SNRS -- Field safety best practices with special thought to women and underrepresented groups

Updated 3/11/2021

**For Principal Investigators**

The 2021 field season is approaching. I wanted to reach out to ask that you take some time to consider fieldwork safety. It may be a good time to develop fieldwork safety plans that you and your group members agree on (check out this simple [template](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1lefmjpgaqrAOaG0MMFGiCwSicSQm1ixX/edit)). Hopefully, we all follow standard safe fieldwork practices; however, you may not have considered fieldwork risks that are unique to women and underrepresented groups of people.

In a [survey](https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0102172) about harassment and assault while conducting fieldwork, 71% of women respondents experienced sexual harassment and 26% experienced sexual assault. Women were 3.5 times more likely to be the targets of harassment and assault and over 90% of the perpetrators targeting women were co-workers.

As a principal investigator, it is your responsibility to ensure that individuals who work under your supervision are provided with a safe work environment, and that you are making efforts to understand and alleviate their fieldwork concerns. **Even if they have not previously raised their concerns with you, I assure you, these concerns exist within SNRS.** So, please take some time to reflect on how you can improve the safety culture for your group members. Here are some considerations and recommendations:

* Recognize that people are not safe when they are conducting fieldwork alone.
* Recognize that people may not feel safe working with certain coworkers, field site contacts, or supervisors.
* Recognize that people may feel elevated risk when being approached by law enforcement, landowners, or other strangers that they encounter in the field.
* Educate yourself on the experience of your group members and understand risks associated with their appearances, identities, and disabilities. You can do this by asking them to share their needs, fears, and comfort levels. If they are unfamiliar with the specific fieldwork conditions of the project, it is your responsibility to help them understand potential threats. Debrief your group members after the fieldwork is complete to identify areas for improvement.
* Identify groups of people who are comfortable working together and who understand threats to themselves and their teammate(s). Allow for re-evaluation and re-assignment of these groups as you are able throughout the field season.
* Reassure your group members that they have your permission to prioritize their safety, even if it means that it delays the fieldwork.
* Budget for safety-related expenses and equipment.
* Ensure that field accommodations are private, secure, and have functioning door locks.
* Consider the restroom situation for all members of your group. Have you ever thought about the challenges and concerns that some people (especially women) have related to using the [toilet](https://drive.google.com/file/d/15mLZgZWQvBXQRU_ok7OqnpUmxKObgwAm/view?fbclid=IwAR0Fa_nzMqB523Xm1RKGHmyeqbIffjk2ELytdWEqbMdURciV4R33EL8J_L0) in the field? Limited toilet facilities or opportunities often increase the chances of dehydration and other health problems due to restricted water intake.
* Provide your group members with extra copies of your business card and contact information to share if they are approached in the field by someone who doesn’t believe they belong there.
* Encourage your group members to carry identification and university credentials at all times.
* Provide NDSU vehicles and clothing or vests to designate an NDSU affiliation.
* Set up a schedule for checking in with your group members while they are in the field. If cell phone service is not available, consider purchasing a satellite phone or GPS communicator (such as a [SPOT](https://www.findmespot.com/en-us/) device).
* It is against NDSU [policy](https://www.ndsu.edu/fileadmin/policy/706.pdf) to carry firearms, pepper spray, or any items intended to be used as a weapon on university property and in university vehicles.
* Encourage your group members to report to you immediately if they experience any misconduct or experiences that made them feel uncomfortable or unsafe. Provide them with resources and support for [filing official complaints](https://www.ndsu.edu/equity/filing_a_complaint_at_ndsu/) with the NDSU equity office. It is very important that incidents and near-misses are documented and that your group member knows that they have your support. A lack of incident documentation, recognition, and follow-through stunts improvements in the work environment. If you become aware that one of your group members has experienced harassment or assault, as a mandatory reporter, you need to file a [report](https://www.ndsu.edu/fileadmin/equity/Equity/Title_IX_Forms/Report_Form.pdf) with the equity office. If you are not sure what to do in response to a report, rumor, or incident, see this [resource guide](https://www.ndsu.edu/fileadmin/equity/Resources/Sexual_Harassment_Guide_PROV_1437.pdf) from the equity office. Please make every effort to protect the privacy of those involved and to maintain confidentiality. Educate yourself about on-campus resources for assault and harassment.
* The [NDSU police](https://www.ndsu.edu/police_safety/) and safety office is another resource on campus that you can contact if you or your group members have concerns. Recognize that some people may not be comfortable approaching law enforcement alone, so you should help facilitate these interactions and provide support and advocacy.

**Want more?**

[ADVANCEGeo: In the field](https://serc.carleton.edu/advancegeo/resources/field_work.html)

[Safe fieldwork strategies for at-risk individuals, their supervisors and institutions.](https://www.nature.com/articles/s41559-020-01328-5.epdf?sharing_token=aGRStpBIsYi0tj_fWSiuMNRgN0jAjWel9jnR3ZoTv0M9-wCD_EDrlAn6ZBZk7SQ2xqENRXqOf5Rc-UJcyMZOoKRw7iS_yCXli_ZNNURLm58FG5bFWDxw_BRbMNg3Dj-9JmJA2Ur4A8OI4x8YSluod0v3zAuOWwDpEeFaQ1Tj5iM%3D)

**For students**

The 2021 field season is approaching. I wanted to reach out to ask that you take some time to consider fieldwork safety. It may be a good time to speak with your advisor about fieldwork safety plans (check out this simple [template](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1lefmjpgaqrAOaG0MMFGiCwSicSQm1ixX/edit)). Hopefully, we all follow standard safe fieldwork practices; however, you may not have considered fieldwork risks that are unique to women and underrepresented groups of people.

In a [survey](https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0102172) about harassment and assault while conducting fieldwork, 71% of women respondents experienced sexual harassment and 26% experienced sexual assault. Women were 3.5 times more likely to be the targets of harassment and assault and over 90% of the perpetrators targeting women were co-workers.

As an employee of NDSU, you have a right to feel safe in your work environment, including in the field. Below are some considerations and recommendations for staying safe in the field, and what to do if you have a safety concern.

* Recognize that people are not safe when they are conducting fieldwork alone.
* Recognize that people may not feel safe working with certain coworkers, field site contacts, or supervisors.
* Recognize that people may feel elevated risk when being approached by law enforcement, landowners, or other strangers that they encounter in the field.
* Speak to your supervisor about any health and safety concerns that you have prior to going to the field. Make sure you are also aware of any health and safety concerns of your group members.
* If you aren’t familiar with a location where you will be working, ask your supervisor to review safety concerns associated with the specific site and project.
* Be an ally to your peers and lab group members. Understand their unique risks and understand how you can help them respond to unsafe situations.
* Educate yourself on how to be alert and aware of potential threats in the field, how to respond to various unsafe situations, and who to ask for help when you feel unsafe in your work environment.
* Set up a schedule for checking in with your supervisor while you are in the field.
* It is okay for you to request specific equipment or resources that you need to feel safe in the field (or anywhere else).
* It is okay for you to leave a situation when you do not feel safe, even if it delays the research.
* Carry NDSU credentials, identification, and contact information for your supervisor and other emergency contacts at all times while in the field.
* Use an NDSU vehicle and wear clothing or vests that designate your NDSU affiliation.
* It is against NDSU [policy](https://www.ndsu.edu/fileadmin/policy/706.pdf) to carry firearms, pepper spray, or any items intended to be used as a weapon on university property and in university vehicles.
* If you have a safety concern, communicate it, and your needs, to your supervisor. If you don’t feel comfortable speaking with your supervisor, or if your supervisor does not respond satisfactorily to your concerns, approach another faculty member, the SNRS Director or Associate Director, and/or the [NDSU Ombuds](https://www.ndsu.edu/ombud/).
* The [NDSU police](https://www.ndsu.edu/police_safety/) and safety office is another resource on campus that you can contact if you have concerns. If you don’t feel comfortable approaching law enforcement alone, take a buddy, a lab member, or a faculty advocate.
* If you experience sexual harassment, assault, microaggresions, or hostility of any kind, tell your supervisor, your peer group, or [file a formal complaint](https://www.ndsu.edu/equity/filing_a_complaint_at_ndsu/) with the NDSU equity office. Again, if your supervisor is not approachable, reach out to another figure of authority or the NDSU Ombuds.

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