conducting the research.
• Understanding of the potential impact of carrying out research, including the cultural or political sensitivity of the research questions.

The safety protocol must be signed by the student researcher and the supervisor to indicate they have agreed and accepted the provisions of the safety protocol. Where no students are involved, the safety protocol should be signed by the researcher and any other staff member or member of the research team with responsibilities outlined in the safety protocol.

EXAMPLE SAFETY PROTOCOLS
The following are examples of well-constructed safety protocols for particular types of research. These should be used as a guide only, and the safety protocol must be developed based on the individual circumstances of the research.

Example 1:
Research involving one-on-one interviews to be conducted by a student researcher overseas in a developing country.

• The researcher will be conducting interviews alone or, if required, with a local interpreter, however her supervisor considers that the safeguards provided in this safety protocol are sufficient to manage the safety risks.
• The researcher will discuss interview safety and perform practice interviews with her supervisor prior to travelling overseas.
• The researcher will take advice from the following local institutions regarding the safety of the planned research process: [details provided.]
• The researcher’s local contact person is: [details provided.]
• The researcher has confirmed there is mobile phone coverage in the areas where the research will take place, has access to global roaming and will take her mobile phone to every interview.
• The researcher will provide a schedule to her supervisor of the date, time and place of all interviews. She will confirm the safe completion of each interview by mobile telephone with her local contact person. She will maintain contact with her supervisor at least twice a week by phone, SMS or (where available) email.
• The researcher will conduct the majority of interviews in safe, public places. There may be situations where it is preferable to conduct interviews in a private home (e.g. old or incapacitated interviewees). In these cases the researcher will call her local contact person before the interview to confirm the address, and after the interview to confirm safe completion. She will provide her local contact with a protocol to be followed if she fails to call within a specified time.
• The researcher has confirmed that there are currently no travel warnings from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade for [name of country/region]. She has subscribed to the travel advice to receive email updates each time the travel warning is reissued. She will also register with the Australian Consulate in [name of city] upon arrival.
• The researcher has obtained a visa [details provided], as required to conduct research in [name of country]. Through correspondence with [details provided] she has determined that no local ethics approval is required for conducting research in this location.
• The researcher undertakes to follow the University of Sydney guidelines on Fieldwork Safety Standards
• The researcher has previously visited [name of country/region] and is confident in travelling in the area. Through her University studies and previous visits she has gained knowledge of the local language, culture and customs. She has confirmed that an interpreter is available if required.
• This safety protocol has been agreed and accepted by the researcher and the supervisor. [Signature of student researcher and supervisor provided.]

Example 2:
Research involving one-on-one interviews to be conducted by a student researcher in private homes in a rural setting in Australia.

• The research involves interviews with disabled people and will therefore need to be conducted in private homes, and the researcher will be conducting interviews alone. However his supervisor considers that the safeguards provided in this safety protocol are sufficient to manage the safety risks.
• Risk management strategies have been discussed between the researcher and his supervisor, and both parties are clear as to procedure. The researcher will discuss interview safety and perform practice interviews with his supervisor.
• The time and location of the interviews will be communicated to a third party [details provided]. The researcher will communicate with this third party prior to commencing the interview and after the interview is completed.
• As the interviews will take place in a private home, the researcher will take steps to ensure that he is able to leave at any time. This includes only entering ‘public’ areas of the house where possible (such as kitchens and living rooms), ensuring that the exit route is clearly known, and watching to ensure that the door is not locked after entering.
• Should anything untoward happen, or the researcher becomes uneasy for any reason, the interview will be terminated immediately and the interviewer will leave. The supervisor will be contacted as soon as practically possible.
• Where possible, interviews will be conducted in daylight hours or in the early evening.
• Transport to and from the interview will be by bus and, where necessary, taxi. Where a taxi is needed, both the outward and return journeys will be booked in advance.
• This safety protocol has been agreed and accepted by the researcher and the supervisor. [Signature of student researcher and supervisor provided.]

Example 3:
Research involving ethnographic fieldwork to be conducted by a staff researcher in remote villages in a developing country.

• The researcher understands that this form of research carries with it a set of unique challenges and issues. The following undertakings have been devised to minimise the risks involved while not placing undue constraints on the conduct of the research.
• The researcher has been conducting research in [name of region & country] for the past 5 years and has acquired a sound knowledge of the local customs [publication references provided]. She has developed a good relationship with the elders in a number of villages in the area.
• Although not fluent in the local language, the researcher has sufficient language to conduct routine conversations, and has hired a local interpreter who is respected in the community.
• The researcher has a high level of knowledge of the geographic, social, political, cultural, ethnic and religious contexts of the region. This includes familiarity with accepted gender norms within the research context, and an understanding of the limitations these may place on the research.
• The researcher will provide a travel itinerary and approximate schedule of fieldwork to [name provided], who is a co-researcher on the study and will be in Australia. Any changes to this schedule will be notified when possible, according to the access to landlines and/or mobile coverage. The researcher will contact [name provided] at least once a week while in the field.
• There is a current travel warning from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade for [name of country/region], as follows: [details or copy provided]. The researcher has considered this warning and determined that it is acceptable to travel, and undertakes to follow the recommendations of DFAT in the
travel advice document. She has subscribed to the travel advice to receive email updates each time the travel warning is reissued. She will also register with the Australian Consulate in [name of city] upon arrival.

- The researcher has ascertained that no visa is required to travel and conduct research in [name of country], and that no local ethics approval is required for conducting research in this location [attach correspondence].
- The researcher undertakes to follow the University of Sydney guidelines on Fieldwork Safety Standards.
- This safety protocol has been agreed and accepted by the researcher and the co-researcher named in the protocol. [Signature of researcher and co-researcher provided.]