In-country Safety and Culture Scenarios

Scenario 1

You are fortunate enough to have a driver to transport you and your research assistants to and from your field site every day. You are very excited as you and your team depart for your first day of fieldwork. As you head towards the main road, your driver begins going faster and faster, careening around potholes and other vehicles, often nearly missing pedestrians. You comment that he seems to be going quite fast, and your research assistants laugh and explain that this is how people drive here. As the field days continue, you realize that this is indeed the norm, but you are very uncomfortable knowing there are a large number of traffic fatalities each year. One day you ask your driver to slow down, but he merely expresses that he knows you have a lot to accomplish, and his job is to get you to and from your field site as quickly as possible. How can you effectively address this issue to ensure the safety of you and your team?
Cultural Issues in the Field

Scenario A

To celebrate your presence in their village, your host family plans a large gathering a few days after your arrival. You are told that all of their close friends and family will be present, as well as the village chief and other important leaders. While you are at your field site, your host family works throughout the day to prepare a banquet for the celebration. When you arrive at their home, a large gathering is already present. Your host mom invites you to be the first to eat. She points you toward many dishes that you do not recognize, and she highlights the prized goat head soup. You know that this feast cost your hosts a great deal to prepare, and you have heard that goat head soup is a particularly prized meal. But you do not find the food’s appearance appealing, and you feel slightly nauseated by the soup in particular. How can you handle the situation without potentially offending your host family?

Scenario B

You have pilot tested your in-depth interview guide and are ready to begin interviewing women about their experiences with intimate partner violence and the resources available to them. Since this is such a sensitive topic and because you do not speak the local language, you asked that your host organization find translators to help you in the field. They selected three translators from the program staff, and you met with them before to brief them on the project and train them in protocol. When you begin your first interview though, you are worried that the translator does not seem to be conveying all the information to you. The translator gives two sentence translations for five-minute responses by the interviewee, and when you try to ask whether the interviewee has felt unwell as a result of experiencing intimate partner violence, you recognize that the translator does not seem to be using one of the few local terms you have learned, asking her whether she has acquired an STD. You also observe that the interviewee is becoming progressively more uncomfortable, looking at you oddly and giving shorter answers. At one point, she bursts out in tears, but the translator tells you everything is okay, that she is just sad, and that we should continue the interview because she is providing valuable information. You think that you have crossed the line and should stop the interview, but are not sure how to communicate this to the interviewee because the translator is so uncooperative.

Scenario C

Now that you have begun working with your research assistants, you find that you have very different expectations regarding time commitments. You have agreed to a $20/day rate, and you expect them to work for approximately 8 hours. However, the research assistants live halfway between the partner organization’s office and your field site, and the RAs find it convenient to be dropped off at home by the driver when returning from fieldwork. On days that require a shorter length of time collecting data, this sometimes mean that they expect to return home after 5 or 6 hours of work. Once the rainy season begins, RAs often ask to leave before the rains begin, likewise shortening the day. You feel that you are paying for the same amount of work when less is being accomplished. Your host organization informs you that it is expected to pay a full day’s rate even when the length of time worked fluctuates. How can you handle this situation?
**Ethical Issues in the Field**

**Scenario A**

During your summer fieldwork, you have hired a language instructor with whom you work part-time. Before you left home, you had identified him as an appropriate instructor through your partner organization and coordinated the pay rate and hours of instruction. Your instructor offers to pick you up at the airport, which you find to be a kind gesture, but after dropping you off at your hostel your instructor informs you that the ride cost $25. As you begin your language lessons, you find that your instructor expects you to purchase many similar services. You learn that the wife of your instructor operates a tourism business, and he frequently encourages you to patronize his wife’s business, from hiring her whenever you need a taxi to going on expensive weekend trips. You find that occasionally giving in and agreeing allows you to continue your lessons with fewer interruptions. You take him up on the offer to visit a beautiful local attraction one weekend because you really wanted to be able to see this area during your travels anyway. After you return from this wonderful trip, the encouragement only becomes more frequent, pushy and uncomfortable. How can you handle this situation?

**Scenario B**

For your summer field experience, you are working on a team to conduct household surveys, in-depth interviews and focus groups with key stakeholders in 3 different regions that are very remote. When your team arrives in the first area to begin your research, you discover that there is very little infrastructure for actual health services. You arrive to the clinic site to find that the patients in need of medical care are overflowing outside of the clinic building. Cots have been placed in the back area and there is only one nurse to treat all of the patients. You notice that there is no waste disposal system and so they simply pour sand when someone defecates. You try to help by getting ORS (oral rehydration salts) for one patient only to find that there is no water available except for purchase at the market. You knew that you were entering into an extremely low-resource community with extensive need for health services, but you had no idea that this is what you would see. What do you do? How do you reconcile the priorities and what to do when you are working on a study that is not necessarily as imminent as the situation at hand? How do you help without any previous medical training?

**Scenario C**

You are conducting a series of interviews about mental health in a very remote and rural area to try to help expand services for post-conflict areas. Your country has suffered a long civil war where there were many deaths, internally displaced people, rape, conscription of child soldiers and additional economic, social and governmental upheaval. Researchers have noted increased rates of depression and suicide in this country since the end of the war and your research will hopefully be used to help identify specific services that could be developed. During your interviews, many of your informants express strong emotional distress while sharing about profoundly troubling experiences. Several have begun crying and explaining that they do not know what they can do. Some have asked for your advice and support even though you cannot answer their questions or provide counseling for them. Your host organization likewise does not have the capacity to provide counseling, but you are aware of an organization in the capitol area that provides mental health care services. How can you best address this situation? What are the implications for your research? Your informants?
Safety and security

Scenario A

Your host organization helped to identify a few local hostels where you can stay for the duration of your 9-week field experience. Many of them are more expensive than you budgeted. You select one of the less expensive hostels because they have a place to cook which will significantly decrease your expenses for food as well. There are spaces for you to store your belongings and you are pretty happy with your selection. One evening you return to the hostel after a long day in the field to find everything in your locked storage area intact except the money within your zipped backpack was gone (about 1000 USD). You are frantic and report this to the person at the front desk that evening, only to find he is drunk and red-eyed and cannot follow your description. What do you do?

Scenario B

You go out to dinner one night with some co-workers/friends after a long day of working in the field. Although you are enjoying dinner, you know that it is not culturally appropriate to be out late as a woman in your area so you are eager to finish and get home before it gets late. You take a taxi part of the way home, but the taxi can’t drive down the dirt road to your house, so you have to walk the last half mile. It got dark faster than you realized and while you are walking, you realize that there are wild dogs beginning to surround you on the dirt path to your house. What should you do?

Scenario C

Midway through your summer experience, you and your team decide to stop at a popular local establishment for a quick drink to unwind after a long day in the field. You feel like you have finally started to feel comfortable and familiar with the area and team members and begin to let your guard down a bit. After several drinks you lose track of time and realize that it is already dark and much later than you expected to be out. It is starting to get a bit rowdier and more crowded and you seem to be drawing a lot more attention. Many people comment on the fact that most Americans don’t come to this place and begin to bombard you a lot of questions. One of the locals who has been there drinking since you arrived all of a sudden gets very angry and starts to yell at you and your entire team for being there. You start to feel more uncomfortable and are eager to leave as soon as possible. However, everyone—including your driver—has had several beers by this point and you are still several miles from where you are staying. What should you do?