

“We are alone in the house”: A Case Study Addressing Researcher Safety and Risk

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Historically the safety of research participants has taken precedence in health research. More recently, however, in response to anecdotal reports there is growing concern for researcher safety which has resulted in policy development and there is a small body of empirical discussion emerging. In this article we present a case study example of a particular incident which happened to one of the authors during the course of data collection. We present this as a case study using two sources of data to support the narrative. We utilise extracts from the original interview in which the threat to safety occurred, and this is supplemented by an interview with the transcriptionist who transcribed the threatening interview. Using thematic analysis we found three key themes from the data, physical threat, emotional responses and managing risk. Our findings suggest that despite reflectively considering and adhering to valuable protocols relating to risk assessment, unprecedented events may still occur. We recommend, therefore, that research teams develop strategies to manage the implications and impact of research involvement to maintain a healthy research team.

Introduction

Over recent years society has become more risk aware and increasingly concerned with risk of harm (Beck, 1992). Within this 'risk society' (Beck, 1992) a culture of safety and risk aversion has developed in research (Pronovost and Sexton, 2005) and researchers are required to consider, predict and manage potential adverse events (Shaw and Barrett, 2006). Historically, risk in research has been limited to an examination of threats to the participants (Dickson-swift et al 2008). This has been particularly pertinent in psychology, health and medicine where it has been necessary to introduce evolving codes of research practice to prevent abuse and provide protection (Dixon-Woods and Ashcroft, 2008). It is becoming more recognised, however, that qualitative research imposes different types of harms on participants, and that the ethical concerns are different (Shaw, 2008).

While recognising the essential requirement to protect participants from harm, there is growing awareness of the need to consider risks to researchers (Dickson-Swift et al, 2008; Lee-Treweek and Linkogle, 2000). A number of risks to the researcher have been identified including physical threat, psychological harm, and accusations of improper behaviour (SRA, 2005) and understandably these risks may present differently for qualitative researchers. Although there are professional guidelines regarding how to conduct qualitative research well, there is little reflection on how risk in qualitative inquiry is mitigated or amplified by good or bad research management as the issue of institutional risk management has received little attention (Bloor et al, 2007). With more emphasis on risk to researchers, it is evident that researchers need to look out for and care for themselves as well as their participants (Corbin and Morse, 2003). Researcher safety is a national and international issue which has been considered within the discipline specific codes of research practice. For example, there

are codes of ethics that cover medicine (GMC), counselling (BACP- Bond, 2004), anthropology, (AAA) and psychology (BPS) and yet these place limited emphasis on risk to researchers, as their primary focus is on participants' safety. In the UK, however, the Social Research Association (2005) has developed a specific code of practice to facilitate the consideration of the safety of researchers.

One of the more commonly recognised risks to the researcher, particularly in qualitative inquiry, is the emotional impact of working with data generated by 'real people'. In other settings, such as clinical relationships, emotional boundaries are clearly demarcated and emotional reflexivity is intrinsic to the work, whereas in research less attention has been afforded to the regulation of emotional impact on the researcher (Dickson-Swift et al, 2006). In research, therefore, it is essential that the researcher works in an environment whereby they have the opportunity to form reflective alliances that can facilitate opportunities for debriefing their experiences (Connolly and Reilly, 2007). Data collection, particularly in face-to-face situations such as interviewing, can be especially demanding (Corbin and Morse, 2003) and can be stressful for researchers (Johnson and McLeod-Clark, 2003), especially for those new to the research role (Coles and Mudlay, 2010). The repeated exposure to the data and the topic can feel overwhelming (Campbell, 2002). In qualitative research, particularly, researchers actively build a rapport with their participants to enhance the quality of their research and because of this participants are more likely to open up and narrate their sensitive/emotional/traumatic experiences (Liamputtong, 2007).

Evidence shows us that qualitative researchers do experience emotional impact during research (Dickson-Swift et al, 2009), including a range of emotions such as guilt, frustration and anger when exposed to participants' experiences (Malacrida, 2007). Researchers can be

left feeling helpless when exposed to stories of traumatic and emotional events, the impact of which can lead to vicarious traumatisation (Etherington, 2007). This emotional impact is prevalent not only for researchers collecting primary data, but also for those analysing secondary data sources. Emotions also experienced in secondary data analysis (Fincham et al, 2008) whereby researchers endure 'pain by proxy' (Moran-Ellis, 1997). Emotionally empathic responses can also be experienced by other members of the research team, such as the transcriptionist and yet these members are often not provided with space to debrief (Etherington, 2007: Gregory et al, 1997).

While qualitative work can extract an emotional toll on researchers, this form of inquiry also has greater potential physical risk because much of it takes place outside of the controlled institutional setting (Ensign, 2003). It is advocated that in the interest of generating authentic data that collection occurs in an environment familiar to the participant (MacDonald, 2008; Warr, 2004). This is concerning given that researchers face both physical and emotional risk in research (Sampson et al, 2008) which can lead to researchers finding themselves in risky situations that had not been planned for (Dickson-Swift et al, 2008). It is rare, fortunately, for fieldworkers to die during the research process, but there are in some cases significant risks to health, through infection, injury or violence. Much of the evidence of physical injury or threat has come from anecdotal evidence but often risky encounters are under-reported by researchers (Bloor et al, 2007). The occasional occurrence of physical violence in qualitative research, however, means that it should be addressed by research managers and considered by researchers (Bloor et al, 2007). Problematically researcher personal safety seems to only become an issue when someone within the institution is confronted by a threatening event (Patterson et al, 1999).

Aims of the article

In this paper we aim to consider the issue of safety in research practice by critically reflecting on our own personal experiences and the need for working together as part of a broader research team. We aim to provide discussion and evidence to show the importance of maintaining a healthy research team and not considering these safety issues in terms of individual impact, but rather consider the cohesiveness of research team practice on the whole. Risk in research relates to the well-being of the researcher, the supervisor, the examiner and the transcriptionist (McCosker et al, 2001). McCosker et al note that because of the importance of confidentiality to protect participants, the risk of breach makes it impossible for members of the research team to discuss their feelings and experiences with others. This can make researchers feel isolated and unsupported (Johnson and McLeod, 2003).

In this article, therefore, we aim to contribute to the small volume of literature that seeks to address the risks to researchers by drawing upon a case example. One of the authors of this paper was engaged in a piece of qualitative interviewing research and as part of that study encountered a situation which highlights researcher safety. In this paper we will use the pronoun 'I' throughout the narrative to reflect on the personal experience. This will be supplemented with empirical data from the original interview and supported with data from an interview conducted with the transcriptionist.

Methods

The case study

A project exploring participant experiences of infection was conducted by one of the authors. This involved a qualitative inquiry using semi-structured interviews with participants in their own homes.

In addition to ethics committee approval, a careful risk assessment for researcher safety, focusing on the risk of infection, was also conducted prior to data collection. While the majority of the interviews ran smoothly and in the manner anticipated, the unexpected behaviour of one participant caused concern and thus forms the basis for this article.

The concern arose when this participant explicitly indicated that there was a possibility that the researcher was not safe in his presence. He had planned for the visit by providing a weapon which he gave to the author to use for her protection if required. Throughout the interview a number of references were made to the potential dangers. After the interview was completed the author was distressed and consulted her supervisor. The interview was transcribed and a copy was provided to the participant at his request. The participant was given the opportunity to withdraw any part of the transcript at his discretion. The audio tape of the interview was, therefore, passed to the team transcriptionist. Due to the nature of the material on the tape this transcriptionist was informed about the content prior to undertaking the task and debriefed at the end.

In this paper we present three data sources to present the case example. First, we narrate the personal experiences of the interviewer. Second, we present data excerpts from the actual interview with the participant. Third we present data excerpts from an interview conducted with the transcriptionist.

Setting and sample

In this paper we provide an integrative analysis of the event from three perspectives, the participant, the interviewer/author and the transcriptionist. To capture the experience of the transcriptionist a single semi-structured interview about the event was conducted and her views are presented.

Data from the interview with the participant and the transcriptionist were both transcribed including basic paralinguistic features to capture fully what was said. Pseudonyms have been applied throughout the transcript to protect all mentioned parties and all place names changed. Thematic analysis is employed as it integrates well with the descriptive nature of the reflective discussion. This analysis aims to provide a platform for discussion to contribute to the small body of literature on research team safety and thus has not attempted to reach saturation as this is not appropriate for this research project.

Ethics

The original project was provided with ethical approval from NRES. The interview with the transcriptionist was approved through the University of Leicester ethics committee. We acknowledge that there is a small risk of deductive disclosure of the identity of the transcriptionist and, therefore, we have been transparent with her about this and she has had the opportunity to read through this manuscript prior to review. We acknowledge that there are also ethical constraints in our discussion of particular details about the respondent in the case.

Often safety issues are discussed anecdotally and researchers have shared stories of being stalked, threatened or frightened (Paterson et al, 1999). In this paper, however, we explicate the issues of researcher safety by using the author's narrative and supporting this with two forms of empirical data. In social research there is a particular risk for those interviewing in participants' own homes (Faulkner, 2004) and thus it is especially pertinent that safety issues are repositioned within the context of team working and that the evidence-base develops.

Analysis

Our analysis reveals a number of important issues for research team safety. Three themes were identified as emergent issues; 1) the risk of physical harm, 2) emotional responses and 3) managing immediate risk and vicarious helplessness. In our presentation of analysis we switch from the pronoun 'we' when making analytic points to the pronoun 'I' when narrating events from the interview to emphasise the personal impact.

The risk of physical harm

The risk of physical harm was completely unexpected. During the planning stage of the interview I had no reason to suspect that there may be a danger from this participant due to the fact that he had been recommended by a credible source and I had some prior telephone and e-mail communication with him. I had mitigated against the possible risk of infection by taking appropriate precautions relating to use of recommended preventative measures.

It was agreed that the gentleman would be alone in the house, to preserve his privacy and enhance the recording quality, without interruptions. As expected this was the case when I arrived and he showed me into a quiet, downstairs room at the back of the house. Following initial pleasantries he quickly became quite agitated, speaking quickly, loudly and on topics

completely unrelated to the interview. It took approximately 15 minutes to start the research interview.

During this fifteen minute prelude to the interview the physical threat was made evident. He started initially with some orientation to the possible risks to my safety from him.

1. “For your safety if at any time you feel (.) this is a formal thing I’m saying to you (.) for your safety if at any time you feel endangered by my actions and I am under psychiatric medication (.) I can assure you that I am a peaceful person”

(Participant)

2. “For your safety you may think that I’m a nutter (.) I don’t care what you think (.) I don’t care what any fucker thinks of me except my wife and my grandchildren”

(Participant)

Early on in the interview the participant alerted me to the possibility that I may not be safe in his presence and yet at this point I was aware that I was several rooms away from the front door and thus possibilities for terminating the interview were difficult practically. These extracts highlight the potential danger I was in as he draws attention to the fact that he was on psychiatric medication, something I was unaware of prior to the interview. By saying ‘*if at any time you feel endangered by my actions*’ indicates that I was potentially in danger or at risk from his actions. Problematically I was unaware what the psychiatric condition was and his self descriptions of himself as a ‘*nutter*’ alerted me to the fact that he may be unpredictable and my safety may be compromised.

I had taken measures to ensure that people knew where I was, and had my mobile phone with me. It is questionable, however, whether this is sufficient as he pointed out the possible consequences of going to the interview alone.

3. “I do not want you to feel endangered by me at any time, however you’re a woman and I am a man. We are alone in the house (.) people may know that you are here but you could disappear”

(Participant)

It is difficult to convey here in the paper, the chilling and deliberate tone in which this statement was delivered but when he said this to me I felt that he had premeditated and planned his actions which was even more disturbing. This is something noted by the transcriptionist as she listened to the interview through the audio tape.

4. **“Transcriptionist:** no he’s so clever. tha- and I think that was more frightening
Interviewer: Right
Transcriptionist: tha- the er the e-the. he’d obviously put a lot of thought into what he was going to say to you”

(Transcriptionist)

Importantly, he recognises that there is a safety procedure in place as he orients to this (extract 3), ‘*people may know that you are here*’ but disregards this by stating ‘*but you could disappear*’. This shows that he was aware that safety procedures were likely to be in place but that these may not be sufficient to protect me from physical harm.

This was further exacerbated by his following action, to alert me to the presence of a weapon stored beneath my seat. This indicates that this was premeditated.

5. “Underneath your seat right (.) underneath your arse if you pick it up the cushion (.) you will find that there is an electric stun gun (.) have a look (.) don’t touch it (.) now lift that stun gun up”

(Participant)

At this point I was alarmed at the prospect that he had placed the weapon under the seat I was sitting on which meant that he had decided where I was going to sit. Strangely, this provision of a weapon was ostensibly presented as assuring my safety; intended as reassurance that I was safe in his presence as I could now protect myself from him. He went to great lengths to demonstrate how I should use this weapon if required by showing me very specifically how to operate it.

6. Give it to me (?). You can operate this by pressing those electrodes next to me. (?) when you press that trigger, the safety catch goes off this will deliver a voltage exceeding 50,000 volts (*sound of stun gun being operated*). Okay? Two seconds, or one, will put me into oblivion. Okay? This is there for your safety. I’ll now put the safety catch on, which is moved down. At any time if you feel in danger, the safest thing you can do is give me two zaps with that and bugger off out of my house.

(Participant)

This demonstration made me think that this was serious, and he really believed that it may be necessary for me to use it in self defence. This active demonstration of how the weapon worked further unnerved me as he was holding the weapon, we were in a small room in close proximity, and the sound elicited felt considerably loud and startling. What was particularly alarming was the specificity of needing ‘two zaps’ of a weapon delivering ‘50,000 volts’ to stun him sufficiently to enable my escape.

What we have shown here is that the interviewer was unexpectedly placed in a physically threatening situation. During the course of the interview, therefore, it was necessary to manage the risk in the best possible way. It was not practical at this point, due to his escalating emotion and physical distance from the door. He was positioned closer to the door and was agitated, thus the safest course of action was de-escalation and containment rather than a forceful escape which may have been seen as provocative by him. In this situation emotions ran high for both the participant and the interviewer.

Emotional responses

For research team members working within the field of qualitative research, in health, psychology or medicine, there is some expectation that data may be emotionally resonant and evocative, during collection and transcription. Furthermore participants may become emotional during the interview and it is important that the interviewer maintains boundaries and does not become too emotionally involved (Dickson-Swift et al, 2009). In some situations, however, managing the participant's emotions alongside one's own can be complex.

7. "However, I am an emotional person, I have killed an awful lot of people, I've killed one person in direct cold blood"
(Participant)
8. "You can't believe how angry I was".
(Participant)
9. "I am now constantly and fervently angry"
(Participant)

As a qualitative researcher I wanted to go beyond the facts of his illness, to understanding how he felt about his experiences. Problematically, by the time the interview actually started, I was rather wary and uncomfortable conducting the interview. In some instances, the participant conveyed how he felt about things in a calm manner, simply talking about his anger and his emotions. This did however, lead to expressions of the '*anger*' as he became more and more animated about his illness experience. As the interview progressed he began swearing and shouting about his suffering and displaying the anger which he described. My role as an interviewer was to access these emotions he felt but as an endangered researcher I wanted to de-escalate his emotional responses in order to manage my own safety.

This interview created a mixture of emotions. I felt compassion for the participant and yet was cautious not to empathise too much with his experience as this may have fuelled his anger. Simultaneously I was also concerned about my own personal safety and I was thus distracted by thinking through how I could communicate my situation to an outside party. I felt it was important to keep my thinking clear and minimise my anxiety about remaining in this gentleman's presence. The emotional impact of the interview was also felt by the transcriptionist and she reports how this affected her. Transcriptionists engage with the data and can feel emotional listening to the tapes (Lalor et al, 2006).

10. "I can't say it frightened me but I felt I felt that it was a must have been en-
horrendous nightmarish situation for you to be in. It is the stuff of nightmares isn't it
really cos how do you get out of that house?"

(Transcriptionist)

Through her summary of the situation she uses intense descriptors as a way of attempting to convey the extremity of her sentiments *'it must have been a horrendous nightmarish situation for her to be in'*. By claiming *'it is the stuff of nightmares'* she suggests that the impact of the interview is something that may continue beyond the event to be troubling. Her empathy extends to consideration of the practical implications of feeling trapped. By questioning, *'how do you get out of that house?'* her attention turns towards the very real nature of managing risk. The empathising displayed by the transcriptionist highlights the human element of transcription and contests the assumption that they are just a conduit. Transcriptionists are actually much more active in the process of research which is evidenced by displays of compassion for the physical and emotional impact on the researcher.

Managing immediate risk and vicarious helplessness

When dealing with situations of threat, there are two issues, the management of one's own safety in the moment and the reflection on that safety after the event. While there are guidelines in place for managing risky research situations, texting, or telephoning someone to alert them to the danger may not necessarily be sufficient. During the interview I was able to discretely send a text message to the nominated contact person to make them aware. Limited in what I could say in the text quickly and discretely, it begs the question, what can the contact person do? This is something recognised by the transcriptionist.

11. Transcriptionist: Who you gonna ring? 999 or who who do you ring? I don- it's never thought through to that.

(Transcriptionist)

12. **Transcriptionist:** if you rang the police up and said this researcher hasn't rang me for an hour

Interviewer: mm

Transcriptionist: but y'know I don't know if anything's happened to them. I- I wonder if it'd be a priority to them. And if you're already harmed. what good is that?

(transcriptionist)

The Social Research Association (2005) recommends that researchers visiting the homes of participants have a safety contact person. The field researcher will use this person to telephone upon completion of that data collection. This is ostensibly a mechanism for ensuring safety. It is problematic, however, that there is little evidence that the extensive arrangements we have for managing or assessing risk are effective (Shaw and Bartrett, 2006) and this is questioned by the transcriptionist as she asks '*who you gonna ring?*'. What she means by this is that there is an implicit assumption that the safety contact person should raise the alarm if the researcher fails to check in. The guidelines, despite their value, are somewhat limited in the very real eventuality of physical risk. I was able to send out a text message to my safety contact persons, but that person was not really able to do anything helpful at that point, other than to wait for me to get in touch again. The safety person may have eventually raised the alarm that something was wrong if I did not get in touch, but given the physical danger I was in during this interview, that may have been too late.

As the transcriptionist noted in extract ten '*how do you get out of that house?*' which highlights that regardless of contact with the safety contact person, the researcher still has to manage the immediate risk and close the interview and if that is not possible physical harm may be imposed. This is oriented to in extract twelve where the transcriptionist notes '*and if*

you're already harmed what good is that'. What this implies is that there is a sense of helplessness not just for the researcher, but for the safety contact person and the transcriptionist. In our case the researcher was experienced and had a safety contact person in place. This was of little value, however, during the interview when it was particularly difficult to refocus the participant on the interview topic and to move quickly through the schedule so as to close it down, despite numerous attempts.

13. "Are you ready to start?"

(Interviewer)

14. "I'm still on question one and I've still got ten to go (laughing) (.) Can we crack on?"

(Interviewer)

15. "I'm sorry to stop you but if I don't make a move I'm going to be stuck in traffic and I've got a [X] hour drive back (.) thanks ever so much for your time"

(Interviewer)

In the absence of the opportunity to leave the house, the safest thing to do seemed to be to calm the participant and distract him from his anger by attempting to refocus him on the topic of the interview. The initial question in extract 13 occurs approximately 15 minutes into the interview following the participant's prologue and demonstration of the use of the weapon. At this point I was feeling rather unsettled and keen to get the interview finished so I could legitimately leave. Approximately 7 or 8 minutes later I still hadn't managed to move on from question one, as highlighted by extract 14. Technically I abandoned the interview schedule and instead asked key questions from it in an attempt to reduce the time I needed to spend with him. Despite this he still managed to provide considerable extraneous information and at various junctures began to rant about his experiences in an animated manner. Eventually I had the opportunity to close the interview which is shown at extract 15. Whilst I

was able to manage the risk and successfully escape the situation unharmed, for the transcriptionist later listening to the audio she experienced the feeling of vicarious helplessness.

16. **Transcriptionist:** there is a feeling of, that you can't do anything about it

This dissonant relationship between the strong emotions evoked in the transcriptionist and the cognitive appraisal of knowing there are pragmatic limits to intervention create the need for resolution. One way of resolving this inner conflict is to separate out and compartmentalise the negative feelings of helplessness.

17. **Transcriptionist:** Erm (.) I suppose you just have to parcel it off cos you can't there isn't really anything you can you can't address it in any way

The inability to attend to the situation '*you can't address it in any way*' corresponds to the inability to resolve the inner conflict of thoughts and feelings experienced. By claiming to '*parcel it off*' she infers the need to suppress the emotional aspects of the experience. What this suggests is that this 'parcelling' off emotions is the only available option. This implies that research teams generally are not attuned to the benefits of debriefing.

Discussion

In the wake of the highly publicised murder case of Estate Agent, Suzy Lamplugh, a number of recommendations regarding lone working emerged and a heightened awareness of the risks of lone working was realised. The formation of the Suzy Lamplugh Trust and subsequent advice gave way to the development of policies and guidelines for lone working for a number

of professional groups; such as social workers, health professionals and estate agents. The risk and safety of researchers, however, has not been taken seriously enough (Bloor et al, 2007) and, therefore, more research on risk to researchers is needed (Dickson-Swift et al, 2008). Dickson-Swift et al proposed that the documentation of stories would illuminate the issue and the field experiences of others ought to be shared. In this article we have reported a particular case study which exemplifies risks to researchers and the impact that this has on the wider research team. Our case reports a sensitive safety issue for the researcher within the parameters of protecting the participant's anonymity. Three themes emerged from the data which were 1) the risk of physical harm, 2) emotional responses and 3) managing immediate risk and vicarious helplessness.

In the case study we have presented, careful contemplation was given initially to the location of the interview. The participant's suggestion to meet in a public place, which is one way of reducing risk (Faulkner 2004), was considered by experienced academics to potentially compromise the quality of the recording. Furthermore, it is generally accepted that it is best to interview in a private space that the participant feels is theirs (Green and Thorogood, 2004). In deliberating a range of risk factors, such as the illness of the participant, location of the interview, access to a vehicle, and access to safety contact person by telephone, a detailed risk assessment was conducted by the researcher as recommended (Belousov et al, 2007). As there was no indication of physical threat prior to data collection it was not deemed necessary to conduct the interview with a second researcher as is often recommended (Monahan et al, 1993).

Within a 'risk society' it is not adequate to simply assess risk of harm but it is necessary to also manage, communicate and monitor risk (Beck, 1992). In the research context it is

particularly pertinent to address the issues of management and communication both pre and post data collection. When unanticipated events occur, therefore, the effectiveness of the team in supporting its members will be influenced by factors including collaboration, participation and team cohesion (Lemieux-Charles and McGuire, 2006). The role of the ethics committee is to anticipate and minimise potential risk, focussing significantly on the protection of participants (McCosker et al, 2001) and while they do consider researcher safety, this is not their primary function (Bloor et al, 2007). In research, therefore, it is clear that risk needs to be managed not only at an institutional level (Bloor et al, 2007) but also more locally within the immediate research team.

We recognise that there are guidelines and recommendations for initial risk assessments and the prevention of harm (for example, SRA, 2005) however there is limited guidance on how to manage the practical, legal and emotional ramifications of when unanticipated or unprecedented events occur. It is clear therefore that there is a differentiation between risk prevention and risk management. The frequency and intensity of potential risk are valuable factors in determining safety procedures. Although risk prevention in research has gradually been afforded more attention, it is still limited and consideration of risk management is somewhat neglected. While researchers may predict some of the risks they are likely to face during fieldwork, taking steps to mitigate these and voluntarily continuing, the researcher may become exposed to involuntary risk which occurs as an unfortunate consequence of the research process (Bloor et al, 2007). Thus there are two main types of risk, ambient and situational (Lee, 1995). Lee describes ambient dangers as those which are present in the actual setting whereas situational risks are those that arise from the presence of the researcher which may provoke hostility. Risk cannot be fully ameliorated and therefore it is equally

important that the research community have strategies and systems in place to manage risk when it arises, not only working to prevent risk from occurring.

Thus we make a number of recommendations for Universities and Research Managers who are responsible for the safety of their employees. First we recommend more attention is paid to the safety of the researcher, second we recommend specialised training, third we recommend transparent risk assessment and fourth we recommend debriefing.

Recommendation 1 – Raising awareness

Undertaking qualitative research can pose some risk to the researcher and the literature on this topic highlights the various vulnerabilities of researchers, both emotionally and physically. It is clear, however, that those involved in research need to be more aware of the potential risks and dangers posed to qualitative researchers in the field. The extent and depth of involvement of participants in qualitative research means that there is a need for more visible discussions relating to safety issues (Liamputtong, 2007). In this paper we have attempted to use a difficult personal experience to benefit other researchers in the future. We recommend that those who have responsibility to researcher, including funding bodies, Research Managers, universities and ethics committees give more serious consideration to the risks faced.

Historically, funding bodies have had considerable authority in shaping policies and guidelines for research, for example, in terms of formal ethical review, and they can strongly influence consideration of researcher safety through their expectations. Funders could require that principle investigators comply with the SRA guidelines and could invite referees to comment on researcher safety issues, which has the advantage of raising awareness at the

application stage (Bloor et al, 2007). This could be facilitated by the research community itself. Researchers could be more proactive in reporting/publishing their experiences and raising the profile of researcher safety through sharing. The community of researchers should look out for each other (Campbell, 2002).

Recommendation 2 – the need for training

The availability of specialised training workshops on researcher safety is currently limited. While there are some reports and guidelines available for consultation, actual training opportunities are in short supply. We recommend that Universities and other research institutions are more active in developing and providing specialised training for researchers and Research Managers in this important area. Universities have a duty of care to researchers to ensure they do not come to harm (Dickson-Swift et al, 2008: b) and thus we recommend that training workshops include four fundamental elements, 1) risk assessment procedures, 2) de-escalation and disengagement techniques, 3) basic self defence and 4) the SRA guidelines.

It is typical during the probation period of employment for researchers that training is raised as an issue. This usually focuses on the research techniques and other related skills required by the researcher to effectively conduct the project and progress in their career. This is a suitable opportunity for research managers to highlight researcher safety and refer the researcher to safety training courses.

Recommendation 3 – Transparent risk assessment

The responsibility for the researcher's safety is shared between the university (employer), manager and the researcher themselves. Research evidence suggests that researchers share this view suggesting that researchers see the responsibility as shared between supervisors, ethics committees and universities while having some responsibility for their own welfare (Dickson-Swift et al, 2008: b). While funding bodies and ethics committees can be instrumental in advocating the need for risk assessment, their primary focus will be in relation to participants. The university, Research Manager and researcher need to take this seriously, but in addition also need to consider researcher safety in the risk assessment. This is particularly pertinent where data collection occurs outside of the institution.

There are numerous factors that ought to be considered in a risk assessment and these will be dependent upon the research topic and the research environment. While it is beyond the scope of this paper to outline them all here we do recommend that the Research Manager and researcher think beyond the obvious when performing the assessment. We recommend that the research team consult the SRA guidelines but also attend to the questions related to lone working provided by the Suzy Lamplugh Trust (2010). When I conducted the risk assessment for this research I was primarily concerned with the risk to my health in relation to the topic of that research, physical threat was not of considerable concern.

There are a number of key issues to consider when performing a risk assessment. This should be done formally, as part of the research team, documented and well considered. Most university insurance policies require a formal risk assessment and without this the policy may be invalidated (Bloor et al , 2007). There are a number of broad areas that should be considered. The environment in which the research is taking place requires some prior thought. Issues such as the physical location in terms of whether it is secluded, high crime

risk, presence of animals in the house, and hygiene may be relevant. The characteristics of the participant ought to be considered. The researcher may not have access to much information about the participants' health, forensic or psychiatric profile, but some attempt should be made to investigate this prior to meeting. Interpersonal issues are also important. The researcher should consider factors such as their own gender, age, ethnicity, in relation to that of their participant.

Recommendation 4 – debriefing

Within research teams it is rare for members to be afforded opportunities for debriefing to discuss the effects on them (Warr, 2004). This is despite a clear need for emotional care and support for research team members (Cambpell, 2002; Malacrida, 2007). The support provided for team members has tended to be informal, however, more formal systems for debriefing are essential (Dickson-Swift et al, 2008). This is particularly important for members such as students, novice researchers (Bloor et al, 2007) and transcriptionists (Gregory et al, 1997).

Concluding remarks

This case study, while limited to one research team experience, does illuminate the importance of the cohesive research team. Building upon the current evidence base, we provide empirical data to extend our understanding of research team safety. Our case shows that despite following the safety protocols a physically threatening and emotionally difficult event occurred. We feel that it is important that when such instances happen, the way in which it is managed have long term implications for all team members. Maintaining a healthy team can be achieved even in the face of adverse circumstances through acknowledging the impact on all individual members and utilising effective communication strategies. We found

that by providing formal supervision for both the researcher and the transcriptionist, practical, ethical and emotional issues were effectively managed. Protocols for risk assessment and management are especially important in the research environment, but despite careful consideration in advance, there will always remain some level of risk for researchers, potential emotional impact of data or unanticipated disclosure

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