



MRS/IQCS Guidelines for Interviewer Health and Safety

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MRS is the world's largest association for people and organisations that provide or use market, social and opinion research, business intelligence and customer insight.



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Introduction

The initial brief given at the IQCS Forum meeting in October 2001, was for a working party to meet and review the literature currently available and to prepare guidelines for Field Interviewers. Respondent Safety would be dealt with at a later stage

The intention in putting together these guidelines is not to be alarmist about potential dangers, but to reassure.

We must first understand the risk that interviewers may face when involved in carrying out their assignments.

1. Increased exposure to risks of everyday life
2. Risk of physical/verbal threat or abuse
3. Risk of psychological trauma, as a result of actual or threatened violence, either verbal or physical
4. Risk of being in a compromising situation, in which there might be accusations of improper behaviour
5. Manual handling & repetitive strain injuries from carrying and using lap top computers

We are very conscious that field interviewers are 'workers' and not employees, and as such market research agencies may assume that responsibility does not lie with them concerning interviewers health & safety. Under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 (HSW Act) and the Management of Health & Safety at Work (MHSW) Regulations 1999, Employers have responsibilities for the health, safety and welfare at work of their employees and the health and safety of those affected by the work, e.g. visitors, such as contractors and self-employed people who employers may engage. These responsibilities cannot be transferred to people who work alone. It is the employer's duty to assess risks to lone workers and take steps to avoid or control risk where necessary. Employees have responsibilities to take reasonable care of themselves and other people affected by their work and to co-operate with their employers in meeting their legal obligations.

The Health & Safety of field interviewers should be taken into account from the very beginning of the design stage of the survey, and we would suggest that awareness of interviewers safety is part of the general training for new research executives.

We would also encourage the use of Incident Report Forms. These forms should be completed by interviewers after an incident has occurred and returned to their Head Office. It is only by collating and assessing such forms that we can measure and calculate the risk that interviewers face during their working day.

This information could then be shared by the industry and an overall picture gained of areas where it is unsafe for interviewers to work, most common incidents and how best to avoid them, etc.

Interviewer Safety Guidelines

There is an increasing awareness in our society that we must all take positive steps to improve our safety and security, within our homes and when we are out and about.

These guidelines have been prepared to help you consider your personal safety whilst interviewing and although almost all of this document is common sense, 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.

In preparing this document, we have referred to guidelines published by the Suzy Lamplugh Trust, the leading authority on personal safety.

We all assume that other people will behave predictably, so when faced with an aggressive person we are often surprised and shocked because it is unexpected. Hindsight is a wonderful thing and often when somebody has been involved in a violent situation, they will say 'I should have realised', 'I felt uneasy'. Learn to listen to your instincts, trust in them and act accordingly.

Be aware. Trust your intuition. If you feel scared or uneasy, do not ignore the warning, Act on it.

Be alert. Do not look like a victim, walk tall, be aware of your surroundings, plan in advance so that you know where you are going and how to get there.

Avoid risk. Avoid dangerous short cuts, walk facing the traffic on the street-side of the pavement, wear light coloured clothing when out at dark. Lock your vehicle, do not leave valuables on the back seat. If you have to wait around, choose a well-lit, busy area and look confident and positive. Never accept or give lifts to strangers. Do not switch off the world by wearing a personal stereo.

Take action when in danger. It is not weak to walk away from violence. Meeting aggression with aggression usually leads to confrontation, avoid an aggressive stance - crossed arms, hands on hips a pointed finger or a raised arm can be seen as a challenge or being confrontational. Walk to a place of safety, preferably where there are other people.

Always report an incident. Report any incident to your Area Manager as soon as possible.

PLAN ahead

Prepare yourself for your journey. (Please remember when interviewing a Police Notification should be completed and taken to the Police Station in the area where you are working. Ask for it to be entered into the daybook for the necessary number of field days. It is particularly important that you register with the police when sensitive subjects are being covered; when a specific request has been made by the client, or when children are being interviewed. The Police can also advise you on the area that you will be working in, if it is new to you.)

Tell someone or leave a note at home as to which area you will be working in and when you expect to return home. If it is not possible to leave a message with someone at your home, please do so with your Area Manager or Area Deputy Manager and advise them the area in which you will be working and the time you expect to return home. Once home, telephone your Area Manager/Deputy to confirm that you are home safely. If your Area Manager has been unable to confirm your safety within forty-eight hours, the police will be contacted.

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 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! If you do not have a mobile phone, keep a Phone Card in your pocket to use in an emergency.

If anyone tries to snatch your laptop bag - let it go. Under no circumstances struggle, or give chase. Should this happen, go somewhere you feel safe and secure and phone the police and your area manager. Try to make a mental note of the attacker, particularly their trainers, as these are often designer shoes. People often work in groups and have a safe house nearby in which to switch clothes. They do not often switch their footwear.

Look Confident

Stand tall, look alert. Work out how to get to your assigned area, and the best route around it when you are there. Planning your journey in advance helps to avoid giving the impression that you do not know where you are going.

Avoid Risk

Do not use unlit cash machines. Do not place your laptop or bag on the floor next to your feet, bags are snatched very quickly when people are concentrating on operating the cash machine.

Think when parking your car in the daylight – will the area be lit after dark. Make a note of the street name.

Do not leave valuables on view in the car – lock them safely in the boot. Do not carry valuables in your computer bag. Should the bag be stolen you will not lose any of your personal possessions.

Never Assume

It won't happen to me or that people are as they seem.

Entering Other People's Homes

Have your credentials ready, introduce yourself, explain why you are there and approximately how long the survey will take.

Listen to your instincts – if you immediately feel threatened or uneasy, do not enter the premises.

Pay attention to how the front door is locked, so that you could open it if you needed to leave quickly.

Make a mental note of your surroundings and try and place yourself nearest the door.

If there is an unfriendly dog, ask for it to be put in another room, no need to say that it is making you uneasy, say you have an allergy to them.

Aggressive and violent behaviour can be caused by people feeling that there is an intrusion into their private lives. They may have had a bad day or possibly a bad experience with a previous caller. If the respondent shows any sign of aggressive behaviour terminate the interview and leave.

Any incident in which you feel threatened should be reported immediately to your Area Manager. Verbal abuse or physical attack is extremely stressful and your area manager will be able to give you the support you need.

Working In Store/Shopping Centres/Flats

If working in a block of flats, shopping centre or store, please ensure you are aware of the fire exits and regulations.

Be cautious when using a lift, if it doesn't appear to be well maintained use the stairs.

Never use a lift in a fire evacuation situation. If working at a Hall Test, your supervisor will brief you on the health and safety issues.

Be aware of litter and never touch discarded objects (hypodermic needles may be obscurely placed). You should not touch or go near any suspicious looking objects.

Please do not worry, it must be remembered that out of every 100 incidents, only a small percentage are reported as violent, and in many of these cases the people involved were known to each other. Also young men 16-25 years of age are twice as likely to be involved in any violent incidences and the older you get (65+) the less likely that anything will happen to you.

Some interviewers feel at risk by carrying a CAPI machine in the street, please note that most CAPI machines are stolen from cars, or in public places when left for a few moments.

General advice when using your car for work

- Keep your car in good working order and have it serviced regularly
- If you hire a car, make sure it has been checked, or check it yourself
- Carry extra petrol in a safety approved portable petrol tank
- Consider joining a breakdown/rescue organisation
- Make sure you have change and a phone-card for an emergency
- Plan your route before setting off
- Have the directions and maps in your car so you do not have to stop and ask
- Keep handbags, briefcases and mobile phones out of reach of open windows in case of snatch thieves, travel with the doors locked
- Lock your car, even if you are only going to pay for petrol

- If you see an incident or accident, or someone tries to flag you down, ask yourself is it safe to stop. Can you help? Might it be safer and more useful if you went for help?
- If a car pulls up in front of you and you have to stop, keep the engine running
- Keep your door locked while sitting in a stationary car and if someone attempts to open the door, sound your horn
- Do not use your mobile phone when driving, even a hands free kit if avoidable.
- If you become tired whilst driving to and from assignments ensure that you stop in a safe area and take a rest. It is very important that you have regular breaks and it is recommended that you have at least a 20 minute break during any single car journey of 3 hours and further breaks at regular intervals thereafter.

Alcohol/Drugs Consumption

You must not drink any alcohol whatsoever prior to or during any assignment undertaken on behalf of (name of company). In particular you must not drink and drive.

Under no circumstances should you take illegal drugs, nor should you drive or work on an assignment if you are on medication that may affect your ability to drive or to work.

Reporting an incident

If you are involved in an accident, attacked or threatened,

2. (If attacked or threatened) Find a place of safety
3. (If involved or witness an accident) Do not put yourself at danger, assess the situation before attempting to help others
4. Call the emergency services if appropriate
5. If appropriate report the incident to the local police station immediately and obtain a crime report number
6. Phone your Team Leader or Area Manager as soon as possible, who will send you an Incident Report Form
7. Complete and return your Incident Report Form to your Area Office immediately.

However trivial an incident you encounter whilst working may seem, always report it

as soon as you can. You should:

- Phone your Area Manager as soon as possible, who will send you an Incident Report Form
- Complete and return your Incident Report Form to your Area Office immediately

It is only by collating and assessing such information that we can measure and calculate the risk that interviewers face during their working day.

Lap Top Computers

When carrying your lap top computer, periodically switch shoulders to vary the weight distribution, and don't carry additional items in the bag.

When using the lap top in a respondents home, try to sit with the computer at a reasonable height, such as the kitchen table, or breakfast bar. Try to avoid resting the computer on a coffee table or your knee, which will lead to postural problems over a long period.

Should you have to carry out a survey in an awkward position, stretch your limbs and flex your back gently once you have finished the interview. Sit correctly when you do have the chance to relax, do not slouch when sitting but ensure that your lower back is well supported. It is also important to ensure that you are sitting correctly when driving and that you are not over extending your legs to use the brake or clutch, as this can lead to back problems.

Summary

Under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 (HSW Act) and the Management of Health and Safety at Work (MHSW) Regulations 1999, employers have responsibilities for the health, safety and welfare at work of their employees and the health and safety of those affected by the work, e.g. visitors, such as contractors and self-employed people/workers who employers may engage.

Employees, self employed people/workers, and contractors have a responsibility to take reasonable care of themselves and other people affected by their work and to co-operate with their employers in meeting their legal obligations.

If you have any questions about these Safety Guidelines, please contact your Area Manager.

DECLARATION

I have read and understood the safety guidelines and agree to abide by them.

Signed: _____

Date: _____

Interviewer Name: _____ I.D. No. _____

(Print)

Further information on Personal Safety can be obtained from the Suzy Lamplugh Web Site at www.suzylamplugh.org.



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