MARKET RESEARCHERS ABSORBING RISK: CONTRASTING TRAINING POLICIES WITH WORKERS' EXPERIENCE

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Abstract

This qualitative enquiry explores the health and safety issues of door-to-door survey workers in New Zealand. Data is drawn from two national organisations fictitiously named OpinionQuest and MarketMatrix. The paper contrasts the formal safety policies and the training given with the workers' actual experience. What do they recognise as risk and how do they deal with it? The research reveals that while many risks are recognised and avoided, the workers absorb others, accepting them as an integral part of their working lives. Organisational training prepares workers for the obvious risks, such as dogs and verbal abuse. It does not address less common events such as physical assault, unwelcome overt sexual overtures - or the road washing away. Recommendations emerging from the research relate to revised training and policies such as the provision of cellphones; systems for tracking the whereabouts of employees working in the field; and adequate coverage, in training, of the full range of risks they may encounter. Survey workers are pivotal to the success of Market Research organisations. Without their risk absorption, the entire process would cease to function.

Key words: risk, health and safety, survey workers, market research, training policy and practice.

Background

Survey workers are exposed to risks in all shapes and sizes. Their stories revealed an unexpected catalogue of hazards: threats at knifepoint, macabre writing daubed in blood on one wall, indecent propositions, objectionable publications on display, coughs, sneezes – and the recurring theme of dog bites.

On entering a house, survey workers have no concept of what unwelcome surprises may await. Nina's story illustrates this.

> Nina: I went to this house and there was this young man ... there was no sign that there was any problem. He would have been eighteen or nineteen and he invited me in. I thought: 'gosh, I wish he'd stop - keep still' - and then (she whispered) I realised he was masturbating. I thought:
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> God, what do I do now - pretend it isn't happening? What do I do? I hurried up and got through the interview. If I'd panicked it might have made him realise, he might have acted. So, I rushed the interview then charged through the house. I opened the wrong door and he said, 'yes, that's my bedroom, if that's fine with you.' I said 'like Hell,' and ran out of the door.

These experiences, while extreme, would come as no surprise to survey workers in New Zealand. Threats, abuse, innuendo and dog bites are the daily experience of those who seek our opinions on everything from airlines to toothpaste. Their story, and that of their employers, is the subject of this paper. All names, whether of survey workers or organisations, are fictitious. The events are not.

At the time of interviewing informants[1] for my study, the risk of lone workers was topical. The front pages of newspapers told of Michael Choy, a Pizza delivery worker killed on the job. On delivering the pizza, he was attacked and beaten by a group of youths with a baseball bat. He had no means of telephoning for help.

Nina's story illustrated non-injurious assault, and how one survey worker absorbed risk. The research highlights the differences between policy and practice.

Disparate groups: same risks

Every day, an army of workers is exposed to danger when visiting people in their homes or working in isolation. Police, social workers, general medical practitioners, community nurses, real estate agents, survey interviewers and sex workers belong within their ranks; this literature review focuses on the safety and health risks to which they may be exposed and the steps they and their employers take to ensure a safe environment.

We live in an increasingly violent world. To many people, 'violence' means physical assault - but this is only one form. "The full spectrum includes verbal abuse;

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[1] For the purpose of this study I chose 'informant' to avoid confusion with the survey workers' role of interviewing respondents.

verbal abuse with specific threats; physical abuse such as pushing or obstructing but without injury; physical assault with minor injury, for example cuts or bruises; physical assault with severe injury, for example being punched and requiring medical treatment; and physical assault resulting in death" (Mullen 1997, p. 27). "Even where staff are not physically harmed, a daily diet of swearing, threats and verbal abuse can lead to depression, stress, low morale and absenteeism" (Ishmael & Alemoru, 1999, p. 46).

Contributing factors to employee risk are contact with the public and working alone or in small numbers (Saul, 2000; Micco, 1997; Brownlie in Diaz, 2000, Zaichkowski & Eng, 2002). In the UK in 1986, Suzy Lamplugh, a real estate agent, disappeared when she went to meet an unknown client. She never returned. No systems were in place to monitor and track real estate agents in their mobile workplace. Lamplugh's disappearance highlighted risks faced by almost every worker, and revealed the inadequacy of employers in protecting their staff (Ishmael & Alemoru, 1999).

Employees often work alone to reduce costs. In rural New Zealand, police often work alone, particularly at night. Four out of the previous five New Zealand police officers killed on duty were working alone (Brownlie in Diaz, 2000). A 1996 staff survey of social workers in the Department of Child, Youth and Family Services revealed that ninety-five percent of them had experienced violence at work. Their request for 'danger money' was rejected. Such, workers often lack the bargaining power to secure hazard pay (Harcourt in Wren, 2000).

In New Zealand, most survey workers employed in market research are women. From a health and safety standpoint, this is significant – women are more vulnerable to physical attack - in particular rape. Men face dangers too. They endure the possible risk of being falsely accused of inappropriate behaviour, harassment, or sexual assault by either female or male respondents. Green, Barbour, Barnard & Kitzinger (1993) researched sexual harassment in research settings and found that age and gender as well as 'sexy' subject matter and in-depth interviewing, increased the researchers' vulnerability. Hochschild (1983) noted that women do more emotion managing than men. Women are able to adapt their roles to suit the clients, for example nurturing as mothers, using sexuality to enhance the status of men. Illich in Hochschild (1983) suggests this "shadow labour" is crucial to getting things done.

Stress is a modern occupational disease. Ostell (1986) in Rudman (1999) defines stress as: "the state of affairs which exists when the way people attempt to manage problems taxes or exceeds their coping resources." Capel and Gurnsey (1988) in Rudman (1999) identify four key contributors to stress in the workplace: environmental factors, job design factors, contractual factors and relationship factors. In spite of the diversity of the work, common factors emerge as core stressors. "Unhealthy environments are those that threaten safety, that undermine the creation of social ties, and that are conflictual, abusive, or violent" (Taylor, Repetti & Seeman, 1997 in Cooper & Locke, 2000 p. 41).

Methodology

In this study, I adopted a qualitative approach. Data gathering was then enhanced by my ability to be flexible and open-ended in questioning informants (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). Semi-structured in-depth interviews enabled the content to be defined by what informants chose to tell the researcher. Such interviews were more than conversations; they had a loose structure (Opie, in Tolich & Davidson, 1999). Open-ended questions were used to stimulate the informants' memories of safety and health issues that they might have encountered, providing freedom for them to tell their own stories.

Ethical approval was sought and granted by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee (MUHEC). Letters, information sheets, consent forms and participation forms were sent to survey workers via the two organisations that agreed to participate. The response rate from OpinionQuest was seventy-five percent and fairly rapid, and twenty percent from MarketMatrix.

I sampled thirty informants representing the diversity of survey workers and their location of work. Thirty-five percent of the informants in this study were male and sixty-five percent female, indicative of an increasing number of males entering survey work. Their ages ranged from mid twenties to early seventies, most being concentrated in the older age group - over fifty. Survey workers were predominantly European but did include other ethnic groups. The length of time in the job ranged from new entrants - one had been in the job for a week - to seventeen years. Many had been with the organisation over three years. Greater experience correlated with higher response rates (Groves & Couper, 1998). In addition to interviewing survey workers, I interviewed three supervisors.

For confidentiality, informants were asked to choose pseudonyms. In some instances, composite characters have been used to protect the identities of informants.

At the beginning of each interview, I provided an overview of the study and asked informants to imagine they were introducing me to the role of survey worker. What kind of things should I look out for? I allowed the informants to decide the flow of the interview. However, if I felt that they were deviating from the topic, I asked them to identify the safety and health issues in their work before focusing on specific experiences when they had felt their safety was at risk. I asked them whether they had reported the incidents, how the reports were received, what was done, and what changes were implemented because of their reporting. I inquired about their initial and ongoing training in safety and health. What proactive measures did they take to keep safe and well while working? I asked them to comment on current management policies and practices in terms of safety and health issues; to identify what was working well; what needed to be improved and the changes they would recommend. I tailored the interview according to the

informants' responses and their verbal and nonverbal cues (Groves & Couper, 1998). The interviews were usually one-hour in length, and with the informants' agreement they were tape-recorded. Tape-recording interviews can lead to complacency. Researchers can sometimes miss an opportunity to follow through on an answer because they are focusing on the next question (Tolich & Davidson, 1999).

I transcribed the interviews verbatim within days of the interviews, erasing them as soon as two hard copies were printed. Pseudonyms were used in the transcripts thus removing the identifiers (Fowler, 2002; Warren, 1977 in Lofland & Lofland, 1995). A list of the informants' names was kept separate from the data but in a way that could be cross-referenced.

Training Policy and Practice

Survey workers work in isolation much of the time, either cold calling people in their homes or telephoning people from their home base. Both present health and safety issues. The potential for harm is ever present; danger lurks in the unexpected, the unpredictable.

All trainees receive a code of conduct, outlining their rights, obligations and expected conduct. Health and safety policies receive appropriate weighting. Yet, the success of these policies can only be measured when we examine how they are interpreted and practised in the field.

In OpinionQuest, recruits undergo four days of intensive residential training, including work on two evenings. Topics comprise: background to the organisation; door-to-door interview techniques; administration and supervision; fieldwork policies; safety and health practices and procedures. Respondent confidentiality is emphasised: survey workers must, on appointment, sign a declaration guaranteeing confidentiality both during and after the employment period. All trainees receive a manual containing policies and procedures. MarketMatrix has similar training but conducts it more informally.

Policy and Practice

In this section I outline the legislative framework, and identify five areas for attention: avoidance of dog attacks; verbal abuse; physical and psychological risks from people; hazards from the physical terrain; and monitoring the whereabouts of survey workers.

The Legislative Framework

The Health and Safety in Employment Act 1992 is the key legislation applicable to workers visiting people in their homes. Other relevant legislation includes the Trespass Act 1980 and the Dog Control Act 1996.

One intention of the 1992 Act was changing the emphasis from control of specific hazards to managing risks in relation to work activities. Its principal objective is the prevention of harm to employees at work, promoting excellence in health and safety management by employers. Organisations are free to develop their own codes of practice relating to hazards, conditional on employers taking all practicable steps to ensure the safety of employees while at work. Employees are also required to take all reasonable steps to ensure their own safety. They are expected to be provided with information about hazards to which they might be exposed and to be given the results of any safety and health monitoring of the workplace. Employees working off-site have the same rights and responsibilities under the Act.

The Trespass Act 1980 is not explicitly mentioned in training. However, survey workers are advised to leave the property if asked to do so, in accordance with the Act, and must not return within two years after the warning. People entering other peoples' properties must also provide their names if asked. There is no documented policy on accessing apartment buildings. Security makes authorised access all but impossible for survey workers, who often have to 'coat-tail' others into the blocks.

Dogs are a constant hazard. The Dog Control Act 1996 requires that they are registered, makes provision for dangerous dogs and imposes responsibilities on owners to ensure that dogs do not cause a nuisance to anyone, whether through injury, danger, or distress (Section 4). The dog must be under control at all times (Section 5 (b)).

Employer Risk Management

Employers must inform employees of hazards and recommend precautions to reduce or eliminate them (Wrigglesworth & Earl, 1978). This responsibility still applies when they have no direct control over their employees' working environment, such as in another's house. The New Zealand Act dictates that employers must do all that is reasonably practicable to ensure their employees safety at work, wherever the workplace may be (Setchell, 2002).

Employers must identify potential workplace hazards, and take steps to isolate or minimise these. Employees too should assess each situation for themselves.

Employee Risk Management

Employees can adopt a range of strategies to increase safety when working alone, not least by recognising and avoiding danger. Physical well-being, fitness, eating properly, sleeping well and relaxing contribute to optimal well-being (Stone, 2002). And an awareness of the immediate environment may alert survey workers to possible dangers (Bibby, 1994). McDonald (2001, p. 35) states "there are things you can do to be safe, and being prepared is one of them." Being aware minimises the risk of being attacked. However, if women do find themselves confronted by an attacker they should be aware of what to do to reduce the risk of rape.

Survey workers approach the prospect's door in a positive frame of mind. They expect a warm greeting and they exude an air of warmth and optimism. Approaches that are non-confrontational, congenial and low key are more

likely to meet with success. (Groves & Couper, 1998) say it helps if survey workers have a positive approach and expect a positive outcome. They are not preoccupied with risks but are alert to them as they stand on the doorstep. After knocking on the prospect's door survey workers frequently stand to the side on the doorstep, so that if a dog in the house leaps out, the survey worker is not in its line.

Those who train survey workers recognise dogs as the most common hazard. The Dog Control Act 1996 is not mentioned specifically in training but the essence of it is - an expectation that dog owners undertake to keep their dogs under control. Survey workers are advised to look out for evidence of dogs, such as signs on gates and mail boxes, and faeces on the lawn. Immaculate flowerbeds are incompatible with dogs, and gates that are difficult to open may be an indicator to keep out. An information pamphlet is provided on dog behaviour and how to read dog body language. A video is optionally available for viewing by trainees.

Dog dazers and personal alarms are provided as standard equipment in the briefcases provided at the end of initial training. When activated, a dog dazer emits a high-pitched tone audible to dogs, that deters them, providing an opportunity for the person to escape. Similarly, a personal alarm emits an ear-piercing shriek that hopefully shocks and deflects a human attacker. It may also alert passers-by. Use of dog dazers and personal alarms is optional. There is no expectation by management that they will be used and management is aware that many survey workers do not use them.

Workers who have been bitten were advised to seek medical attention, notify the supervisor, and complete an accident form. The organisation reimbursed costs incurred such as doctors' fees, tetanus injections, dry-cleaning or replacement of torn clothing.

A few informants were subject to vicious attacks by dogs. Lynne experienced a serious attack when two Alsatian dogs leapt on her, one on each thigh. She said the dogs "took a chunk out of me;" she was miserable for some time afterward. Survey workers usually spoke to the owners but often this was met with ambivalence and comments such as: "he's never bitten anyone before."

All workers, it seemed, had their canine defence strategy. For many, the clipboard provided a basic level of protection. One enterprising survey worker, Maree, always carried a dog biscuit in her left hand pocket. She transferred it to her hand when walking up the path so that if any dogs surprised her, she could "chuck the biscuit at them and find an escape."

Kamake received an unwelcome surprise. "I went to one place and I didn't like the look of the property. I thought I'd knock on the door and there was a cat door there. I was standing there knocking on the door and this enormous Alsatian head shot out the cat door, of course it couldn't get through the cat door but it gave me such a fright."

Verbal abuse

Survey workers are emotion labourers (Hochschild, 1983) and must cope with their own and the respondent's emotion. Abusive respondents were recognised as part of the job, but MarketMatrix did not expect its staff to accept abuse. Their policy indicated that all instances must be reported to supervisors, who took appropriate action to enable the survey worker to "recover" from the incident. At MarketMatrix, all personal injuries had to be reported and recorded. This extended to a survey worker applying a band-aid. Supervisors kept records of minor injuries, but serious injuries were entered on a main accident register.

Suggestive, lewd comments were less common in face-to-face interviews than with telephone interviews where suggestive comments were common. Women, in particular, attracted verbal abuse from male respondents. Kamake, a sixty year old, said one man just "wanted a woman." Recognising the risk in the comment, she chose to ignore it, and treated the interview as a conversation. By absorbing this risk, she was thus able to elicit answers to the questions. Unwittingly, the respondent was very cooperative. Risk was averted yet potential risk was absorbed.

Ethnicity too, presented its own issues. Pakeha survey workers interviewing Maori respondents occasionally encountered racial abuse from them. "Who do you think you are, Pakeha, and who sent you?" was one response.

Physical and psychological risks

Sometimes, danger emerged with the arrival of a third party. For example, partners returning home to find their partner engaged in conversation with a member of the opposite sex occasionally reacted jealously. Flatmates and sullen teenagers could also resent intrusion.

Alison was undertaking an interview that appeared to be going all right until the respondent asked Alison to make a cup of tea.

> I said no, let's do this and half way through she suddenly lost control and she started running around the house throwing things and I said it was obviously not a good time and I made my way to go. I was very shaken and sat in the car. I found it threatening on my own physical safety. I didn't know what to do. I wondered what I'd done wrong. Now I am much more careful – if they say they've got a headache, I'd make an appointment to go later.

Blocks of flats and apartments present risk, given that survey workers are enclosed. Jean found herself being followed by a person she identified as a 'loony' in a block of flats. She went round and round until she could escape into the lift.

On one occasion, Patricia found she was re-interviewing in a block of flats in a less desirable part of the city

because she had not completed the survey on the first visit. Visibly trembling, Patricia told of her second call.

> I returned to the flats the following day and there was writing in fresh blood on the wall. I got out of there quickly because something had been going on. There was no physical danger, but the writing in blood terrified me. You could even smell it. I got out; I got out.

Respondent sexual overtures happened occasionally for both female and male survey workers. Joseph pre-programmed his telephone to ring him when he pressed one number. He has used this on two occasions when he felt he was being drawn into an encounter that he did not want. He was able to retreat by saying that he was needed urgently at home.

Hazards from the physical terrain

For rural survey workers in particular, the physical terrain was fraught with hazards. In New Zealand, only five percent of roads are divided, which increased the risk. "A US study found rural arterial roads – comparable to most New Zealand's state highway network – had an accident rate three times that of interstate highways, where traffic flows were divided" (Bass in Brown-Haysom, 2002, p. 20).

Dawn was very aware of some of the risks of the job. She ensured that the petrol tank was full and the oil level and tyres checked before leaving to work in distant, rural areas. She carried equipment to cope with possible car-related problems – ropes, sacks, and bottled water, as well as the standard toolkit.

Breakdowns happened, forcing workers to seek help from breakdown services, family, friends or passers-by. When they did, the survey workers' first call was to their families. Partners or grown-up children had usually come to the rescue. On one occasion, Sally became stuck in the mud and unable to break free. Fortunately, she had a sack with her, put it under the wheels and gradually eased herself out. She was in an isolated area and it was unlikely that anyone would pass by for several hours. "A cellphone would have been wonderful," she thought.

Gordon was a seasoned survey worker who travelled long distances. Black ice, snow, howling gales and heavy rainfall were common hazards. Roads could flood or break up completely. He said:

> The weather is a safety risk. When I know the weather is going to break up or it's going to rain, I don't go out. You don't know whether the road is going to be there or not.

One time, he had to reverse five kilometres because the road he was following had disappeared.

> "There was no way I could go sideways, forwards or turn. Quite scary - a narrow road, about 2,500 feet above sea level."

On another occasion, he had problems with the radiator drying up, so he had to go to a creek to fetch water, as the nearest town was ten kilometres away.

Travelling long distances to an address to find that the householder is not at home was time-consuming, frustrating, stressful – and expensive. TomJack commented on the benefit of going out in bad weather. "It's hard to catch farming people in the house unless it's a stinking wet day and that's the day you don't want to be out in it."

Monitoring the whereabouts of survey workers

No policy existed requiring survey workers to leave details about the specific location in which they were working. They were expected to indicate a general area of activity to their partner, if they had one. It was accepted practice that two interviewers could travel to a house together, but only the one authorised to undertake the survey should enter the house. Confidentiality debarred survey workers from taking children, partners or friends in the car while they were working, or revealing the exact address they were visiting.

Informants in this study did not recognise the risks implicit in leaving for work without anyone knowing their precise whereabouts. Often they would indicate to family members their general area but no specific location, thus preserving confidentiality. Neither organisation had a policy of requiring survey workers to report in to say where they were going to work, nor of reporting in when they had completed their work. The OpinionQuest manual stated that survey workers should let a family member know an expected time of arrival home. This made no provision for workers who lived alone. It also shifted responsibility for safety from the employer to employees and their families.

Lack of reporting systems meant that survey workers' whereabouts could not be tracked. Although many of the informants in this study did tell family members of their approximate location, it would have been difficult to locate them while at work. This was a major risk to their safety. The survey workers could have been contacted if they had cellphones.

As a security measure, Joseph let his wife know the general area but not the exact location of his work. She was able to contact him by cellphone. Joseph had his cellphone pre-programmed to phone home if he encountered problems. He recharged it regularly.

Recommendations

Cellphones

Individuals and organisations recognised the value of cellphones as safety devices. Many organisations whose employees are in lone work situations have modified their policies and provided cellphones. For example, The Ministry of Social Development and Accident Compensation Corporation provide cellphones for staff

that work in the community. Sadly, this policy was initiated only after a client with a knife killed an ACC staff member in their office. The murder prompted a complete review of safety procedures (pers.com. ACC staff member, October 2001).

Neither market research company provided cellphones as standard equipment, but two informants obtained cellphones after approaching their supervisor. This policy/practice was not publicised.

The policy of not providing cellphones to all survey workers was the strongest and most contentious issue raised by informants in this study. One survey worker had been issued with a cellphone by the organisation but was asked not to communicate this to other workers. Of survey workers engaged in face-to-face interviewing, all but two believed that the organisations should provide these. Forty-five percent of the informants in this study had purchased their own cellphones, some as a direct result of starting survey work. They had recognised risk, absorbing the economic cost to ensure safety at work. Cellphones were often pre-programmed to family and the police so that in the event of a crisis, the survey worker could access help quickly. The willingness of many workers to obtain their own demonstrated their conviction that cellphones were an essential item.

Dogs

Policies on dogs were well practised – with one qualification. Training included a discussion on how to be alert for the signs of dogs on properties, how to read dogs, how to avoid attack, what to do if one is attacked, and the reporting of dog incidents. The manuals contained information on canine body language, showing how to interpret the signs of impending problems with dogs. It also documented what to do if bitten.

Survey workers approached houses cautiously, standing to the side of doors in case dogs bounded out. They were diligent in reporting dog incidents, and subsequent follow-up was generally carried out. Yet, despite good practices, an increasing number of survey workers were being bitten.

OpinionQuest issued, as standard safety equipment, dog dazers and personal alarms with flashlights in them. Many of these devices remained in the briefcase, or were left in some inaccessible place. Very few workers carried the dog dazer and personal alarm at all times; most considered dazers to be of little use. To be effective they must (of course) be carried. Even survey workers with dazers at the ready had experienced dogs catching them unawares, sometimes from behind. OpinionQuest provided the dazers in the belief that they were useful, yet their policy did not state that they must be carried. In this respect, neither employee nor employer was meeting its obligations. McDonald states, (2000, p. 48) "It is important to note that once suitable clothing and equipment are provided, employees have a legal obligation to use it." Carr (2002, p. 3) states that "successful hazard management should be founded on the assumption that employees will not do as they are told."

If OpinionQuest believes survey workers should always carry dog dazers and personal alarms, it should monitor this in its performance management system. At the time of writing, MarketMatrix did not provide this device. From the experience of their usage in OpinionQuest, it would be inappropriate to recommend that they consider doing so.

Neither organisation expected its staff to take unnecessary risks. If for any reason survey workers felt uncomfortable, they were advised not to proceed with the interview, though many did. However, specific circumstances were not identified that should alert the survey worker to retreat quickly. OpinionQuest workers had the right to terminate an interview at any time. MarketMatrix staff used the pretext that they had already interviewed their quota for the day in a particular group if they felt uncomfortable with the person at the door. They could terminate the interview at any time as the respondent would not be aware that questions remained unasked.

Confidentiality

Emphasis on respondent confidentiality placed survey workers at risk, if in consequence, they were working alone in an unknown location. Policies concerning non-disclosure of the addresses and not being accompanied by an outside person were not always adhered to. Two survey workers were accompanied by family members, with the full knowledge of their supervisors. However, workers in this study never took their companions into respondents' homes. In all other respects, confidentiality was well practised by all but one survey worker, who informed her husband of the addresses she was visiting (though not the content of information received.) Survey workers were likely to inform their families of the general area in which they would be working, but not specific streets or addresses, making it difficult to find them unless they possessed a cellphone.

Verbal Abuse

Survey workers in both organisations were expected to report incidents, yet this policy was not practised. Under-reporting of incidents results in the organisations having an incomplete picture of what actually happens in the field. Verbal abuse was often ignored (Beale, Fletcher, Leather & Cox, 1998). One common reason for non-reporting are the beliefs that the victim has contributed to the incident and, secondly, that management will not take the issue seriously (Ishmael & Alemoru, 1999).

Physical and psychological risks

Some risks have no solution. Survey workers appear to believe that middle to higher socio-economic areas carry less risk than less prosperous parts. This may be true, it is not guaranteed. The risk of stereotyping needs to be emphasised at the initial training. Gang houses present their own special problems. Features of gang houses include gates, long grass, many vehicles on the grass, and many people on the property. Survey workers appear

willing to locate respondents in gang houses, but retreat if there are signs of alcohol or drug intake. The unease of some informants suggests the need for a policy on gang houses.

In OpinionQuest there is no policy on how to access respondents who live in security controlled apartment buildings. The practice of coat-tailing people into apartment buildings needs to be stopped and a firm policy initiated to specify how survey workers are expected to access these buildings without risk of trespass or danger.

House (1981) found that the status differential between supervisor and staff member can prevent a supportive relationship developing. A buddy system between two survey workers would work, provided the organisations bear the cost of telephone calls.

Hazards from the physical terrain

At OpinionQuest one of the roles of the supervisors is to be accessible to survey workers to offer advice, support and to provide information. Supervisors may work from offices in Auckland or Wellington, physically far removed from many of their survey workers. The policy is for survey workers to use a 0800 number to contact supervisors. This works well for some purposes, but there is no provision for access to help in the event of breakdown or danger. Telephoning someone in Auckland or Wellington to advise of a breakdown outside Mangaweka would not in any case be a productive activity. Telephoning the AA or a nearby garage would be more practical.

Overall

The organisations do not appear to follow up training to ensure that some policies are practised as they were intended. Brake (2001) in Bateman (2001) states that an essential component of good training is follow-up to ensure that knowledge has transferred to practice.

Conclusion

Are survey workers on the way out? The increasing use of the telephone for interviewing may see a decline in door-to-door interviewing. "Two thirds of all ad hoc surveys are now done by telephone" (Mercieca (2002, p. 29). This is probably driven by economics rather than an attempt to reduce the risks to survey workers on the streets. Face-to-face interviewers achieve a higher response rate than mail surveys (Babbie, 2001), and survey workers in face-to-face interviews contribute to the quality of the data (Curasi, 2001). The survey worker at the door will be around for a long time, and risks to their personal safety are likely to increase if current trends in crime continue.

The two organisations are well-intentioned in devising appropriate policies intended to ensure the safety and health of survey workers. But by failing to monitor that the policies are practised, they expose their employees to avoidable risks. Two changes that would reduce these risks are the provision of cellphones and a system for identifying the whereabouts of survey workers in the field.

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Statutes

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