



Psychological Hazards Fact Sheet

The risk of developing a psychological issue can be elevated due to the fundamental elements of field research.

Isolation- Researchers doing field work in unfamiliar locations are largely removed from their usual support networks. Researchers working alone, or in remote areas, can be more affected by isolation than other types of field workers.

Culture Shock- Researchers can be exposed to cultural experiences or events that may be difficult to witness and accept as the cultural norm for the field location. Living conditions, medical care, and customs can be very different and shocking.

Stress- Field research has a number of stressors that can affect the overall well-being of researchers. New living situations, research setbacks, time management issues, monetary pressures, mental and physical exhaustion can all trigger psychological issues.

Discrimination/Harassment- Some field locations may have customs that condone harassment and discrimination that researchers are unaccustomed to experiencing. Race, gender, religion, and LGBT status may affect the response locals have toward researchers. Harassment and discrimination may also be present within the field team, which should be addressed immediately.

Intimidation- Aggression from local groups or officials may be a concern in certain locations. Junior researchers may also feel intimidated by other field members and may be reluctant to report safety concerns. Field leaders should foster an environment where all team members can report any safety concerns, unexpected hazards, or incidents without fear of reprisal.

Trauma- Researchers may become victims to crime, illness, or other trauma that can be very overwhelming and distressing. Witnessing a traumatic event may also put a researcher at risk for psychological issues.

Pre-existing Conditions- Stress, changes in diet, lack of sleep, and lack of consistent source of medication can all exacerbate pre-existing psychological conditions.

CONCERNS

- ✓ Depression
- ✓ Threatened or Attempted Suicide
- ✓ Aggression
- ✓ Anxiety
- ✓ Substance Abuse
- ✓ Psychotic or Delusional Behavior

PREPARATION AND TRAINING

- ✓ The principal investigator and any field supervisors should consult the Counseling Center's "Helping Students in Distress" prior to travel.
- ✓ The principal investigator should provide relevant contact information for hotlines and emergency response assistance.
- ✓ Researchers should be encouraged discuss expedition hazards with their primary care physician and to bring all medications that they will need for the duration of the field expedition.
- ✓ All researchers should become familiar with the emergency response and mental health assistance options. Researchers abroad should become familiar with international medical insurance coverage and assistance options.
- ✓ The principal investigator should inform researchers of any anticipated cultural differences.
- ✓ Due to privacy concerns, principal investigators and other supervisors are not allowed to inquire about a researcher's psychological conditions, treatment, or other medical information.

GENERAL SAFETY

- ❖ Build in time into the itinerary for rest and relaxation.
- ❖ Encourage researchers to connect with family and friends during breaks, if possible.
- ❖ Monitor each other for signs of distress.
- ❖ Be supportive and responsive to researchers who have mental health concerns.

EMERGENCY RESPONSE

- ❖ If psychological issues occur in a domestic field location, assistance can be derived from the researcher's primary care physician, UMD Counselling Center, UMPD emergency line, national hotlines, and local emergency services.
- ❖ If psychological issues occur in an international field location, the primary contact for immediate assistance is the CISI

international medical insurance provider.

Potential Concern

- ❖ The supervisor should talk with the researcher in a quiet, secure place. Refer to the “Helping Students in Distress” guidance for information on how to conduct the conversation.
- ❖ Assess the severity of the situation and available support resources.
- ❖ Encourage the researcher to seek professional counseling, or other available assistance, voluntarily.
- ❖ Encourage researcher to reach out to their personal emergency contact.
- ❖ Monitor the situation.

Active Emergency Situation

- ❖ If possible, ensure that the researcher is not left alone.
- ❖ Assess the severity of the situation and available support resources.
- ❖ Encourage the researcher to seek treatment, or other available assistance, voluntarily.
- ❖ If the researcher is aggressive or poses an immediate danger to themselves or others, contact emergency services immediately for assistance.
- ❖ Do not attempt to restrain or intervene with a physically aggressive researcher, unless you are defending yourself.
- ❖ If the researcher is hospitalized, plan for member of research team to remain with the researcher until the situation has stabilized. Emergency contacts should be notified.
- ❖ If the situation is unresolvable, arrange for the researcher to return home.

REFERENCES AND ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

UMD Counseling Services- (301) 314-7651 [Helping Students in Distress](#)

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline- 1-800-273-TALK (8255)

CISI International Insurance Emergency Number- (01-312) 935-1703