

Confronting Gender-Based Violence in Fieldwork: Potential Sites of Intervention within DPU's PhD Programme

A report produced in collaboration between the
Development Planning Unit and the Network of Women Doing Fieldwork
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(As amended following a staff discussion)

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INTRODUCTION

This report was commissioned by the Development Planning Unit (DPU) at University College London (UCL) in collaboration with the Network of Women Doing Fieldwork (NWDF). Its main purpose is to evaluate how DPU's PhD programme could recognise and mitigate gender-based violence experienced by PhD students during their fieldwork. It is anticipated that the report will be a primary resource for DPU staff to mainstream concerns surrounding gender-based violence within their teaching practice.

There are several principles and assumptions that underpin this report. Primarily, this report is written to support the rights of researchers to conduct their work safely and with dignity. This includes the ability to produce knowledge free from discrimination, harassment, violence, and abuse—whether virtual, verbal, or physical. It is recognised that researchers who identify as women, and/or who present as women, experience gender-based violence with more frequency, irrespective of geography. Further, researchers belonging to a marginalized social group—whether based on sexuality, race, ethnicity, religion, or ability— or an intersection of these identities - are also particularly at risk to experience violence. Acknowledging this context, distinct from its normalisation, is a duty of care towards researchers, colleagues, students, and research participants. In turn, this position enriches and diversifies knowledge production and academia more broadly.

Despite being a widespread issue, gender-based violence experienced by researchers generally, and PhD students particularly, is rarely discussed in academia. While gender-based violence is a constant feature of contemporary society, this is amplified during fieldwork when researchers are separated from their social networks and have to collect data imperative for the completion of their education (and eventually their livelihood). Gender-based violence during fieldwork impacts the way data is collected and analysed; further, it affects the wellbeing and performance of the researcher with potential consequences on research participants. As such, in the absence of explicit recognition and resources to address gender-based violence in fieldwork, DPU's PhD programme risks sustaining structural inequalities faced by women, minority, queer, disabled, and migrant researchers. Further, as an educational institution, UCL has an obligation to support the safety, health, and wellbeing of its students.

This report has emerged from a review of the policies, procedures, and forms employed by the DPU and UCL regarding ethical approval and risk assessment. These were provided by the DPU's PhD Programme Director or were publicly available online. Further, an interview with the PhD Programme Director placed these documents in their educational context. A meeting with Archaeology South-East (ASE) at UCL provided additional institutional

background.¹ Much of the conceptual framing of this report is drawn from seminars organised by the NWDF in 2021 and recommended academic articles by its members. As the report developed, feedback sessions with members of NWDF and DPU's PhD Programme Director refined and strengthened the report. Finally, comments from DPU staff and PhD made at an internal departmental meeting to discuss the draft report, were also incorporated. The author of this report, who identifies as a woman, recently completed a PhD programme at a public UK university which included several field research trips. She also earned a master's degree from DPU in 2010.

This report has five main sections. The first three sections lay out the wider polemics and challenges in recognizing gender-based violence in fieldwork within academic institutions. First, Section One describes how gender-based violence manifests throughout the planning, carrying out, and evaluation of fieldwork. Section Two explains why these experiences are often made invisible, through delineating the conceptual inconsistencies that face researchers, supervisors, and institutions when addressing gender-based violence. Interpersonal and institutional challenges emerge from this conceptual foundation and are discussed in Section Three.

Sections Four and Five address the specific context of DPU and UCL. Actors and policies that are relevant for recognizing gender-based violence in fieldwork are considered in Section Four. Finally, Section Five offers potential sites of intervention within DPU's PhD programme, where gender-based violence in fieldwork could be explicitly discussed, planned for, and ultimately mitigated. Finally, the report concludes with recommendations for initial actions to be taken by DPU staff and issues that will need further exploration.

1. MANIFESTATIONS OF GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IN THE FIELD

Gender-based violence can occur and therefore should be considered at all stages of fieldwork. This includes scoping the field, immersion, data analysis, and report-back to respondents. During scoping the research design is conceptualised and decisions are taken that will influence the researcher's relationship with the field, including identifying specific places and participants. Immersion refers to the traditional 'fieldwork' period when students are embedded in their research site for the purposes of data collection and generation. During this stage, they are potentially separated from their institution and, if PhD students are not native to the site of research, from their personal support networks. Upon completion of immersion, researchers then analyse the data gathered in the field, which often includes revisiting experiences that had led to data collection. This analysis is often reported-back to research

¹ For a few years, ASE has actively promoted staff training to combat sexual harassment and violence during fieldwork and encouraged reporting of such incidences to senior staff.

participants, either before or after the finalisation of the PhD (depending on the research methodology).

Understanding how gender-based violence could manifest throughout a PhD is vital for identifying possible interventions. Crucially, gender-based violence refers not only to extreme forms of sexual violence, but also includes all physical and mental harm emerging from discrimination, coercion, manipulation, and threats. During PhD research these forms of violence can directly impact the student's ability to carry out data collection, thereby jeopardising the completion of the PhD. Here, a nuanced understanding of the possible different forms of gender-based violence that might be experienced in relation to the researcher's positionality is key as it helps to prepare adequately for the different stages of field work. Where intersectional experiences of discrimination and violence happen, PhD students could, for example, have to deal with both racism and gender-based violence at once. Preparing for such situations requires a consideration of the researcher's embodiment of gender and its intersection with other social relations in the field, and how their intersectional identity is 'presented' in various spatial and cultural contexts at all stages of fieldwork.² This awareness is distinct from, what can be, formulaic explications on positionality, which tend to be uni-directional, namely between the researcher and themselves. Instead, considering the embodiment of the researcher accepts that the field is dialogical; while researchers may instigate an intervention in the field, the field is also acting on them.³ Thus, the field is not a neutral space. It is relational to the researcher and requires an intersectional analysis of both the field and the researcher.⁴ From this vantage point, several key issues of field research—within and across scoping, immersion, data analysis, and report-back—emerge that can be particularly precarious for researchers.

The first is the selection of gatekeepers and the maintenance of this relationship throughout the research. Gatekeepers can be the sole entry point to a community; the researcher risks losing access to critical data if they cannot sustain a positive relationship with a gatekeeper. This can put researchers in a vulnerable position whereby gatekeepers can take advantage of their power, by making demands on the researcher in exchange for access, support, or connections. These can vary from harassing the researcher to spend personal time with the gatekeeper, to overt invitations for sexual relations, and even physical violence.⁵ In these situations, researchers are forced to weigh their research progression against their own

² Ayona Datta, 'Spatialising Performance: Masculinities and Femininities in a 'fragmented' Field', *Gender, Place & Culture* 15, no. 2 (2008): 189-204.

³ Julie Cupples and Sara Kindon, 'Far from Being "Home Alone": The Dynamics of Accompanied Fieldwork', *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography* 24, no. 2 (2003): 211-28.

⁴ Maya J Berry, Claudia Chávez Argüelles, Shanya Cordis, Sarah Ihmoud, and Elizabeth Velásquez Estrada, 'Toward a Fugitive Anthropology: Gender, Race, and Violence in the Field', *Cultural Anthropology* 32, no. 4 (2017): 537-65.

⁵ Liza M Mügge, 'Sexually Harassed by Gatekeepers: Reflections on Fieldwork in Surinam and Turkey', *International Journal of Social Research Methodology* 16, no. 6 (2013): 541-46.

personal safety. In some cases, researchers may decide to change their topic, methods, or research subjects because of gender-based violence. For example, a researcher might choose to only interview women or limit participant observation to public spaces. These deviations from the original research design may require dedicated support from supervisors. They also chart new trajectories for the researcher which may be detrimental to their academic career if not managed well with proper support from the supervisor and the institution.

Beyond gatekeepers, researchers often develop relationships with community members or informants, particularly in work using ethnographic methods. When gender-based violence is inflicted by a member of the community, reporting it can cause internal conflicts and further jeopardise the research. In addition to dealing with the trauma of experiencing such violence, the researcher must also decide how to adjust their research project, pursue avenues of justice, and navigate the University bureaucracy whereby changes in research topics must be justified.⁶

In addition to planning for their own safety and wellbeing, researchers are also responsible for any research assistants, translators, and ‘fixers’ they hire in the field.⁷ Effectively, the student could be viewed as an employer who may be exposing their employees to risk, including gender-based violence. As such, students may have to plan for transportation and arrange places and times to conduct fieldwork with safety the foremost consideration. Yet, researchers are rarely given guidance on how to manage these relationships and provide support for those they employ.

Fieldwork often takes place away from the academic institution where the PhD student is based, particularly for international students or students working on topics related to international development. As such, many students can find themselves isolated from their normal support networks, in addition to being disconnected from their supervisors, department, and institution. In the aftermath of experiencing gender-based violence, researchers may have to navigate unfamiliar legal and health systems, including dealing with the police, hospitals, and insurance companies. Further, researchers who work in remote areas may find it difficult to access health care and legal advice. Encounters with these unfamiliar bureaucratic institutions can be emotionally and mentally draining, which is amplified in the absence of close friends and family members. When students reach out to their supervisors and departments for support, their accounts of gender-based violence may be minimised, on account of the general expectation that fieldwork is supposed to elicit a degree of physical and

⁶ Luisa T Schneider, ‘Sexual Violence During Research: How the Unpredictability of Fieldwork and the Right to Risk Collide with Academic Bureaucracy and Expectations,’ *Critique of Anthropology* 40, no. 2 (2020): 173-93.

⁷ This is, of course, in addition to the research participants, though this relationship tends to be addressed in ethical approval processes.

mental discomfort.⁸ This can result in the researcher dismissing their own recognition of the violence and its effects on their wellbeing. Even when researchers have established a new network in the field and are able to seek support, this comes at the expense of local, and sometimes vulnerable, work they have already undertaken.

Arranging for safe and affordable accommodation and modes of transportation, particularly for female researchers, is another site where concerns regarding gender-based violence surface. Securing appropriate housing that will facilitate the research can be difficult within the relatively short period of field research. The choice (or lack thereof) of housemates, the location of the residence, its access to safe transportation at different times of the day and year, and its expense—are all crucial considerations. This is not limited to students working in a country different from one where they have previously resided. Further, on account of their social identities, researchers may be targets for gender-based violence in particular spaces.⁹ Explaining such considerations is not yet normalised within funding applications for fieldwork, whereby requesting support for renting a car or staying at a hotel are considered mere luxuries, rather than necessities.

For female researchers, accessing sexual health services including birth control and diverse menstrual products may be difficult during fieldwork. Locating clean and safe toilet facilities while conducting fieldwork also requires planning and may extend the time taken to conduct research. Childcare is another factor that not only impacts the preparation and funding needed for fieldwork, but also the researcher's presentation in the field and its impact on methodology.¹⁰

Gender-based violence experienced during fieldwork endures once the student returns to their institution and begins data analysis and writing-up. In some cases, these experiences have limited the data collected or even shifted the subject of the research. Researchers may grapple with how their own affectivity impacts their analysis of the data and to what extent it informs the methodology of the research, a consideration that was not present in scoping. Moreover, the trauma of conducting the research is continuously revisited through the writing up period, hampering the completion of the PhD. Any changes to data collection resulting from gender-based violence, may have to be defended in the viva, which is another source of concern. Currently, academic institutions do not have ways to render visible gender-based violence during field research and understand how it can affect the long-term progression of the researcher, their ability to successfully finish their PhD, and establish their academic

⁸ Amy Pollard, 'Field of Screams: Difficulty and Ethnographic Fieldwork,' *Anthropology Matters* 11, no. 2 (2009): 1-24.

⁹ Berry et al., 'Toward a Fugitive Anthropology,' 537-65; Erin Pritchard, 'Female Researcher Safety: The Difficulties of Recruiting Participants at Conventions for People with Dwarfism,' *International Journal of Social Research Methodology* 22, no. 5 (2019): 503-15.

¹⁰ Christine Gibb, 'Not just Parenting in the Field: Accompanied Research and Geographies of Caring and Responsibility,' *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography* 42 (2020): 284-300.

career. Ultimately, this facilitates the continuation of inequality and discrimination within the research community.

2. CONCEPTUAL CHALLENGES

Though gender-based violence in fieldwork is not a new phenomenon, it remains a subject that is rarely acknowledged publicly by academic institutions, supervisors, and PhD students. This can be attributed to several conceptual challenges that inhibit research institutions and individuals from discussing this issue openly and honestly. The first challenge concerns the tension between recognising that gender-based violence is prevalent while refusing to normalise it as a given or acceptable reality. Ironically, because gender-based violence is a common phenomenon experienced mostly by women and those identifying as LGBTIQ+, it can be an expected—not exceptional—element of fieldwork. As such, it becomes an ‘open secret’, one that is known but not discussed explicitly. This has a silencing effect, whereby researchers privately absorb gender-based violence as a ‘normal’ part of fieldwork, especially if they were not subject to extreme forms of sexual violence. Consequently, students may develop feelings of failure or shame towards their research, especially in a context where PhD fieldwork is often portrayed and experienced as a liminal experience, transforming the student into a researcher.¹¹

When researchers experience gender-based violence in fieldwork, they are forced to confront that their own body is integral to the research process. For researchers that do not focus on gender studies, or have no background in gender or feminist studies, this realisation occurs in the absence of the conceptual tools and knowledge to fully comprehend it. For those that explicitly support gender-sensitive approaches in their research or study violence, not previously taking this into consideration may further amplify feelings of failure and shame associated with experiencing gender-based violence.

Once researchers, especially women, encounter their own embodiment in the field another conceptual dilemma emerges: how to reconcile mitigation strategies to avoid gender-based violence with their own feminist positions? Women are often blamed for the violence inflicted on them; most commonly, analysis of violence quickly shifts to the clothing worn by the victim, their purpose for being in a place at a particular time, or even their lack of cultural awareness and preparedness.¹² For some researchers, changing their style of dress or restricting their movements based on safety considerations are practices complicit with patriarchal positions that blame women for gender-based violence. However, such an interpretation needs to be carefully read against the need for professionalism in research

¹¹ Pollard, ‘Field of Screams,’ 1-24.

¹² Karen Ross, “No Sir, She Was Not a Fool in the Field”: Gendered Risks and Sexual Violence in Immersed Cross-Cultural Fieldwork,’ *The Professional Geographer* 67, no. 2 (2015): 180-86.

through adapting to implicit or explicit codes of conduct in all research contexts. Thus, when designing and articulating such mitigation strategies, researchers may feel they are betraying their research site, and their position in it, by considering the field as dangerous. Conversely, those who conduct research in spaces with a legacy of violence against, for example, women of colour, might be reluctant to adapt to the cultural norms of groups perceived as oppressors. For those whose research is in the Global South, there is an additional tension of not contributing to racist and orientalist perceptions of the postcolony as an uncivilised, primitive space. This relationship and loyalty to the field site is also questioned as students grapple with their 'me too of privilege'; on the one hand, they are privileged researchers with social, cultural, and often economic, capital, but this is always accompanied by their disempowerment as women or other marginalised minorities.¹³

When researchers decide to publicly discuss their experiences of gender-based violence in fieldwork, they risk their work being classified as gender studies. The wider implications of their research for their discipline may be overlooked, or outright rejected. Acknowledging the possibility of gender-based violence in the field contradicts prevailing norms which position the researcher as a neutral observer of data and exposes them to accusations of unprofessionalism and bias. This may limit the future trajectory of the researcher, associating their career with the violence they experienced rather than their theoretical and empirical contributions to their discipline. Consequently, gender-based violence remains an issue to be tackled by victims, entrenching it as a 'women's issue' to be resolved between female academics. This is concerning not only because it places responsibility on women for the violence inflicted on them but also because it does not acknowledge men's gendered experiences of violence in the field. Further, female academics often assume the responsibility of supporting students who undergo violence in the field.¹⁴

Finally, underpinning these conceptual challenges is the ambiguous position of PhD students within academic institutions. They are simultaneously considered students, staff, and researchers (at different stages of training). Thus, the University's duty of care is not clearly defined. For students, they must balance a request for support with their professional standing within a department. This may result in profound consideration of their research participants in ethical approvals and risk assessments coupled with a dismissal of personal risks. Additionally, students may feel uncomfortable articulating safety and wellbeing concerns, out of fear that such admissions would be portrayed as untrained, naïve, or weak.

¹³ Mindi Schneider, Elizabeth Lord and Jessica Wilczak, 'We, too: Contending with the Sexual Politics of Fieldwork in China', *Gender, Place & Culture* 28, no.4 (2021): 519-40.

¹⁴ Denise Goerisch et al., 'Mentoring with: Reimagining Mentoring Across the University,' *Gender, Place & Culture* 26, no. 12 (2019): 1740-58.

3. INTERPERSONAL AND INSTITUTIONAL CHALLENGES

Beyond conceptual challenges, there are interpersonal and institutional challenges within academia which have discouraged consideration of gender-based violence in fieldwork. Fundamentally, there is a lack of clarity regarding the location and division of responsibility for this issue between researchers, supervisors, departments, and centralised administration. Academic administrations may take the position that gender-based violence in fieldwork is indicative of the naivety of the student or their lack of supervision. This localises the problem of gender-based violence, instead of supporting wider communal practices towards mitigation. Supervisors may be apportioned blame, even as they are increasingly overworked and lack the necessary skills and/or training to provide emotional and pastoral support to students. Communication between these sites is important for lessening the burden of individuals who have experienced gender-based violence and those who advise them.

The relationship between the supervisor and PhD student is a key site where gender-based violence in fieldwork is not addressed. This subject can be uncomfortable and stressful to discuss among peers, let alone in an asymmetrical gendered relationship. PhD students rely on supervisors to guide them throughout the PhD, introduce them to colleagues and the disciplinary field, and write references for further academic positions. Engaging in intimate conversations that yield emotive responses may position the PhD student as vulnerable and unprofessional to some supervisors. Further, academic institutions are still comprised of majority white male faculty in senior positions. These faculty members may not have previously considered gender-based violence in fieldwork as a topic to broach with students. Some female students may feel embarrassed to raise gender-based violence as a concern with a male supervisor. And, when safety and potential harassment in the field is addressed, it may be treated as an unavoidable casualty of fieldwork, rather than as a topic to be seriously planned for and mitigated.

Supervision methods and abilities vary greatly within a department. Generally, departments provide minimal oversight of supervisors and give them flexibility to arrange supervisions with students. In this context, supervisors may rarely develop their pedagogical practice towards PhD students, which is distinct from teaching in lectures or seminars. Without explicit training on mentoring PhD students, supervisors may neither have the capacity, nor sensitivity, to confront gender-based violence in fieldwork. When students feel their supervisors do not understand their concerns regarding gender-based violence, they may turn to other faculty or colleagues for support, especially those that have previously been vocal regarding gender-based violence. This reinforces the division of labour when addressing this issue, one where women take on the most responsibility.

At the institutional level, there are several sites that could address gender-based violence in fieldwork explicitly. These include the department, research ethics committees,

risk assessment committees, student wellbeing offices, alumni networks and the myriad policies, guidance documents, and procedures that accompany PhD fieldwork. However, these operate in a context of tension between the centralisation and localisation of decision-making and support. Decentralisation may provide practices that are tailored to students of a particular discipline, but also risks assuming responsibilities for which the wider academic institution is better equipped (and funded). At the same time, centralisation may render issues bureaucratic and non-relatable, which is a disservice to the researcher's development. This results in a situation whereby students, supervisors, departments, and centralised committees may treat ethical approvals and risk assessments as a necessary exercise rather than also a fundamental pedagogical tool essential for research development. The many guidance documents that accompany such approvals reinforce that the process itself is about completing forms for committee review, rather than establishing an ethical, safe, and feasible research design and methodology. Students may even pursue avenues outside of these formal processes where they can more freely consider and work out how to carry out fieldwork. This may even extend to when they are immersed in the field, when reassessing ethics and risk becomes necessary, even if it is not required by the University.

PhD students usually navigate ethical approvals and risk assessments towards the end of the first year of their programme, prior to fieldwork, and when they are still relatively new to the department, its institution, and how the two overlap. Fieldwork guidance between the two may be repetitive or even contradictory. Further, some parts of the University may consider overseas research as distinct from other forms of field research, often portraying it as inherently more dangerous even when a risk such as gender-based violence is possible in all places and can take place in unexpected spaces.¹⁵ At a time when students are preparing their upgrade papers and arranging logistics for fieldwork, parsing working through these documents and administrative entities can be confusing without clear instruction.

Seeking research approvals is usually done in parallel with applications for fieldwork funding. Already, students and their supervisors may adjust the description of research activities and the field site to make them appear less risky and more 'approvable'. Funding bodies and institutions are generally risk-averse and prefer projects that will yield publications and impact easily. Being transparent about the risk of gender-based violence in the field is counter to this partiality. Students, and especially women, may be urged to change their research topic or field site to avoid potential risks. International students are also pressured to complete PhD in timeframes aligned with visa durations, which can complicate efforts to confront risk or process challenging experiences. Ultimately, this is complicit in reducing

¹⁵ Pritchard, 'Female Researcher Safety,' 503-15.

research space, by discouraging research topics by specific researchers. For these reasons, students may prefer to represent their research alternatively to avoid being penalised.

Many academic institutions have dedicated policies and procedures regarding gender-based violence, but these are separate from research ethics and risk assessment committees. Rather, human resources or student wellbeing offices explicitly incorporate guidance on sexual harassment and violence. However, as noted previously, because PhD students are not fully staff nor students, these policies can fail to address the particularities of gender-based violence in fieldwork, which is both a professional issue (i.e. academic) and a personal one (i.e. wellbeing), requiring the cooperation of multiple departments. Student wellbeing offices are often designed around the needs of undergraduate students while human resources departments have no formal responsibility to PhD students. Reporting mechanisms for gender-based violence are generally designed around incidents between members of the University or with member of the public where the University is located. Gender-based violence in doctoral fieldwork, and how this impacts the progression of the student and their mental and physical wellbeing, is not an issue commonly addressed by any of these centralised departments.

4. RELEVANT ACTORS AND POLICIES AT DPU AND UCL

During their time at DPU and UCL, PhD students will encounter several actors and policies that will influence their fieldwork approach and planning. This includes the preparation of documentation for the purposes of ethical approval of their research, a process that includes risk assessment. Particularly, their fieldwork training will largely be developed along three main avenues: guidance from their supervisor, two seminar series designed for DPU PhD students, and UCL training sessions on research methods. Understanding how these components work together through time can provide entry points for incorporating discussions and planning for gender-based violence in fieldwork. Currently, DPU is considering some adjustments to its ethical approval process, which may give the department more autonomy. Another consideration is that the students from DPU (and the faculty) come from diverse disciplinary backgrounds, including geography, architecture, sociology, and planning. As such, there is no shared academic forums outside of DPU where all students and faculty would engage in discussion about fieldwork. For this reason, it is even more imperative that DPU develops its own approach to fieldwork training that recognises gender-based violence.

DPU students are assigned a primary and secondary supervisor. Typically, the primary supervisor will be the main reference point for queries regarding fieldwork, risk assessment, and ethical approval. Each supervisor will approach fieldwork training in their own way and to varying degrees, which may depend on their own fieldwork experiences. Understanding this

dynamic is important and may be achieved through further discussions with supervisors and PhD students on the consistency of supervisions regarding fieldwork training. Supervisors are generally forthcoming with the PhD Programme Director if they are having trouble supporting a student. Conversely, students will also approach the PhD Programme Director if they believe there is a shortcoming in supervisions. Thus, the PhD Programme Director may act as a mediator between both parties when there is miscommunication or insufficient support. Every year, supervisors meet to discuss the progression of PhD students. This event is often used as an opportunity for supervisors to collectively share how they have dealt with supervision challenges. The PhD Programme Director is an important convergence point in these discussions as they have an overview of the main issues across the DPU from the perspectives of students and faculty.

In addition to their supervisors, students develop relationships with the staff convening the Doctoral Seminar Series and Research Methods Seminar Series. The two series are meant to complement one another with the former being more general and the latter more specific to research methodology. Both seminars emphasise value-led research practice and aim to provide a supportive intellectual space for students. Each cohort of students is typically between four and twelve; by the end of their first-year students are thus exposed to each other's research and develop a peer network.

The Doctoral Seminar Series convenes approximately once per week between October and May of the first year of the PhD programme. The series provides an overview of the stages involved in doctoral research including literature review, conceptual development, fieldwork planning, and managing the research process more generally. It includes presentations by guest lecturers and students. The series concludes with students presenting their conceptual framework, with the convenor of the Doctoral Seminar Series and PhD Programme Director in attendance. Thus, within eight months of starting their PhD, each student's project is known to their colleagues and two faculty members apart from their supervisor.¹⁶

The Research Methods Seminar also takes place during the first year of the PhD programme, convening about once a week from October to July. It is then suspended during the second year of the programme and reconvened in the third year. The first year focuses on introducing students to a range of research methods. These change from year to year, depending on the research topics and approaches of the cohort. Notably, the series focuses more on the logic or rationale of choosing between different methods rather than giving training in them; training is provided through UCL's central support services. The first year includes dedicated sessions on negotiating entry to the field and subjectivities. At the end of the first year, in July, students submit a 3,000-word report which describes and justifies the

¹⁶ Unless the Head of Department or PhD Programme Director serves as supervisor.

methodology of their PhD research. Once the Research Methods Seminar resumes in the third year, it focuses on sessions that are useful for the data analysis and writing up stages. The curation of this year has changed over the last several sessions and is now focused on giving students feedback on written work.

Discussing the definitions of gender-based violence during regular courses, such as the Doctoral Seminar or Research Methods Seminar, prior to starting fieldwork will draw researchers' awareness to their own actions in the field and in relation to the possibility of experiencing gender-based violence. With respect to the former, while scenarios where researchers act as perpetrators of gender-based violence might be rare, it will be useful for PhD students of all genders to reflect upon problematic behaviours, and understand the many forms that gender-based violence may take.

Once the Doctoral Seminar Series and Research Methods Seminar Series conclude towards the end of the first academic year, students begin preparing their Upgrade Paper, which is submitted in October. This is soon followed by an internal viva. The initiation of the ethical approval process, which includes successful completion of a risk assessment, is a prerequisite for the Upgrade. In September, a session is organised within the PhD Programme to explain the ethical approval and risk assessment process to students. The timing of this session is so that students have already completed their conceptual framework and methodology (in the two Seminar series), in order that they are clear on their field sites and methods before beginning documentation for ethical approval. Students are also supposed to have dedicated meetings with their supervisors to supplement this session.

Ethical approval has four requirements: 1) reading UCL's Code of Conduct 2) completion of Risk Assessment Form 3) completion of DPU 'Low Risk Research Checklist' and 4) completion of 'Application Form: Ethical Review of DPU Low Risk Research'.¹⁷ The last three forms are submitted to the DPU Research Ethics Committee for approval. DPU has produced a summary of this process in a flow chart (Figure 1). Supervisors are expected to guide students through this process and are responsible for the student's adherence to research ethics principles.

¹⁷ This is taken from the document 'Ethical Review Procedure for DPU Research Projects' updated in March 2019. The UCL Code of Conduct for Research is currently under consultation; the new version would update the 2013 version. See https://www.ucl.ac.uk/research/sites/research/files/ucl_code_of_conduct_for_research_-_ucl_consultation.pdf. Most research by DPU PhD students is considered low risk from an ethical review perspective.

DPU RESEARCH ETHICS (RE) CHECK AND APPROVAL FLOW CHART

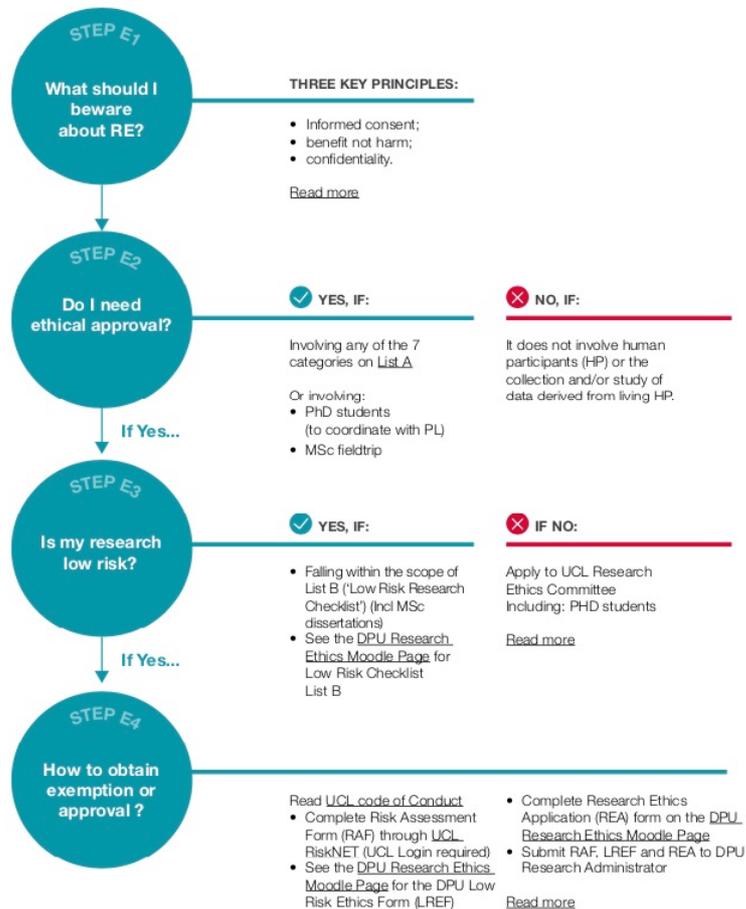


Figure 1: DPU Research Ethics Check and Approval Flow Chart
DPU

The Risk Assessment Form is completed through the UCL web portal, riskNet, and is sent to the student’s supervisor and the DPU Head of Department for approval. This form includes about two dozen possible hazards to plan for during fieldwork. Many of these relate to environmental conditions and are not applicable to research at the DPU. Nonetheless, there are several hazards that are relevant to recognising gender-based violence in fieldwork including ‘travelling to and from a fieldwork site’, ‘lone working’, ‘isolated location’, and ‘violent or aggressive behaviour’.

To complete ethical approval, students must then confirm if their research is low or high risk and then complete the appropriate form. This former is evaluated through the DPU ‘Low Risk Research Checklist’ which is organised under five main categories: observational studies; projects involving public figures and other professionals; projects involving publicly

available data; analysis of existing non-sensitive anonymised data sets/records; and data collection on non-sensitive topics with non-vulnerable participants. This form has supplementary documents to help determine the risk-level of research. These include ‘List A: Research that Requires Ethical Approval’ and ‘DPU Risk Level Devolution’. Both documents focus on the elements of the fieldwork related to participants, gatekeepers, and personal data management, though the ‘DPU Risk Level Devolution’ document does refer to risk of harm to the researcher.

If the research project is deemed ‘low-risk’, the student completes the form ‘Application Form: Ethical Review of DPU Low Risk Research’. In this form, students explain how they will manage personal data and address the ethical issues that are involved in their research. As most PhD research at DPU is considered low risk, it is approved at the departmental level through the DPU Research Ethics Committee. This is comprised of the Head of Department, the PhD Programme Director, Director of Research, and one other staff member. Research that is high risk must be approved by the UCL Research Ethics Committee.

Once students are successfully upgraded from probationary status, they typically set out to do their fieldwork after November and October of their second year. They should have returned to DPU by October of their third year to attend the Research Methods Seminar Series in which they are soon expected to produce a piece of written work based on their fieldwork for discussion. During fieldwork, students may be in regular contact with their supervisor, but this is variable. They generally do not keep in touch with the PhD Programme Director. Amendments to ethical approval and risk assessment may be undertaken once on fieldwork and follow the same procedure as the original documentation.

Beyond DPU specific policies and procedures, various UCL bodies address fieldwork, ethical approval, risk assessment, and gender-based violence. PhD students may be most familiar with the Safety Services Department, which administers riskNet. The website of this department includes guidance for risk assessment, fieldwork, and lone-working.¹⁸ However, the Safety Services Department is broadly more concerned with risks regarding environmental and bio-safety, for example fire safety, safety in laboratories, transportation of hazardous materials, and proximity to wildlife. Moreover, their guidance is largely written for group fieldwork activities that are organised for undergraduate courses. As such, the orientation of their guidance on fieldwork may not be the most applicable or comprehensive, for doctoral students at DPU. It lacks much of the political, social, and cultural contexts important for assessing risks in fieldwork undertaken by DPU students.

¹⁸ The UCL Safety Services website is: <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/safety-services/>. For guidance on fieldwork topics see: ‘Risk Assessment’ <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/safety-services/policies/2021/jul/risk-assessment>; ‘Fieldwork’ <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/safety-services/policies/2020/oct/fieldwork>; and ‘Lone Working’ <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/safety-services/policies/2020/nov/lone-working>.

hazard tables to be referenced when completing risk assessments.²⁴ The Earth Sciences Department also has a dedicated guidance on harassment during fieldwork.²⁵ Finally, the Bartlett Ethics Commission, in collaboration with DPU's own research project KNOW, has also published a website entitled 'Practising Ethics' that is a curated resources of principles, guidelines, and resources regarding research ethics.²⁶ The Guidance Documents, Requirements, and Reference Documents relevant for DPU PhD students seeking ethical approval is visualised below (Figure 3).

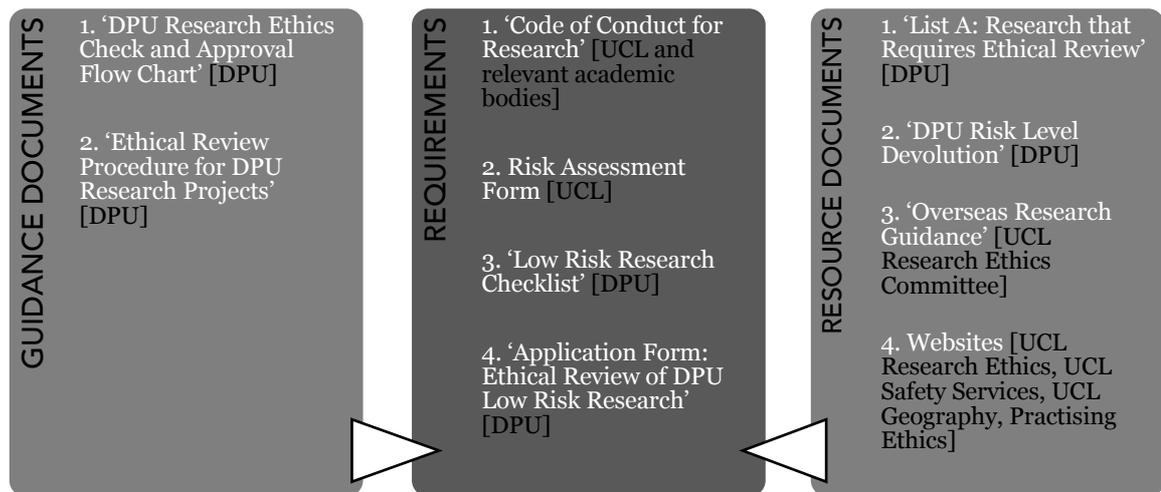


Figure 3: Ethics Approval Documents Relevant for DPU PhD Students
The institutional entity that owns the respective document is in brackets.

Gender-based violence is also addressed specifically within several UCL entities and channels. UCL Support and Wellbeing has a dedicated portal called 'Report and Support' where UCL members can report incidents of bullying, harassment, and sexual misconduct.²⁷ Reports can be made anonymously or with the support of an advisor. Report and Support also provides a list of support services for use by students who have been affected by gender-based violence.²⁸ This includes counselling services offered by UCL as well as those offered by UK-based charities. A recent contribution by UCL's Pro Vice Provost (Equity and Inclusion) indicated that UCL would intensify its efforts to support students who have experienced gender-based

²⁴ See 'Hazard Tables' <https://www.geog.ucl.ac.uk/resources/safety/risk-assessment/fieldwork-risk-assessment-preparation/hazard-tables>

²⁵ See 'UCL Department of Earth Sciences, Code of Conduct relating to participation in Fieldwork' https://www.ucl.ac.uk/earth-sciences/sites/earth-sciences/files/fieldwork_harassment_policy.pdf

²⁶ See 'Practising Ethics' <https://www.practisingethics.org/project> This initiative was awarded the RIBA Research Award 2021.

²⁷ For the website of UCL Support and Wellbeing see: <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/students/support-and-wellbeing-o>; Report and Support has its own website: <https://report-support.ucl.ac.uk>

²⁸ See 'Support for Students Affected by Gendered Violence' <https://report-support.ucl.ac.uk/support/support-for-students-affected-by-gendered-violence>

violence.²⁹ UCL also offers staff training on how to respond to students reporting gender-based violence. In cooperation with UK charities, Rape Crisis and Survivors UK, sessions entitled ‘What to do if your student reports sexual violence’ have been offered for at least five years through UCL Workplace Health or Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion.³⁰ These events explore myths surrounding sexual violence and provide guidance on advising students who report sexual violence. While UCL does offer avenues of support regarding gender-based violence, these seem to be divorced from fieldwork for research purposes and assume that the violence has occurred on the UCL campus or in London. Nevertheless, these events indicate there are resources within UCL and the wider London community that may be harnessed. In the next Section some potential sites of intervention are explored. Given that UCL is a member of the Athena SWAN charter, a gender equality framework that is used across Higher Education, this report and the strategies it proposes fits well within the UCL Action Plan for 2021 – 2026.³¹

5. POTENTIAL SITES OF INTERVENTION

There are several critical moments and sites where the DPU can explicitly address gender-based violence in fieldwork undertaken by doctoral students. Foremost it is imperative that students are prepared to handle such experiences and rely on mitigation strategies that are in place prior to embarking on fieldwork. The following are potential sites of intervention within the DPU PhD programme that build on its existing strengths, namely advocating for value-led research and its close-knit research community.

5.1 Supervision Guidance and DPU Resources

DPU may consider producing guidance for supervisors on how to introduce the topic of gender-based violence in fieldwork with students. Suggestions may include having explicit conversations with students on the variety of spaces they will embody in the field, how those contexts influence the ways in which they are perceived by research participants and the public, and how this may impact their safety. Supervisors may encourage conversations about how to mitigate dangers and find alternative means to acquire research data. These conversations should continue once students are immersed in the field. A dedicated session could even revisit ethical approval and risk assessment forms to ensure they are still sufficient. Ultimately, it

²⁹ See ‘Supporting women in our community and opposing gender-based violence’ <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/news/2021/mar/supporting-women-our-community-and-opposing-gender-based-violence>

³⁰ For example, see ‘What to do if your student reports sexual violence’ <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/teaching-learning/events/2021/jun/what-do-if-your-student-reports-sexual-violence-online-30-june>

³¹ See ‘Athena Swan at UCL’ <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/equality-diversity-inclusion/equality-areas/equality-charter-marks/athena-swan-ucl>

would be beneficial if students and supervisors—with support from the department and university—devised protocols and procedures in cases of catastrophic violence or trauma in the field. It is important that a sequence of actions has been planned and can be operationalised quickly when a student is in danger in the field. Crucially this includes funding to assist the student to access health or legal services, to leave the field site, and to discuss pertinent insurance services previously identified by the DPU.

These discussions can be uncomfortable, especially during the first year of the PhD when the relationship between the supervisor and student is new. It may be useful for DPU to assign an independent Fieldwork Coordinator who acts as a source to brainstorm potential problems in the field and connect students with other colleagues—whether students or faculty—who may be encountering similar concerns. The role of a Fieldwork Coordinator should be well defined and linked to other resources inside and outside the department.

The introduction of a volunteer scheme for PhD representatives and staff could be another low-threshold way of accessing gender-sensitive fieldwork experiences. Having a list of staff that reflects the diversity of PhD students can help to lower the threshold when accessing services, and gives PhD students the opportunity to talk to someone outside of their education. Talking to other peers or staff with a specific background might make PhD researchers feel safer when sharing uncomfortable experiences. This could be enhanced through regular meetings through a forum for researchers during fieldwork. Training on gender-based violence during fieldwork will further be helpful to support the recognition of the issue and prepare staff to deal with situations of gender-based violence effectively and with care.

5.2 Doctoral Seminar Series

As a series that is conceived to give students an overview of doing doctoral research, this seminar could incorporate sessions, discussions, and readings that prepare students for the challenges that accompany fieldwork. Topics in such sessions should address mental health concerns during the PhD programme, including taking this issue seriously while on fieldwork. Fieldwork should be treated as a potentially transformative experience that requires students to be emotionally prepared. Further, when students discuss ‘situated ethics’ in fieldwork, this would be an opportunity to introduce the concept of embodiment in the field. This could open conversations regarding the risks to the researcher when gathering data and how these should be considered early in the research process. Further, this series should address the supervisor-student relationship and advise students on how to navigate this dynamic throughout their programme.

5.3 Research Methods Seminar Series

The Research Methods Seminar addresses fieldwork more explicitly than the Doctoral Seminar Series. It is anticipated this series will be a critical site to address gender-based violence in fieldwork. First, sessions that address fieldwork should be specific about how intersectional subjectivities influence the researcher's presentation in diverse spaces in the field and render them both vulnerable and even powerful, with a clear discussion about the conditions under which these can change and ways to manage them over time. Here, discussing the various forms of gender-based violence, ranging from structural violence to street harassment, will be useful for a nuanced discussion of gender-sensitive research methods. These would correlate with the use of different research methods which place the researcher in a specific field site, for example in a private home, a bureaucrat's office, a taxi, or a neighbourhood, all within a larger urban or rural context that may be remote or high-density. Addressing decisions on selecting housing and modes of mobility should be part of this discussion as well as understanding how isolation in the field can be social, as well as spatial, and vary from day to night and throughout the year. This discussion could also be useful for researchers who move to London prior to field research. Further, sessions should explicitly address student's health in the field, specifically how this relates to access to sexual health as well as mental health services. This is a complex and delicate topic in culturally diverse ways, and needs to be sensitively managed in a group of culturally diverse students (for example, a discussion of sexual health in the context of fieldwork is just not possible for some women in a gender mixed classroom). This should be contextualised within the broader recognition that fieldwork can be a stressful, exhausting period that requires planned periods of rest and identified practices to relieve anxieties, such as exercise, journaling, or social activities. Equipping PhD students with practical advice when preparing for fieldwork could further include how to manage encounters with police, insurance companies and health services in a case of emergency, which can alleviate anxiety and stress before starting field research. Proposing research breaks under certain circumstances can seem unrealistic when juxtaposed with limited funding resources and visa constraints; still having a conversation about such contingencies may allow for them to be scheduled and budgeted.

5.4 Ethics Approval and Risk Assessment Guidance, Policies, and Forms

While DPU and UCL provide several ways to access information on ethics, risk assessment, and fieldwork preparation, these can be difficult for students to understand comprehensively during their first year and while they are writing their upgrade report. The multiple flow charts, procedure documents, codes of conduct, and forms that divide research into ethics, risks, hazards, and overseas and non-overseas can be unclear. It may be beneficial to introduce

students to the ethical approval process earlier in the academic year in order that they can adequately prepare documentation and devise mitigation strategies.

DPU may consider an additional form which is more explicit on risks regarding fieldwork than riskNet currently offers. Such forms could include sections that ask students to identify how they intend to identify allies in the field who can support them socially and legally; where they would access health care in the case of an emergency; laws regarding sexual practices and health in the field site that may impact them; and how they may adjust their research if access poses harm to themselves. If DPU appoints a Fieldwork Coordinator, the student could schedule a dedicated meeting to review this form and through dialogue to identify additional risks specific to their subjectivity, research methods, and field site.

5.5 First Year Report and Progression

Using the forms and processes outlined in 5.4, ethical approval and completion of risk assessment are requirements of upgrading from the probationary period of the PhD at the end of the first year whereby students submit a paper and have an internal viva. This is a critical juncture when potential risks in the field should be identified before the student leaves for fieldwork. It is important that the Application Form for Ethical Review and Risk Assessment are not treated as perfunctory, peripheral documents but rather as integral to students' thinking surrounding their research methods, data collection, and fieldwork planning. The stance of the supervisor will be instrumental in this regard.

Once the upgrade paper is submitted, examiners could be asked to give comments on potential risks in fieldwork that they have identified, and their impact on the research and student wellbeing. Students also present their research in an internal presentation to the DPU PhD students and staff, which could be a useful venue for a collaborative discussion on ethics and risk assessment.

5.6 UCL-wide Support Services

DPU may consider identifying key sites within UCL that would be interested in expanding services and training in relation to gender-based violence in fieldwork. This includes sessions designed for doctoral students in the social sciences who undertake fieldwork. The central counselling office may also require a formal request to provide services for students who are away from the university via online sessions.

Another university-wide initiative could be to create a register of current students who have conducted fieldwork in different countries. This would be a good resource for students to meet colleagues in other departments and years who may offer advice and support on risks in

the field. A first aid kit designed for fieldwork could be another service UCL provides.³² The kit would provide a standard list of items as well as specific ones to be determined by a questionnaire that is gender sensitive and contextual to the field site (such as remote access to the internet and communication technologies). The UCL Doctoral School, Archaeology South-East, and the faculty members responsible for equality, diversity, and inclusion may be important allies in addressing gender-based violence in fieldwork.³³

Further, DPU operates within the larger context of higher education in the UK. In this regard, it may be beneficial to engage with the Vitae Development Framework (Figure 4), which codifies the development of knowledge, behaviours, and attributes of researchers but does not discuss risk of gender-based violence to researchers during fieldwork.

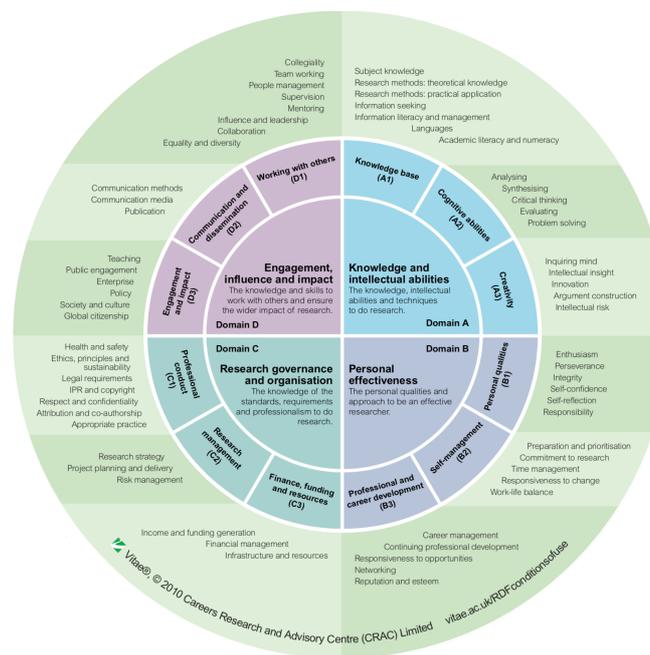


Figure 4: Vitae Researcher Development Framework
 Vitae, © 2010 Careers Research and Advisory Centre (CRAC) Limited

CONCLUSION

This report has synthesised the main issues and polemics facing the DPU as it proactively addresses gender-based violence in fieldwork. As the DPU progresses on this issue, lessons learned might be applied to other researchers including postdocs and master’s students. It is important to prioritise a collaborative, honest and culturally sensitive approach that will share responsibility between institutional entities and individuals, rather than apportion blame and liability. Foremost, students should be cautioned regarding the potentials of gender-based violence during their research early on in their programme, initially in one-to-one conversations with supervisors where issues of privacy, shyness and cultural sensitivity can be

³² This is one service offered at the University of Birmingham.

³³ Archaeology South-East particularly has experience with addressed gender-based violence on archaeological sites which have unique social and spatial challenges.

more easily negotiated. The challenge is how to address this serious issue without heightening the anxieties related to field research. Facilitating an environment where students think through different scenarios can inform their own expectations of fieldwork and prepare them for previously unforeseen situations. It is also important that supervisors and DPU faculty are prepared to respond to serious incidents during students' fieldwork. This may require training or explicit guidelines to provide emotional support during fieldwork. Formal changes could be made to the ethical approval process, including risk assessment, to promote a horizontal and dialogical engagement—rather than prescriptive and foreclosing—between the student and the institution.

Finally, DPU should make explicit that addressing gender-based violence in fieldwork is not an exclusive concern for women or for those working in the Global South. Rather, it is a common concern that should be addressed through different venues, actors, and policies across the University towards progressing equality, diversity, and inclusion in the research community and knowledge production.

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