Killing of researchers in Tanzania: Towards a conceptual safety protocol

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Abstract

The killing of two researchers and their driver while conducting fieldwork in Mvumi-Iringa Village, Chamwino District, in Dodoma, Tanzania has opened the eyes of methodologists on this sub-area. A survey of the literature on the safety of field researchers provided even a more informative picture of the state of safety of field researchers. In this article, a typical safety protocol is developed for teaching and use by researchers in developing a project specific safety protocol. While there is no standard protocol applicable to all situations due to contextual variation between research settings, it is hoped that the developed protocol will serve as a prototype for demonstration purposes.

Keywords: Fieldwork, research risks, safety, prevention, protocol, Tanzania

Introduction

Two Tanzanian government researchers and their driver doing fieldwork in Iringa-Mvumi village, Chamwino District in Dodoma, were pulled out of their fieldwork vehicle and lynched. The vehicle with a government registration number was burnt. Three lives were wasted and a government property was damaged. The event reminded researchers in Tanzania that there are risks as they conduct their work. However, events of this nature are not new to the family of researchers globally as they have happened before (Brougham, 2012; Dickson-Swift, 2008; Howell, 1990; Johnson & Clarke, 2003; Patterson et al., 1999; Sluka, 1990). Such risks differ depending on the context and the composition of the research team. Johnson and Clarke (2003) argue that every topic of research is sensitive in its own context and thus its risk analysis should be done accordingly. Some projects carry more and others less, but they all possess risks.

Risks to researchers are imminent during the period of fieldwork but even after that period. There are risks that follow the researcher even after fieldwork due to for example possession of the research information, fieldwork anxiety, post fieldwork

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trauma, analysis or due to mishandling of the information collected. It is reasonable to say that the risks are spread throughout the whole period of research rather than limit them to a specific phase of the research. Woodby et al. (2011) point out that there are risks experienced by researchers coding data on certain problems or situations such as long-term illness, rapes, violence, marital conflicts, child abuse and similar topics. As noted before, risks are distributed across the research process and thus precautions are required throughout.

Since data collection, coding and analyzing are methodological aspects, segments which have potential risks, the safety of researchers is a methodological concern and methodologists cannot run away from this reality but offer the required training (Bloor, Fincham & Sampson, 2010). Trainers in particular have the duty of care and this comes in the form of the responsibility to teach fieldworkers measures they should take when they are at risk in the research process.

The issue

The event of the killings mentioned happened in a rural Tanzania, which is regarded as a safe and peaceful country, and where researchers have worked without trouble. Anthropologists and other research scientists in Tanzania have worked on sensitive topics such as witchcraft, street children, street vending, commercial sex workers, artisanal mining and fishing communities and on land conflicts to mention but a few (Fisher, 2007, 2008; Lange, 2011; Mesaki, 1993). Studies have been done among and with communities in remote rural areas like the Iringa-Mvumi Village over the years, but the killing of researchers is atypical. This event calls for a need to revisit practical methodological issues with regard to safety of researchers conducting studies in rural Tanzania.

The objective

The main objective of crafting this paper was to develop and present a model safety protocol as a modest contribution to help students and emerging researchers learn how to prepare such protocols for use in different environments and hence reduce fieldwork hazards. It is argued here that fieldwork safety in Tanzania is an area that has not been examined adequately in recent years. The killing of researchers in Dodoma serves to remind the community of researchers about these events; the event draws a true picture of what could happen to any researcher and why a safety protocol is an important tool of field research.

Rationale

Safety protocol is an important component of research that cannot be ignored and its absence may lead to serious problems. The event of the Dodoma killings reminds research methods instructors to provide a solid training to research students on how to manage such precarious circumstances (Brougham, 2012; Bloor, Fincham & Sampson, 2007, 2010; Johnson and Clarke, 2003). The safety model has been built step by step so as to allow students and other users to develop skills of crafting research safety protocols. The model is equally useful to seasoned researchers who are taking for granted that they know the field and its risks. It is a guide they would find useful in organizing their multidisciplinary teams for successful fieldwork.

The approach

This review is theoretical in nature as it is aimed at putting together a safety protocol guide which would be used to guide researchers, instructors, students, and even funders when developing and/or reviewing research works. It involved reading and reviewing different research works conducted in rural and urban Tanzania and beyond, to examine the potential sources of dangers to researchers and ways of avoiding and/or minimizing the impact. To build up the protocol, a review of works on safety of fieldwork was completed from social and health studies that have elements of fieldwork. Different contexts such as indoor, outdoor, institutionalized, slums, frontier zones, are some of the contexts that were considered in developing the safety protocol.

Safety of researchers during fieldwork

The search for the literature on safety of researchers indicates that little has been written and most of what exists is recent (Bloor et al, 2010; Fry, 2013; Howell, 1990; Patterson et al, 1999; Sluka, 1990). On reading the few sources of information available, the standard complaint throughout is that the safety of researchers is a neglected area (Boynton, 2005; Fry, 2013; Roguski & Tauri, 2013; Sinha, 2016). Most of the works on safety issues in field research have tended to put a concern on the safety of respondents of the study and not researchers. McDonald et.al (2016) in their work on adults with mental disability, for example, considered at length the safety of the respondents but the risks to researchers are unattended despite the potential hazards embedded in such research. Sullivan and Cain (2004) have gone even an extra mile to develop a safety protocol for interviewing abused women to avoid further abuse, but the interviewers, the researchers, were left out.

The work of Nancy Howell (1990) with the goal of identifying varieties and severity of risks facing anthropologists in the field was the first large study on the risks faced by researchers in the field. Before that, most of the works were anecdotal accounts documenting experiences of individuals and or research teams. Following the footsteps of Nancy Howell, Bloor et al. (2007) completed a literature survey of works that have been published in this area as a way of consolidating knowledge and resources. This was done due a realization that comprehensive information on this topic was missing. Kenyon and Hawker (1999) point out that perhaps one of the reasons for this neglect is due the fact that these lethal events are rare, do not happen frequently and hence do no attract attention of scholars. This view is also noted by Bloor, Fincham & Sampson (2010) as well as Williamson and Burn (2014) who argue that physical safety problems during fieldwork are rare in general.

However, the above position on scarcity of these events is challenged. Patterson et al (1999) made a follow up on safety of researchers and noted that when they discussed field risks with colleagues, they found out that there are many events of different nature that are happening, but are not reported. According to their piece, underreporting could be attributed to different understanding of what constitutes a risk in the field, or the fact that researchers are not trained in this area. Bloor et al. (2010) for example note that events go unreported because victims do not know where to report and how to initiate the process. Some of the unreported incidents include researchers having their cars sabotaged, being stalked, receiving unwanted sexual advances, near rape and threats of rape, experiencing aggressive behaviours, having guns pointed at them, and being politically intimidated (Brougham, 2012; Bellowsov et al., 20107; Patterson et al, 1999; Williamson & Burns, 2014). It is further noted that, some researchers have been jailed despite having proper documentation, contracted diseases, or had accidents but they were not aware of their risks (Bloor, Fincham & Sampson 2010). Joan Sieber (2007) adds other events on the list to include kidnapping, robbery, assaults, and murder.

Kenyon and Hawker (1999) raise a point that during their PhD studies they were never taught safety issues for researchers and still they were allowed to conduct fieldwork. This position is similar to that of Bloor, Fincham & Sampson (2010) and Brougham (2012) who note that graduate students are allowed to go for fieldwork without proper training on safety issues and how to manage the situation in the event of a problem. According to their argument, individuals are employed and become professional researchers but they are never prepared to manage their safety and have no general code of practice; a situation that leaves them vulnerable when they are caught in dangerous moments.

What is coming out of the sources reviewed above is that training on safety of field researchers during fieldwork needs more attention in the course of grooming new researchers before dispatching field research teams.

Categorization of field research risks

The literature surveyed shows that there are several categories of fieldwork risks and they differ depending on the nature of the study topic, study area, team experience, composition and the nature of the respondents. These risks can be arranged in groups depending on the nature of the research topic, its sensitivity, targeted respondents, or environment. Patricia Brougham (2012) has worked on the literature on dangers faced by field researchers and identified four major groups of risk: emotional risks, physical risks, legal risks, and personal /professional risks.

a. Emotional risks

These are risks that are associated with doing fieldwork on topics that are dealing with sensitive personal issues and or experiences (Woodby, 2011). Examples of these include researching long chronically ill people, gender based violence, abused children and death. Some topics may lead researchers to be in peculiar situations with drug users, prostitutes, or interviewing people in prisons and these may expose them to traumatic experiences.

Researchers have different levels of emotional management; hence, while doing research, they are at different levels of risks. Effects of post field emotional disorders are many and may last for some time. Brougham (2012) in her study notes that a good number of researchers are affected by research emotionally but they do not share this because they would like to be seen neutral, unbiased, and detached. However, the truth is that some researchers are suffering. There is a need for innovatively developing a space that would allow researchers to share the different experiences as a way of helping each other and learning for good field practice.

b. Physical risks

Physical risks include assaults, stalking, shooting, killing, robbery, being abducted, raped, being held at gunpoint, etc. The list of what can happen to researchers is long and scholars have pointed these out clearly. Williamson and Burns (2014) remind us that there is a close relationship between physical risks and emotional risks, i.e. if a physical risk is not mitigated it may escalate and cause an emotional harm as well.

Physical risks can happen in many different forms and contexts and fieldworkers need to be aware. Some of what has been documented include research conducted in

homes of respondents, door to door work in unfamiliar environments, and working with certain kinds of respondents such as criminal gangs, drug users, patrons of night clubs, abusive men. It may also result from working on certain topics such as night police patrols, special operations; anti-drug networks (Belousov et al., 2007; Brougham, 2012; Williamson & Burns, 2014).

Woodby (2011) distinguishes between sensitive topics and sensitive research, where topics such as illness, rapes, abuse or neglect are likely to produce emotional effects to the researcher. Politically and socially sensitive research may include works that trace the breaking of a law, illegal trade, corruption, disclosure of power relations, political manoeuvre, or hidden malpractices.

Physical risks can be generated by situations as well. Some areas are dangerous to visit and pose a huge risk to a researcher. These areas, known as 'frontier zones' (Belousov et al., 2007), are un-policed places were smuggling is done, drug dealers meet, deals are settled, and other crimes are committed. These areas include remote border crossing points, illegal drug plantations/factories, smuggling routes and secluded dockyards as areas of tax evasion, illegal trade, and smuggling. Fishing islands, underground mining camps are areas that are less policed and hazardous to field researchers. A researcher is feared or unwanted in these areas because their reports may uncover information which will turn things around.

c. Legal risks

Legal risks faced by fieldwork researchers are largely those that result from researcher being caught by the legal arm of the state while conducting research in some areas on susceptible topics. When police raid into homes or meetings of such respondents, or intercept cars in transit or caravans, all individuals are charged. It takes time for a researcher caught in those instances to explain their situation. Similar situations have happened when a researcher studying prostitutes in a city was caught by police and charged for loitering. This is also true of researchers investigating cross-border smuggling, drug trafficking, illegal mining or illegal money markets. Researchers have also been held in jail for months for refusing to release information useful to police (Bloor et al, 2007; Brougham, 2012; Langford, 2000). Fieldwork researchers need to know about these risks, prepare accordingly, and follow all steps of doing research so as to protect themselves from these risks.

d. Personal/Professional risks

This type of risk comes with the decision of the researcher to do a certain kind of research. The topic might have a stigma that will be attached to the researcher. A good

example is name-calling for researchers studying gay culture or the lives of prostitutes, which requires them to be seen around with the respondents.

Professionally, some research topics might put the researchers in an ethical dilemma because it might call them to do things outside of the boundaries of research, or witness illegal deals, resource abuse, or criminal acts about which researchers cannot expose information to the authority. Professional researchers are expected to maintain confidentiality and hence, they cannot share information. Brougham (2012) reports how a female researcher who worked with a police patrol group was asked to search a woman offender in another room. The researcher was not a police officer but was exposed to risk if the offender would become violent. It was a challenging moment as to whether she should reject or comply with the directive of the police.

Risk classification

Fry (2013) developed a classification of fieldwork risks according to three types of danger: ambient dangers, situational dangers and perceived dangers. *Ambient danger* refers to those risks that are avoidable but researchers put themselves in, so that they can carry on with their work. The risk is well known though low, and the researcher takes it for the purposes of conducting the study. For a researcher to be allowed to conduct such a study, reviewers and supervisors must be convinced that the harm is lower that the good and that the study would contribute to knowledge.

The second type of danger is *situational danger* which emerges when the presence of a researcher in a particular place or action taken has provoked the community being researched. In such situations, people become hostile, violent or aggressive. Researchers experiencing this type of danger need skills to move out of the situation safely.

The third type of danger is *perceived danger* where researchers are able to see that certain fieldwork has potential risk. This may happen when doing research with gangs, street workers, commercial sex workers, drug users, criminals, prisoners, long term sick people and similarly sensitive topics. This identification is useful since it will inform the decision to continue or not to continue with the study based on the level of the risk.

Typical dangerous fields

Every field has its own dangers but some fields are more dangerous than others and they demand more detailed protocols (Duran-Martinez, 2014). Knowing these dangerous fieldwork contexts is thus useful for preparing good protocols. Below is a

list of potentially dangerous situations that require safety protocols. The list is aimed at stimulating a critical thinking with regard to areas and topics of research.

Dangerous fieldwork: potentially risky contexts/situations

1. Interviewing individuals
    - Divorcee
    - Marital conflict-GBV
    - Sufferers of long-term illness
    - Past offenders
    - Drug users
    - Unemployed
    - The poor
    - Street children
    - Homeless
    - Street traders

2. Community- centred fieldworks
    - Probing about contentious topics
    - Religious belief
    - Cultural practices
    - Gangs, cults
    - Networks of criminals
    - Night club rivals
    - Stolen good markets
    - Sources of wealth

3. Sensitive topics
    - Tax evasion
    - Smuggling
    - Drug trade
    - Human rights abuse
    - Election-based violence
    - Election rigging
    - Organized killings
    - Illegal firearms trade
    - Corruption
    - Money laundering
    - Political manipulations

4. Dangerous environments
    - Respondents' home
    - Bars, liquor stores
    - Isolated rooms
    - Late night/early morning
    - New places unaccompanied
    - Not introduced
    - Frontier zones
5. Country situations
    - Civil war
    - Active rebels, factions
    - Social upheavals
    - Battled election times
    - Sexuality
    - Finances
    - Resource conflicts,
    - Weak state
    - Failed state
    - Collapsed state

The list outlined above provides a guidance of some areas/topics that pose higher risk to researchers conducting fieldwork and thus care must be taken when developing studies that will be conducted in these types of areas or on these types of contexts. When the right precautions are taken, risk would be reduced significantly if not avoided. After developing the research protocol, a safety protocol has to be developed even when the risk is minimal. For good practice, it is useful to develop a research protocol first since safety protocol is logically an extension of research protocol. It is thus imperative to introduce the research protocol in order to make the link visible for learning purposes.

Protocols

The research protocol

The success of any study starts with the development of a research protocol. A research protocol is a full description of the planned project activity for guiding reviewers of the research when they are considering issuing a research clearance (Iphofen, 2013; Ohio State University, 2014). The protocol is used as the roadmap by researchers throughout the research process. Research protocols will differ between topics and contexts depending on the nature of the study, its respondents, sensitivity, location of the study and the team that will execute the study. A typical research protocol may have the following subsections:

- Project summary
- General information
- Rationale of the research
- Study goals
- Study design
- Methodology
- Safety considerations
- Follow-up of the research subjects
- Data management
- Quality assurance
- Expected outcome
- Dissemination strategies
- Anticipated problems
- Project management
- Ethics
- Official research permissions
- Informed consent
- References cited only
- Timeframe
- Dissemination plan

In each of these steps, the investigator has to detail what will be done and how it will be done. The steps provide information on how the project would be executed and, if there is an area which is not clear, the protocol allows reviewers to demand changes or

clarification. Upon securing research clearance, it is the responsibility of the team leader to train all field researchers and all those who will be involved in different sections on what to do according to the protocol. All project staff needs to be conversant with the methodology because making mistakes and ignoring the steps may lead to problems both in the field and on the quality of the data collected.

Safety protocol

Safety protocol is an important guide in any research regardless of the level of the risk. A standard research project needs to have in place a safety protocol and its team members must be aware of the contents. Langford (2000) sees safety protocol as an addition to the research protocol specifically aimed at addressing safety issues. Several scholars have contributed to this notion (Belousov, et al, 2007; Bloor et al, 2007; Brougham, 2012; Howell, 1999; Iphofen, 2013; Kenyon & Hawker, 1999; Patterson et al, 1999; Portland State University, 2015; Roguski & Tauri, 2013; Sinha, 2016; Williamson and Burns, 2014). The components of a safety protocol depend on the nature of the research, topic sensitivity, the team and location of the study (Duran-Martinez, 2014). A safety protocol is developed by the team after mounting and screening different scenarios. Thus, there is no one size standard safety protocol that fits all studies.

On the basis of the literature reviewed, a typical model of safety protocol is advanced here. The goal of the model protocol is to offer a guide that would help emerging researchers to learn how to develop such a protocol step by step and afterwards put it into use. The proposed model safety protocol is hereby presented.

1. **Readiness of the researchers to anticipate and mediate dangers**
   Researchers need to be aware that there are risks of doing fieldwork and anticipate facing some. They should be ready to mediate, reduce, or avoid them (Iphofen, 2013).This is a reality to both new and experienced, men and women. Researchers should be aware that their presence in any area, rural or urban, may be the source of risk and hence be prepared.

2. **Prepare for fieldwork**
   A researcher should prepare for fieldwork taking into consideration cultural and social reality of the area. Get necessary permissions such as formal permits and letters and introduce herself and the team to local leaders; explain the research and have a conversation about it. Not only is this good protocol, but it may give the researcher(s) insights into the local community on the topic researched. Dress to fit the expectations of the people, do not overdress

or provoke the people by inappropriate dress code. Flat shoes are ideal for long walks or escapes when necessary (Roguski & Tauri, 2013). Depending on the nature of the study, while talking to respondents, calm demeanour, moderate humour, and rapport are important (Sinha, 2016). Avoid arrogance or being perceived to be so as this may provoke respondents or the people around. Before starting an interview, check if all your equipment including the car, the recorder, personal alarms, cell phone, and the field bag are in place and in good order as planned. If using a common car, plan pick up times and stick to the plans. Have a communication signals, rescue plans. Communicate to others the whereabouts in case a rescue is needed (Iphofen, 2013; Williamson and Burns, 2014).

Furthermore, agree on common procedures such as when to start and finish interviews, how to alert others if in a risk, leave information of whereabouts and details of the participants to be interviewed. In addition, a common definition of what constitutes a risk is important because it will allow researchers to be able to judge different situations (Williamson & Burns, 2014). Have the whole team learn the safety protocol and where possible practise so that all can memorize key points. For safety purposes, define responsibilities and lines of communication to all members. It is advised that all fieldworkers familiarize themselves with the project research protocol for a smooth conduct of their work.

3. Budget and purchase protective equipment

Field safety needs protective strategies and equipment and hence the need to budget for all of these (Bloor et al, 2007; Howell, 1990). Field researchers need to have equipment that will help to protect them and/or alert colleagues that there is a risk. Some of this equipment includes personal alarms and pre-programmed cell phones loaded with adequate airtime.

4. Plan for extreme events

While doing fieldwork, researchers can have their equipment damaged or stolen. This may affect the research (Bloor et al., 2007; Brougham, 2012). Similarly, researchers may fall sick, get involved in an accident or attacked by criminals while working. All these need to be considered and planned for ahead of the time.

5. **Assessment of the site situation before and during an interview**
   Before beginning fieldwork, conduct a check on the state of the situation of the field (Iphofen, 2013). Talk to people to get details of the situation on the ground and ask for feedback on doing research at the time. While doing fieldwork, researchers should be able to maintain a state of awareness. Be on the lookout on what is going on in the community. When interviewing, note who is around and who has left, listen and observe carefully and pay attention to silences of respondents as well.

   Prior to fieldwork or interviews, it is recommended to familiarize with the place and make sure people are aware of the presence of the researcher(s) (Belousov et al., 2007; Sinha, 2016). Furthermore, avoid dark settings and select a place with good visibility. Conduct fieldwork during the day, use open public areas, quiet places, and avoid evenings. This will allow one to see things clearly and respond accordingly. Visibility protects both the researcher and respondent.

6. **Research the participants**
   Before embarking on the fieldwork, it is good to know more about the participants. Getting to know their history, culture, level of development and literacy level gives an idea of the nature of the respondents. If the respondents are individuals with unique conditions, e.g. long-term illness, it is good to know their individual histories. This helps plan ahead and will inform research and safety protocols.

7. **Identify and respond to threats**
   While conducting fieldwork, note things and respond accordingly, observe gestures, use of certain words, sitting pattern and plan to leave if there is a problem. Williamson and Burns (2014) advice that during an interview with a study respondent, if the participant or others in the house are intoxicated, plan to leave as it is a sign of potential problems. Same if they display sexually inappropriate behaviour, gestures or sexually inappropriate verbalization. It is recommended that researchers should trust their instincts and follow them.

8. **Pay attention to the nature of the research topic**
   Some topics are very sensitive politically or socially and might cause problems to the researcher (Belousov et al., 2007). Researchers need to pay attention to the topic, respondents and the timing. The list proposed before should be able to give some guide on this issue.

9. **Consider emotional safety**
   Different individuals in the team have different levels of emotion. This needs to be discussed by the whole team since it might have repercussions to the individual and to the study as a whole (Williamson & Burns, 2014). Some emotional effect if mishandled may have fatal outcome to the researcher including withdrawal from the community, mental health problems and self-denial to mention some.

10. **Follow up the event/episode**
    If an event happens or a threat is experienced, it should be documented, reported and followed up. The event should be documented in details even if no legal action is taken. The information might be needed in the future for future researchers and or for developing safety guidelines. It is worth noting that even the same team could plan for second or third rounds of fieldwork. Proper record will guide the next phase (Iphofen, 2013).

11. **Nature of the environment where the fieldwork will be conducted**
    Some environments could be very risky to do fieldwork (Belousov et al., 2007). Areas where there is no security or the presence of the state, isolated areas, urban slums with no clear address and landmarks, criminal business corners or gang controlled areas are risky areas. Researchers should plan to meet with interviewees outside of these zones.

The eleven points presented above offer a roadmap which can potentially guide research teams and researchers to develop their specific safety protocol. The central goal of this protocol is to prepare teams and researchers on how to avoid dangerous situations and if caught in one, how to help themselves out. This goal corresponds with the argument that all areas are potentially risky and thus researchers need preparation. To discover the magnitude of risk involved, a risk assessment must be conducted in the first place. The assessment report is what forms the bases of developing a safety protocol that corresponds to the situation.

In essence, the protocol presented above provides a guide to not only the researchers but also team leaders, instructors, institutions and funders. As pointed out before, the research and safety protocols go together and all team members need to know them, rehearse and simulate scenarios so that they are familiar with the protocols.

Conclusion

This work was stimulated by the events that happened in Mvumi area in Dodoma Region (Tanzania) where three researchers were killed by villagers. The event reminds researchers and methodologists that although rural Tanzania looks peaceful, it still does entail risks. The goal of this work was to develop a typical model of safety protocol which would serve as a guide in developing specific study safety protocols for teaching and research use. As Duran-Martinez (2014) observe, researchers should carefully consider and plan for safety before they begin to do their fieldwork. It is anticipated that the model will serve as a typical teaching and learning protocol for instructors and students of field research methods.

Field research risks are context specific and context sensitive. Further scholarship in the area of risks would help to inform researchers in Tanzania and elsewhere about the various risks which they are facing as they conduct research in different topics and areas, and prevent tragic situations like that of Dodoma from occurring again.

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