

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 LGBTQ status may affect the response locals have toward researchers. Harassment and discrimination may also be present within the field team, which should be [reported](#) and 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 must 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

- 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.

Psychological Hazards Fact Sheet

- The principal investigator and any field supervisors must consult Student Affairs' "[Resources to help a student in distress](#)" prior to travel.
- The principal investigator must provide relevant contact information for hotlines and emergency response assistance.
- Researchers should be encouraged to 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.

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, Counseling and Psychological Services at (650) 723-3785, national hotlines, and local emergency services.
- International SOS offers mental health counseling and emotional support services for Stanford personnel traveling abroad. International SOS may be contacted at +1-215-942-8478 or via the chat feature in the International SOS Assistance app.
- Ensure there are multiple options available for reporting harassment (in case the sole communication device is controlled by the harasser).

Potential Concern

- The supervisor should talk with the researcher in a quiet, secure place. Refer to the "[Resources to help a student 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 the 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.

Psychological Hazards Fact Sheet

- 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 members of the 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

Counseling and Psychological Services at (650) 723-3785

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

International SOS (Outside the United States) +1-215-942-8478

Illness, injury and close call events shall be reported by submitting an [SU-17](#).

If you have questions or need support, contact EH&S's Field Safety Program at [ehs field safety support@lists.stanford.edu](mailto:ehs_field_safety_support@lists.stanford.edu).

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