Minimising risks to the researcher in post-war zones

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Abstract

Doing fieldwork is probably the most rewarding task for researchers despite the risks that are involved. However, it can remain a daunting task for researchers to carry out fieldwork, even though they have some risk awareness. It is now accepted that the risks posed to researchers are multi-dimensional as such warrants proactive risk management and forms part of the research process itself. As researchers continue to carry out fieldwork in dangerous environments, and the dangers they face become an inherent part of fieldwork which result in a need to review these arrangements in the light of researcher experience. The article will explore risked informed decision-making and individual-institutional boundary responsibilities of assessing and managing risks at the pre-fieldwork stage and during fieldwork.

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Abstract

Doing fieldwork is probably the most rewarding task for researchers in spite of the risks that are involved. However, at the best of times, this can still be a daunting task for researchers despite careful planning and the fact that they have some risk awareness and prior experience. This paper considers the risks to researchers of working in modern post-war zones, where the risks faced by researchers can be significant.

This paper first outlines the nature of the partnership between researchers, principal investigators/supervisors and university ethics committees, noting, in particular, the boundaries of responsibility within this partnership and how the lead role in this responsibility relationship shifts over time from institutions to the individual researcher. Second, it recounts and reflects upon the experiences of the researcher on working in a post-war

zone in Northern Province, Sri Lanka in 2015, following the war in which officially ended in May 2009. Various effects of the war were still evident, which required careful management by the researcher. Finally, the paper seeks to draw out the positive learning from these insights and experiences, offering some constructive suggestions for the management of responsibility and risk for research in post-war situations.

Risks as everyday life

Doing fieldwork is probably the most rewarding task for researchers despite the risks that are involved. However, it can remain a daunting task for researchers to carry out fieldwork, despite the fact that they have some risk awareness. Risk, however low-level, is often an inherent part of conducting research in the field, and there are various standards and guidelines in place that seek to ensure that the risk of harm to researchers is as low as possible (Alpay & Paulen, 2014; Craig, Corden, & Thornton, 2000; Daniels & Lavallee, 2014). Methods for protecting researchers are therefore well-documented (Daniels & Lavallee, 2014; Kovats-Bernat, 2002; Paterson, Gregory, & Thorne, 1999) and form part of the ethical framework for the conduct of research.

The significance of risks faced by researchers doing fieldwork warrants proactive risk management and forms part of the research process itself (Kovats-Bernat, 2002; Parker & O'Reilly, 2013; Peterson, 2002). It is now accepted that the risks posed to researchers are multi-dimensional and include physical and emotional aspects. However, physical harm has been more widely discussed in the literature than emotional harm (Belousov et al., 2007; Lee-Treweek, 2000; Sharp & Kremer, 2006). Several factors contribute to this emphasis. These include a structural approach to risk analysis by institutions (Health and Safety Executive, 2016; Higgitt & Bullard, 1999) in which the 'tangibility' of physical harm often takes priority. For example, risks of catching a disease or physical injury are generally perceived to be easier to identify and manage than non-quantifiable emotional harm. Nevertheless, it has become widely recognised that emotional harm, such as anxiety and isolation, can be at least as significant for researchers (Bloor, Fincham, & Sampson, 2008). Moreover, physical and emotional harm may be inter-related, so that discussing them in isolation is not meaningful. For example, a physical injury could have emotional effects on a researcher that could outlast the time it takes to heal. As such, an overall understanding is needed among all involved when planning for risk management.

The regulatory frameworks in many organizations, such as universities, have pre-identified and standardised risk and management practices in place. These are helpful as far as they go, but maybe insufficient to capture the detail required for research in particularly challenging contexts. 'Best practices' and universal standards can, therefore, become a double-edged sword. On the one hand, they demand every project to meet appropriate minimum standards; on the other, the standardisation that is often inherent in such procedures may lack sufficient flexibility to capture and accommodate the finer details of risk associated with particular projects. Therefore, researchers must proactively engage in order to identify specific risks (physical and emotional) associated with their fieldwork.

To this end, it is now common to employ standard risk-assessment procedures (i.e. proactively identifying different types of research risk and assessing their potential likelihood and severity) and risk management procedures (i.e. proactively planning to minimise or eliminate these risks) in a coordinated effort of procedures, processes, roles and responsibilities (Green, 2016). The situation is therefore widely considered to have moved on from that described by Kenyon and Hawker (1999: p. 322), in which: '... *only one of our 46 respondents has ever been issued with safety code of practice, [so] the majority of safety practices mentioned by our sample have been personally developed and directed* '.

However, some key questions remain. For example, to what extent a 'one-size-fits-all' approach is reinforced in universal risk management standards and to what extent this shifts significant responsibility for risk management towards researchers in the field, so that researchers may find themselves underprepared for

what they might find in particularly high-risk environments. Researchers being harmed during fieldwork is a more common and severe occurrence than might be generally thought. This could range from the renowned ethnographer Ken Pryce's body being washed up on a Caribbean beach (Bloor, Fincham, & Sampson, 2010) and the case of anthropologist Myrna Mack, who killed while researching internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Guatemala (Lee-Treweek & Linkogle, 2000) to difficulties in creating safe places where researchers could act as independent witnesses without intimidation and mistreatment (Brun, 2013). As researchers continue to carry out fieldwork in dangerous environments, and the dangers they face become an inherent part of fieldwork, there is a need to review these arrangements in the light of researcher experience. The article will explore risked informed decision-making and individual-institutional boundary responsibilities of assessing and managing risks at the pre-fieldwork stage and during fieldwork.

The study

The 26 years of war between the Sri Lankan armed forces and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), a proscribed terrorist organization, resulted in over 750,000 IDPs at the end of the war in May 2009. The majority of these IDPs were resettled by mid-2014 (Ministry of Resettlement 2014) under an expedited resettlement process conducted by the government of Sri Lanka (GOSL). Despite this resettlement process, the post-war zones in Sri Lanka still face three main challenges: the wellbeing of resettled IDPs, rebuilding the shattered economy and preventing future wars. Facing these challenges is complicated by the lack of access during and after to war zones due to lack of de-militarization, which has resulted in a lack of research and data. Although the war has ceased, conducting fieldwork in post-war environments presents formidable issues in terms of the scale of the risks involved compared to fieldwork in non-war areas. For example, researchers must overcome challenges such as gaining access, hostility, distrust, intimidation at the personal level as well as communal humiliation, human rights abuses, enforced disappearances at a broader level, and assuring the safety of all involved in an increasingly volatile environment. This paper discusses the practical issues faced by the researcher when conducting fieldwork in a complicated context such as this and proposes some suggestions to mitigate risks to researchers when implementing fieldwork in post-war zones.

The researcher grew up in the poorest part of a poor country surrounded by poverty and has seen and experienced poverty personally and lived-in experience showed how the cycle of poverty curtailed opportunities. The researcher also experienced the ethnic war first-hand, which tore apart the country with death and destruction. Through personal contacts, the researcher came to know the scale of poverty in resettled communities at a time when official statistics were unavailable. For example, 2012/ 2013 statistics were issued in August 2015, which was the first available official statistics since the early 1980s (DoCS, 2015). The researcher himself is an entrepreneur who knows the power of it to open doors, opportunities and its ability to transform lives. As a result, the researcher wanted to know the role of entrepreneurship in escaping poverty in contexts of PWZs and embarked on this research project.

The focus of the research was to explore the potential of entrepreneurship in eradicating poverty in post-war zones and the district of Mullaitivu in Sri Lanka was selected to conduct fieldwork. This District was selected mainly because it is the poorest district in the country, having seen the most destructive in terms of infrastructure and lives, as well as being the area where the final battles took place, displacing the largest number of people in a single event during the 26 years of the war. The fieldwork was carried out for approximately 4 months in 2015, in which 129 screening questionnaires were collected and 61 semi-structured face-to-face interviews conducted. The interviewees included government officials, office bearers of community-based organisations (CBOs), officials of third sector organisations, entrepreneurs and aspiring entrepreneurs. Fieldwork was carried out after receiving written permission by respective Divisional Secretaries in three divisional secretariats in the Mullaitivu District namely, Maritimepattu (MTP), Puthukuditiruppu (PTK) and Oddusudan (ODD). Data and information were collected at respondent's homes and their legitimate business/ workplaces.

Managing the 'risk boundary'?

This paper starts from the above position that safety frameworks that are required by institutions must account for researcher safety. Alpay and Paulen (2014) argue that the principles of field safety remain the same, which is to provide a basis to promote risk management practices and create awareness that brings individual responsibility, irrespective of whether institutional structures are in place or not. Such an approach has frequently placed on researchers the main responsibility of managing risks in research projects. This has demanded that researchers anticipate scenarios that could harm them physically and emotionally and proactively manage such situations. However, this paper seeks to examine the extent to which the responsibility of managing such risks represents a partnership between researchers, principal investigators/ supervisors and university ethics boards/committees that reflect institutional positioning and individual responsibilities. In particular, it identifies some important 'boundaries' or 'transition points' in this responsibility relationship. A common denominator in definitions of risk is the chance of occurrence of negative events in the face of uncertainty (Green, 2016). This is linked to decision-making by Daft (2003), who describes risk as a situation where a decision has clear-cut goals, but outcomes are subject to chance. What emerges is the importance of decision-making in managing risks, which involves combining fact-based and value-based data and information as shown in Figure 1 (Aven, 2016).

Expert Decision-Maker

Fact-based

Value-based

Figure 1 . A model for linking the various stages in the risk-informed decision-making (Lans, Blok, & Wesselink, 2014; Maine, Soh, & Dos Santos,)

Aven's (2016) framework provides a useful way to approach the process of risk management in research. First, in the initial stages of research planning and seeking ethical approval, the 'expert' role of providing evidence generally lies with the researcher who, while they may draw on the knowledge-base and advice of institutional actors and other third parties such as research funders and collaboration partners in constructing their application for ethical approval, are generally considered to be the *de facto* 'experts' in their own study. Within the submissions demanded by university ethics committees, there is generally some form of risk assessment sheet and accompanying narrative on how identified risks will be managed. This means the researcher making a 'broad risk evaluation' based on the foreseeable risks specific to their particular project. The 'decision-maker' at this stage is the university ethics committee. However, before a decision can emerge, the process needs to undergo a further loop of 'expert' analysis. Here, the university ethics committee will compare the evidence provided by the researcher with such other pertinent evidence that is available to them and draw on the knowledge base within (and possibly outside) the group, in order to form their own 'broad risk evaluation'. If there are concerns at this stage, more evidence may be requested from the researcher (as the 'expert' in their own research) and the cycle repeated until the university ethics committee is able to finally transition from its own 'expert' role to that of 'decision-maker' and approve the study.

The principal investigator/ supervisory team generally at this point remain in a more *supportive and advisory* 'expert' role, although it is possible that the principal investigators involving in fieldwork thereby playing a transitionary role between institutional and individual arrangements. This may, in advance, involve providing advice and support regarding appropriate fieldwork precautions. Once in the field, it will also generally involve requiring the researcher to report back 'evidence' from the field on any ethical issues that arise (including the risk of personal harm), drawing on their own (and possibly others') 'knowledge base' to subsequently form their own 'broad risk evaluation'. The reporting back evidence from the field by the researcher and accordingly communicating supportive advice where appropriate to the researcher by the principal investigator/ supervisory team is a dynamic process. As a result, the institutional positioning and individual responsibility comprise a proactive two-way relationship (Figure 1) that facilitates risk-informed decision-making. In extreme situations, such advice could go as far as a decision that the researcher should

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withdraw from the field altogether, although the formal 'decision' to withdraw ethical approval in this scenario would normally lie with the university ethics committee, who may be asked to step back in as 'decision-maker' if the principal investigator's/ supervisor's advice goes unheeded. The 'safety culture' within institutions plays a vital part in this overall understanding of risks that shape perceptions and risk tolerance. A high-risk activity for some may be viewed as a relatively low-risk by another, which brings in a level of subjectivity, making analysis complicated and limiting generalisation.

However, arguably the most important transition or boundary in the responsibility relationship is reached at the point of ethical approval, at which point the ethics committee takes a step back from any immediate involvement in the study and the researcher assumes the mantle of 'decision-maker' in the ethical conduct of the study. This is a significant delegation of responsibility, and its implications need to be fully considered. Key questions that arise include:

- Have the good practices that potentially fill gaps has been understood by everyone involved (i.e. ethics committee, supervisors and field researchers)?
- Has the researcher been made fully aware of the responsibilities and is there clarity of ownership?
- Could the researcher identify emerging risks, evaluate them and implement action?
- Are unacceptable risks that act as red lines explicit and are contingency plans are in place?

In short, what Aven's (2016) framework alerts us to is a set of possibilities where potential gaps or ambiguities might become apparent, and where good practice might be extended as a result. The disappearance of the fuzzy boundaries that existed in the pre-fieldwork stage has clearly shifted the burden to the researcher, who predominantly assumes the role of undertaking all five elements of the risk-informed decision-making process. Hence, potential gaps regarding who is doing what at what point and time to what extent and the level of communication arise when managing risks as shown in Figure 2.

			Evidence	Knowledge Base	Broad Risk Evaluation	Decision Maker's Review	Decision
Institutional framework	Ethics Committee	Pre-fieldwork					
		During fieldwork					
		Emerging risks				(Non-time-critical)	
	Principal Investigators/ Supervisors	Pre-fieldwork					
		During fieldwork					
		Emerging risks				(Non-time-critical)	
Individual positioning		Pre-fieldwork					
	Researchers	During fieldwork					
		Emerging risks				(Time-critical)	

Figure 2 . Boundary- Responsibility relationship of fieldwork risk management

The figure shows how the data and information collected through analysis provide the evidence that informs the knowledge base. This includes obtaining the expert knowledge that can augment the existing knowledge base. The inclusion of experts who have specific knowledge is assumed to be positive in creating a knowledge base that is considered the 'truth' and perceived to be legitimate. This provides scope for further evaluation by all involved in the risk management process and forms the intersection of fact and value-based judgements. The interaction of available scientific proof and value-based judgments is often complicated when the broad risk evaluation is taking place and has a direct impact on the decision outcome. As a result, final decisions are inherently based on a combination of subjective and objective data and information. As the model suggests, risk-informed decision-making is mostly context-specific and constrains the ability to generalise. Thus, having a context-specific understanding is important for effective risk management.

The evidence gathered through data and information is provided in partnership with researchers, supervi-

sors and the ethics committee involved in the research project. Accommodating a model of risk-informed decision-making that has a partnership approach requires clear lines of responsibility in establishing the knowledge base and decision-making. This hypothetical boundary between creating the knowledge base and decision-making is implicit and becomes apparent at the planning / pre-fieldwork stage. This hypothetical boundary needs to be established and managed pre-fieldwork and during the fieldwork stages in order to produce a successful risk management plan. The responsibility for establishing this hypothetical boundary involves a negotiation between researchers, supervisors and the ethics committee at the pre-fieldwork stage although the burden is tilted toward the institution, i.e. supervisors and the ethics committee, which has the overall responsibility and authority in reviewing and making decisions. However, once the boundary needs to be managed during fieldwork, the partnership dynamic changes and the responsibility shifts to the researchers, due to their proximity to data and information and the need for time-critical decision-making when responding to fluid adverse events. At this point, the boundary is not hypothetical and the researchers are faced with real events in real-time, which needed to be managed effectively in order to mitigate risks.

Hence, at the pre-fieldwork stage, a lead role in the risk-management process is undertaken at the institutional level, in checking that the proposed research meets ethical standards and guidelines for the prevention of harm and that appropriate risk assessment have been conducted. As the final decision-making authority on whether or not to grant ethical approval for the research to start, it must be satisfied that such standards and guidelines have been given due consideration. However, this lead role necessarily shifts to researchers during the actual conduct of fieldwork, as they have the real-time, context-specific understanding, and must make appropriate decisions when facing risk events that may be fluid and time-sensitive. The non-time critical emerging risks should be evaluated by the researcher and communicated to supervisors as appropriate to facilitate broad risk evaluation. At this point, it is a supervisory responsibility to inform the ethics committee, if warranted, for further review and decision making.

The management of this boundary has implications that are not always fully considered in research. This paper provides examples of the implications of this and suggests some positive ways forward for risk management in research. It seeks to aid researchers in effective risk mitigation when faced with real-world, real-time risk events. Facing these risks as an individual researcher can become challenging, given the changing nature of the above boundary, which shifts from being implicit, hypothetical and timeless at the pre-fieldwork stage to becoming explicit, real and time-defined during fieldwork. If this boundary is not carefully managed, there can be a blurring of responsibilities within the partnership for managing fieldwork risks. This article intends to highlight this gap by placing researchers at the centre of safety protocols. Further, the safety of researchers and participants is interrelated; thus, prioritising researcher safety will arguably enable researchers to effectively assure participant safety. Moreover, this article intends to provide a theoretical understanding of risk management, highlight the importance of proactive planning and emphasise the value of decision-making when doing fieldwork in high-risk post-war zones.

Empirical issues: Research in modern post-war zones

As the risks faced by researchers in modern post-war zones have increased, researchers face many hurdles, while putting themselves at the risk of significant harm. In addition to the overall risk management plan, further risk analysis needs to be carried out on an ongoing basis to accommodate the changing nature of the fieldwork context that could (in an instant) result in spikes in risk levels. As such, researchers are expected to be flexible with their risk management plan during fieldwork in order to access situations and make swift decisions in times of volatility.

In situations like those in post-war areas, there are very specific issues that researchers face. These may include militarization, intimidation, curtailed freedom of movement, restricted freedom of expression and negotiating complex power structures that researchers may find challenging. Further, some topics, such as politics, may not be up for discussion, due to tyranny or self-censorship by respondents. As a result, there are many responsibilities placed on researchers to communicate with supervisors and bring information forward.

The partnership should be sufficiently capable and flexible to provide the best support and advice available. Supervisors, as the first point of contact during fieldwork, need to be open to this broader discussion, up to the point where, if it exceeds their own knowledge base, they are prepared to say so and consult external experts with specific knowledge. This will further help the ethics committee to fulfil their inherent responsibilities of providing overall oversight and due diligence during the life of the research project.

Scenario planning

One way to manage risks is to proactively plan for possible scenarios by anticipating events that could place researchers at risk (Daniels & Lavallee, 2014). The involvement of experts who have specific knowledge is invaluable at this stage where researchers should ask 'what if?' questions until they are fully satisfied that all identifiable scenarios are covered and answered. The objective here is to first eliminate or avoid risks where possible or if that is not possible, minimise the risks posed to an acceptable level. For example, the researcher avoided carrying out fieldwork in the Keppapilaw village in MTP. Described by the military as a model village, Keppapilaw is a place where people were forcibly settled after confiscating their land to build the joint military headquarters. More or less all day-to-day activities are conducted by the military, implicitly or explicitly, and it was decided that the risk posed to the researcher was too high and it was not worth stirring up a hornets' nest. Doing fieldwork in the Keppapilaw village would have placed the researcher in harm's way, brought unwanted attention and would have compromised the whole fieldwork process.

Most parts of the risk management process consist of 'minimising' risk factors because it is not possible to eliminate or avoid risks. Incorporating some form of approval by an authority, such as by a government department will greatly reduce risks to researchers by bringing some form of legitimacy to fieldwork. However, identifying an institutional authority that has 'actual' power in post-war zones can be difficult. The reason for this is there are many power brokers who operate alongside the public administration apparatus and who have different agendas. There is highly likely to be a presence of political parties, military and paramilitary forces which are active and operate beyond the remit of the law. For example, the researcher had the prior approval from the Divisional Secretary to do fieldwork in MTP. However, he was aggressively confronted by an army Colonel on the first day of fieldwork during a discussion with a senior administrative officer at the Divisional Secretariat. The army Colonel barged into the office and the researcher was blamed for not letting the military know about his presence in the area and was accused of being biased (toward Tamils who are an ethnic minority in Sri Lanka) within the first few minutes of the interaction. The researcher was blamed for not being willing to tell the army's side of the 'story' of the war even though the researcher insisted the fieldwork was about entrepreneurship and poverty and had nothing to do with the ongoing war crime probe by the United Nations. The researcher had overestimated the power of the civilian administration, at the planning stage, and had failed to fully grasp the presence and power of an invisible administration by the military apparatus that ran parallel to the civilian administration. Understanding power relations at fieldwork sites and getting access through the appropriate channels will reduce the overall risks, although the downside is that such attempts may compromise the data collected, by the unwarranted influence of power brokers.

Anticipating possible events is important in proactive scenario planning in order to formulate possible responses. For example, it was anticipated that there would be interventions by the military in some shape or form at some point in time during the fieldwork. It was decided that the information disclosed to military personnel at these encounters should be situation-specific, after taking specifics into account such as the place, time, and the ranks of the personnel and the nature of involvement. The limited disclosure of information in such cases is obviously not with the aim to do covert research, which is forbidden by the ethical guidelines but to ensure researcher safety. It is important to understand that researcher safety is paramount, and as such the adherence to the ethical framework should be situational (Woon, 2013) and these situations must not be labelled or viewed as 'unethical research'. For example, the researcher left out the information that the fieldwork was linked to a United Kingdom university when military personnel stopped

and confronted him at Puthumathalan village. At this point, the researcher was told that the Tamils who live in the area have relatives abroad that send money to them so there was no need for research, and hence no need for the fieldwork or the researcher's presence in the village. The researcher had to insist that he had approval from Divisional Secretaries of MTP and PTK to carry out fieldwork and convinced them that the scope of research was only about 'businesses' and 'poverty'. Puthumathalan area was part of the 'no-fire zone' where the last battles took place and belong to MTP and border the PTK divisional secretariat. It was known that the area was guarded by the military around the clock and such encounters were anticipated. Therefore, as a safety precaution to minimise risks, it was decided to wait until permission was obtained from the bordering PTK Divisional Secretariat to carry out fieldwork.

In another instance, the researcher continued a semi-structured interview when military intelligence personnel from a nearby army camp in Alampil village in MTP started monitoring from a distance. Such situations were anticipated and it was pre-decided not to engage with the military unless they approached first. Although the situation did not escalate further, the semi-structured interview was carried out under immense emotional pressure amid the possibility of physical danger arising. However, it is important to note that the interview was carried out with the full consent of the respondent at this point, where the respondent was well aware of the situation. Such surveillance and intimidation had become normal and the villagers had become accustomed to it.

The general approach when managing high-risk highly-volatile settings (i.e. a situational danger) is to take a passive stand, where researchers are advised to take a step back to calm and assess the situation (Nilan, 2002). However, some circumstances may demand that researchers have to recognise and interpret situations in a very short time and take a more active stand than the preferred, non-aggressive passive stand (Castellano, 2007). Taking a passive stand may not always be possible and researchers may have to stand their ground in order to achieve the preferred outcome. For example, when two lower-ranking military personnel who were armed and in civilian clothing confronted the researcher in ODD, the researcher insisted that he wanted to talk to their commanding officer when the conversation started getting out of hand. The researcher noticed that the two military personnel were carrying duffel bags and understood that they were on their way home on holiday. They too did not want the situation to be dragged on which may prevent them from going on holiday. Demanding to call the commanding officer placed lower-ranking military personnel at a situational disadvantage and they left the area, allowing the researcher to carry out fieldwork. However, it is important to note that the confrontations in post-war zones often take place with armed personnel and the researchers should know the 'limits' of the situation when managing risks and de-escalating hassles and confrontations to provide the best outcome.

The drawback of having a defined plan in place and proposed possible courses of action is that these may tend to be perceived as rigid and researchers may decide to follow them to the letter. The situations in post-war zones are dynamic, and thus may well have changed from the time of planning. Therefore, the risk management process should be viewed as ongoing and should retain flexibility. Most of the responsibility at this point falls within the remit of researchers who are in the field and benefit from situational understanding and, as such, have the greater responsibility to assure personal safety and the safety of others involved. Ignoring ground realities or underestimating them will increase the risks. Therefore, being able to adapt to the situation and change plans in place accordingly is important on an ongoing basis. The proposed plan in place should be flexible enough to accommodate the volatile realities of post-war zones. For example, it was planned to conduct fieldwork activities until 8 pm but it was observed that villagers deserted the roads and public places by early evening. People living in the area did not deem it safe to be in public places when darkness fell and the researcher, in this case, adjusted his working pattern to suit ground realities by restricting fieldwork to daylight time as much as possible. Fieldwork conducted during the daytime is considered relatively safe (Kenyon & Hawker, 1999). In another instance, the plan to carry a water ration of 1 litre was not sufficient and the amount had to be increased to 1.5 litres, due to fluctuating temperatures that had risen from 35 to 42 degrees Celsius. Further, having a 'fixed' plan, in this case, the quantity of water, may not suit individual requirements if many researchers are involved, thus, the flexibility of the plan in place is vital to accommodate personal needs and changing contexts. In another instance, the researcher

came across information on public demonstrations on 18th May in relation to the sixth anniversary of the end of the war, which had the potential to be violent. Although the police took out a court order to prevent any demonstrations in Mullaitivu, the Chief Minister had called for a remembrance event in Mulliwaikkal, the place where the last battle took place. By taking account of real-time information and the context, the researcher managed to conduct fieldwork beforehand in this area avoiding potential risks.

Unpredicted events

Once they have identified the 'eliminate' or 'minimise' elements of the risk management process, researchers will be aware of what to do, where and how to access help when adverse events occur. However, anticipating and planning for all possible scenarios is not humanly possible, due to the high volatility of post-war environments. As a result, occurrences of unexpected events are bound to happen and most decision-making in such events tends to happen under fear and duress. Decision-making in fearful and spontaneous circumstances usually demand quick responses that may not necessarily produce favourable outcomes (Evans & Curtis-Holmes, 2005). Therefore, researchers should be aware of the fact that quick responses may not be their own favour, where they may find it difficult to make rational decisions under pressure, irrespective of prior planning and experience. Although this is not specific to post-war zones, one of the experiences of this researcher provides an example of an unexpected event that placed the researcher in grave danger. While driving late one evening, this researcher came face to face with two adult wild elephants and a calf on the road. In a fearful state, where the researcher was alone and in darkness, the situation could have produced clouded judgment or no judgment at all (a frozen state). This would have placed the researcher in a confrontational position with the wild elephants in a matter of seconds. It is known that elephant parents protecting their offspring tend to be aggressive and become spontaneously violent. Although the researcher managed to escape from this occasion unharmed, the lesson here is to recognise that when unpredictable events occur, the tendency to make quick decisions may not produce the best outcomes. Therefore, it is recommended to postpone the decision-making when in a fearful state or under duress, where possible, in order to accommodate a thoughtful decision-making process, where time allows.

Exit strategies

The ground realities in post-war zones are ever-changing and could turn worse in no time. The risks posed to researchers may exceed an acceptable level and researchers should have the ability to leave the situation, and possibly the post-war zone, at short notice. Pre-identifying risks that are unacceptable and act as 'red lines' will aid the researcher's readiness to flee the area when such events occur. It is important to be alert all the time and assess situations proactively in order to make conscious decisions. Not taking a decision to leave the area may put lives at risk; as such, it is prudent to incorporate possible evacuation strategies in advance. Researchers are always encouraged to have a 'plan of escape' (Belousov et al., 2007) before setting out for fieldwork. This may include possible pre-identified escape routes, contact persons and communication procedures. Having multiple escape plans will provide researchers with a range of options at their disposal to limit risks and provide the best chance of escape. For example, there was a pre-identified escape route in place at the start of the fieldwork and during the fieldwork in this study, two more exit routes were added to provide the best possible chance of escape.

Emotional risks

For ease of discussion, physical and emotional risks are discussed separately here, although it is important to note that they are interrelated where there is the possibility of both physical and emotional harm taking place at the same time. Although some associations occur at the time, some may go well beyond the period of

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the fieldwork. For example, the emotional harm that has occurred during fieldwork may lead researchers to 'self-harm' later; therefore, restricting emotional harm to the time span of fieldwork is problematic. Mattley (2002) describes emotions as "social objects, formed by a social process, generated by actors and groups who have rendered people's feelings and "emotional lives" of social significance". These socially constructed emotions are considered as 'risks' when they negatively affect researchers.

Emotional risks tend to take a backstage position, due to their intangible nature and the belief that researchers should distance themselves from the data collected (Widdowfield, 2000). However, Punch (2012) argues that emotional traumas are frequently unavoidable during fieldwork and form part of the research process. Further, it is acknowledged that there is an emotional cost of undertaking fieldwork in qualitative research (Bloor et al., 2008). This highlights the need to incorporate a proactive approach to emotional risk analysis; however, mainstream research has frequently avoided or placed less emphasis on the need to acknowledge the importance of emotional risk management in the overall research process (Lund, 2012; Paterson et al., 1999; Sluka, 1990).

Modern wars have often been increasingly violent, with many casualties. The effects on the victims often go beyond the war period, where victims find themselves in a long-lasting struggle to overcome and heal physical as well as emotional wounds and traumas. As such, researchers who are engaging in fieldwork in post-war zones must accept that they will inevitably come across victims of the war such as the wounded, the disabled, rape victims and relatives that have lost their loved ones. The stories they share with researchers will unavoidably be stressful and researchers may find themselves experiencing the same pain by proxy (Bloor et al., 2010), just as the victims of the war. Failure to recognise the importance of emotional harm, in the beginning, may overwhelm researchers and potentially compromise the whole research process (Sanders, Munford, Liebenberg, & Henaghan, 2014). Having early recognition of potential emotional harm will place researchers at an advantage when it comes to managing and coping with emotional risks, and accessing help.

The respondents and the natives of post-war areas may not consider researchers as neutral, altruistic and friendly (Goodhand, 2000; Sluka, 1990), due to bitter experience and widespread distrust in post-war zones. There is a potential to open up old wounds, to be targeted as perpetrators and being accused of having hidden agendas against these groups. For example, the researcher was confronted by a respondent saying that the researcher is a 'Sinhalese' (the majority ethnic group in Sri Lanka) and he bombed them and destroyed everything they had and, after doing all that, now has returned to ask how they are doing. Then she started crying, crying loudly until her mother came and consoled her. Silence is probably a coping strategy for traumatised individuals. For her, the researcher was the face of evil that destroyed everything they ever had and the researcher had opened up old wounds. The mere presence of the researcher created a negative situation. The researcher did not feel good at that time partly because of sympathy towards the respondent and partly due to been accused of something that the researcher was not responsible for.

Although these situations are emotional for both sides, arguably they help to understand and interpret the data collected in a 'genuine' way in the specific context. In many instances, the researcher came across victims of violence, injured and disabled by participants of the war who had 'stories' to tell. These respondents were vivid in their information and sometimes they were eager to share their horrific stories. These emotionally charged discussions have the potential to overwhelm researchers and have a long-term impact. The ability to anticipate and understand the emotions of respondents whilst becoming familiar with the background of specific post-war areas will help researchers to cope with their own emotions, which may be negative and harmful. Researchers should access the help of professionals when needed.

Conclusion

Researchers who carry out fieldwork in dangerous contexts such as in modern post-war zones face some specific risks, which expose them to increased levels of risks. The inability to avoid these risks has called for proactive risk management, where acknowledging and addressing the risks researchers face becomes an

inherent part of the research process. The proactive risk management process is a tripartite relationship, with boundaries between institutional actors such as university ethics committees, individual researchers and principal investigators/ supervisors, that acts as the bridge between the institution and individual researchers. The boundaries in this tri-part relationship change from being implicit, hypothetical and timeless in the pre-fieldwork period to becoming implicit, real and time defined during fieldwork. As a result, proactive risk management needs to be a two-way relationship where information flow between the institution and individual researchers is built upon a partnership to facilitate risk-informed decision-making on an ongoing basis.

The contribution of researchers, principal investigators/ supervisors and the ethics committee in building the partnership is mostly dependent on negotiations and at first, establishing the hypothetical boundary is somewhat difficult. This is because of the impossibility of having perfect information and the possibility of any boundary, being moved to either side on an ongoing basis. This raise the fundamental question as to whether the boundary is placed in the right place – that is, has everyone involved in the research project fully considered the data and information and consulted with experts when making decisions. The frequent lack of in-depth risk management by institutions that are heavily dependent on researchers to provide data and information in building a knowledge base has forced researchers to fend for themselves at critical times without adequate support in place. This has pushed individual researchers to depend on their informal network, such as family and friends when things go wrong (Kenyon & Hawker, 1999). Regular supervision could be helpful to some extent, although sometimes this may be inadequate. However, there are advantages in the researcher bearing some responsibility when away from the institutional frameworks in some instances. For example, nominating a point person in the UK during fieldwork would have been counterproductive and family and friends maybe more appropriate. The intervention by institutions to assure researcher safety during fieldwork may require them to act at the highest levels; for example, interventions through diplomatic channels may create new challenges to researchers who are already in highly volatile post-war zones. As such, there are limitations to institutional interventions when it comes to assuring researcher safety and merits in individual responsibility.

The fieldwork risks posed to researchers have become normalised and researchers are expected to accept some form and degree of risk while doing fieldwork. However, recent post-war zones have become extremely violent and researchers working in these areas face increased levels of risk, which could be life-threatening. The importance of anticipating the occurrence of negative events and proactively planning for such scenarios to ensure researcher safety cannot be stressed enough when conducting fieldwork in post-war zones. However, the fine details of the plan need not necessarily be in writing. This is due to the peril of the risk assessment plan falling into the hands of other parties, which then makes the plan ineffective and may compromise the whole research process. Therefore, familiarising oneself with the risk management plan and memorising possible actions to meet the demands of possible scenarios will avoid the need to carry a documented risk management plan during fieldwork. As Kovats-Bernat (2002) explains when working in dangerous fields,

'The old adage that 'if it's not written down, it didn't happen' has held little relevance for my research, when keeping detailed notes of my interviews could often have jeopardised the lives of myself and my informants. Field notes, however, codified or locked in electronic documentation, contain sensitive information that could be used against the anthropologist or informants'.

It has been seen that researchers may find themselves unable to implement codes of ethics to the letter in post-war zones due to associated risks. This should not be interpreted as unethical research. The codes of ethics are situational and there is a need for a localised, contextual and situational approach to ethics when it comes to managing risks in post-war zones, in order to assure researcher safety, which takes precedence. The emotional risks have received little attention in the research process when compared with physical risks, although they form an element of the research process. There is also the possibility of emotional harm emerging after a dormant period and this may occur after the period of fieldwork. This needs to be recognised at an early stage of risk management planning. Further, the institutional apparatus should not assign sole responsibility to individual researchers and supervisory teams to manage risks on their own and should take

an active role in managing risks in post-war zones. For this purpose, safety training and awareness-raising for researchers as well as personnel at an institutional level, such as supervisors, are encouraged.

This paper has discussed only two dimensions of risk: physical risks and emotional risks that are faced by researchers in post-war zones, however, there is a need to recognise the presence of other dimensions. Gender dynamics have not been discussed here separately, but the nature of risks could vary by gender. This needs to be accounted for when analysing risks and needs to be addressed in-depth to develop a comprehensive risk management plan. Furthermore, the post-fieldwork stage risk management should be recognised, to assure the long-term wellbeing of researchers. There are many stakeholders involved in a typical research project such as funders and suppliers, as well as respondents who face varied risks to a different degree, which the authors of this article acknowledge.

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