

Code of Conduct for Preventing Sexual Misconduct in the Field

Fieldwork is an essential component of research, allowing researchers to gather data in real-world contexts. While fieldwork offers invaluable experiential insights, it also creates an environment that could potentially facilitate instances of sexual misconduct. Unlike controlled settings like offices or academic campuses, fieldwork often involves unpredictable circumstances, isolated locations, and extended periods of close interaction among team members. These conditions can create vulnerabilities that necessitate special considerations for safeguarding against misconduct.

These additional challenges require researchers and students to maintain the highest standards of professionalism, respect, and ethical behaviour, particularly in relation to sexual conduct.

The following detailed code of conduct outlines principles and guidelines to prevent sexual misconduct during fieldwork:

Zero Tolerance for Sexual Misconduct

- Sexual misconduct, including harassment, assault, and exploitation, is strictly prohibited under all circumstances.
- Grantees must actively prevent, address, and report any instances of sexual misconduct they witness or experience.
- We should outline the legal ramifications of sexual misconduct, but we need legal advice on this (e.g., bursaries suspended, etc.)

Informed Consent and Boundaries

Fieldwork can be physically and emotionally demanding, often involving long hours, harsh conditions, and tight deadlines. High-stress environments can exacerbate interpersonal conflicts and misunderstandings, creating a setting where misconduct might more readily occur.

- Prioritise clear communication and informed consent in all interpersonal interactions.
- Respect personal boundaries and ensure that all interactions remain consensual, respectful, and professional.

Power Dynamics and Authority

- Grantees must not abuse their position of authority or influence to engage in or encourage inappropriate conduct.
- Recognise and address potential power imbalances that could lead to exploitative behaviour.

Respect for Local Norms and Customs

- Research teams should seek guidance from local experts who have an in-depth understanding of cultural norms. Whether these experts are anthropologists,

community leaders, or local non-governmental organisations, their insights can be invaluable for avoiding inadvertent misconduct or misunderstandings.

- Research teams must thoroughly familiarise themselves with the local cultural norms and practices. These can include taboos and restrictions on physical contact between genders.
- Appropriate attire based on local customs
- Specific rituals or cultural practices that involve gender roles
- Local laws on gender and relationships
- Always prioritise cultural sensitivity and ensure that interactions align with local values and customs.

Reporting Mechanisms

- Establish clear and confidential reporting mechanisms for instances of sexual misconduct.
- Grantees must be informed about how to report misconduct, ensuring that whistleblowers are protected from retaliation.

Need to list Ethics board, HR department, or individual responsible for handling misconduct/to which reports should be made.

Training and Awareness

- All grantees must undergo comprehensive training on preventing and addressing sexual misconduct before engaging in fieldwork.
- Continuously promote awareness and education regarding respectful conduct and the consequences of sexual misconduct.

Accommodations and Safety Measures

Fieldwork frequently takes place in isolated or remote areas where standard institutional oversight might be lacking. In such environments, research team members may spend days, weeks, or even months living and working in close quarters. The physical closeness and isolation can sometimes blur professional boundaries, making it easier for misconduct to occur and more difficult for victims to report or escape uncomfortable situations.

- Ensure that all accommodations provide privacy and security for researchers and participants.
- Implement safety measures, such as designated buddy systems and communication protocols, to prevent isolated situations.

Code of Conduct Acknowledgment

Fieldwork often involves interdisciplinary teams made up of members from various backgrounds, departments, and even countries. Such diversity can lead to differing expectations

and understandings of what constitutes misconduct, thus requiring explicit and universally understood codes of conduct.

- Grantees must acknowledge and sign a code of conduct specifically addressing sexual misconduct before participating in fieldwork.
- Regularly review and reaffirm the commitment to the code of conduct throughout the duration of the project.

Transparent and Timely Investigation

- Respond promptly and thoroughly to any reports of sexual misconduct, conducting impartial investigations.
- Ensure that disciplinary actions are taken if misconduct is substantiated while respecting the rights of all parties involved.

Community Engagement

- Collaborate with local communities and leaders to ensure the project's objectives and conduct align with community values.
- Address any concerns or feedback from local communities regarding potential sexual misconduct.

Bystander Intervention

- Encourage and empower grantees to intervene and support victims or potential victims of sexual misconduct.
- Foster a culture of responsibility and accountability among team members to prevent and address misconduct.

Continuous Evaluation and Improvement

- Regularly assess the effectiveness of the code of conduct and related policies in preventing sexual misconduct. (we need to figure out how we do this --)
- Adapt and improve the code of conduct based on feedback, emerging best practices, and evolving understandings of sexual misconduct prevention.

By strictly adhering to this detailed code of conduct, grantees can contribute to a safe and respectful field work environment that upholds the dignity, well-being, and rights of all individuals involved and prevents instances of sexual misconduct.