Guidance on Conducting and Supervising Community-Oriented Psychology Research During COVID-19

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Cite as:

Introductory note

This document comprises (1) pedagogical guidance, (2) research design resources, and (3) signposting to key ethics policies for use by student researchers and supervisors of community-oriented psychology research (primarily, but not exclusively, in the fields of community psychology and critical health psychology).

This document was originally drafted for use by supervisors and students undertaking a Dissertation on a MA in Community Psychology at the University of Brighton in the UK. The phrasing employed (e.g., student researchers) reflects this. Specifics of pedagogical policy that would not be of interest outside this context (e.g., submission deadlines) have been removed, but others have been retained to optimise this document's utility in providing pedagogical support and guidance.

Please feel free to use and adapt whatever is helpful to you (citing as appropriate) and leave what is not. The decisions made by the author may not be appropriate for your own situation, but they are presented to you as one option for proceeding in the current public health context.

Section 1: Pedagogical Guidance and Policy during COVID-19

A desire to conduct community-oriented research

Many researchers will have begun their work expecting to build or maintain longstanding relationships with community members and community-based organisations (CBOs); to conduct research in a participatory, collaborative, and/or action-research orientation; to work with vulnerable groups and individuals; and to engage in the majority of their research face-to-face and/or in community settings. Due to Government-actioned social distancing measures, shifts to remote learning and working, and a shifting community sector facing fresh constraints on resources and demands, some necessary changes to student and staff research are required even as we maintain a focus on community empowerment, participatory knowledge-creation, power redistribution and other tenets of community psychology research.

Researchers who have developed (or are developing) project proposals which can be transferred to remote or secondary data analysis are encouraged to pursue these proposals. Most proposals can be pursued whilst adhering to current ethical guidance and with a remote or secondary data collection design, although you will need to be mindful of shifting contexts such as resource limitations, participant vulnerabilities and time constraints.

Where student researchers feel that they cannot conduct remote or secondary data analysis, but must instead opt for face-to-face research, **they must discuss this with their supervisor or, where no supervisor has been allocated, with the module coordinator** to obtain their approval to wait until the public health context has changed. At the moment, face-to-face data collection is prohibited by the University. However, student researchers are encouraged to remember that the constraints and challenges facing society are not likely to go away completely, even when Government-actioned social distancing measures ease and/or face-to-face data collection again becomes permitted by the University.

Of course, we recognise that because of personal circumstances to do with COVID-19, student researchers may not be able to begin their research even using a remote or secondary analysis

design. In that case, please inform your supervisor, module coordinator, and/or course leader of your circumstances so we can best support your progression in the MA.

Supervision

All supervision will be remote until face-to-face teaching has resumed.

Guidance on research designs

Whilst student researchers on this module often wish to employ a participatory, collaborative, and/or action-research orientation, **it is not a requirement of the module that they do so**. Learning outcomes indicate that methods, theoretical frameworks and key concepts should reflect pillars of the discipline, but that does not mean that because you cannot employ a 'traditional' PAR design, you cannot do community psychology. Indeed, PAR is based on the idea that methods must reflect the social realities and social problems facing communities, so it is **entirely appropriate** to shift and adapt. We will likely see a number of creative and innovative study designs coming into play as researchers around the world must look afresh at their methodologies. In this sense, as community psychology student researchers, you have a strong basis from which to proceed – you have been practising your creativity and critical thinking, and interrogating the processes of social change, for many months now.

In general:

- Student researchers will not be penalised for having small numbers of participants, or for not having repeated research encounters with participants as might otherwise be expected in many PAR studies
- Student researchers will not be penalised for employing research designs that are not PAR, participatory or collaborative. Where such designs are more traditional, or where secondary data analysis is used, student researchers will be expected to engage with theoretical frameworks, concepts and analytical interpretations that reflect community psychology principles. Student researchers may consider ways to structure traditional designs (such as semi-structured interviews or qualitative surveys) in ways that are empowering and are sensitive to participants' varied experiences.
- Student researchers will be expected to maintain adherence to high ethical standards, with particular attention to data protection, minimising harm, maximising benefit, and maintaining awareness of the current context (e.g., Government guidance on social distancing, travel restrictions, changes in service provisions, emotional precarity). Where the need for supervisory approvals are indicated, standard Tier 1 or Tier 2 ethical approval process still apply.

Ways to maintain **participatory and collaborative working** include enabling community organisations, community groups and/or individual participants to set research questions, identify crucial social problems, or choose their preferred method of data collection; being responsive to community input; planning dissemination of knowledge through online platforms or (eventually!) out in the community; sampling naturalistic data as appropriate (see below); asking for sense-checking of analyses by community members; using data collection designs that are more participatory or creative in nature.

Ways to maintain an **action research** orientation include cycling through consultations with stakeholders/community members and research as normal, but doing so remotely (and

providing more time for doing so); enabling stakeholders/community members to identify what kinds of outcomes or outputs would most benefit them; and to focus, if ethically permissible, on social issues arising directly from COVID-19 and the public health response. You may also find it useful to think about expanding the focus of research towards issues of information dissemination, resource provision, and service provision (being mindful that you're not just performing a service evaluation!).

Examples of appropriate **data collection designs** for remote or secondary data collection include (but are not limited to):

- Remote interviews and/or focus groups using Teams or one of the other University-approved platforms (see Section 3: *University of Brighton/SASS Ethics Guidance for Modified Research Practice for UGs and PGTs (COVID-19)*
- Sampling naturalistic data from traditional media [e.g., magazines, books, newspapers, podcasts or television] or publicly-accessible social media [e.g., Twitter, open forums, YouTube]
- Sampling naturalistic data from closed/protected social media or online communities with explicit permission from administrators
- Photovoice or photo elicitation using previously-generated images or newly-generated images where there is either no copyright or the participant owns the copyright [ensuring that participants are adhering to Government guidance on restricted movement]
- Artistic expression such as collage [ensuring that participants are adhering to Government guidance on restricted movement]
- Autoethnographic data collection
- Online story completion methods
- Online qualitative and/or quantitative surveys
- App-based methods
- Observational studies [that adhere to Government guidance on restricted movement]
- Systematic reviews

The suspension of face-to-face data collection means that the range of equipment and software you may use is more limited than it would otherwise be, although new options have certainly opened up recently and will likely continue to become available as the University adjusts. It is important that you check the ethical compliance of programs, apps and data sources. Similarly, this shift to remote learning and remote research was made suddenly and students may have variable access to equipment (e.g., laptops) and software. **If you require equipment or software for your research**, first discuss your needs with your supervisor, who can refer a request for materials to the module coordinator if required.

Most **data analytical methods** that student researchers would normally wish to use on this module are still available to them, including qualitative analytic methods such as thematic analysis, discourse analysis, interpretative phenomenological analysis, framework analysis.

Student researchers are asked to be mindful of the following contexts specifically relevant for the COVID-19 context:

Technological access. Technological access should not be assumed for participants, both in terms of devices, data, and privacy. Whilst this is especially so for socioeconomically

vulnerable participants, even households that are reasonably well-equipped are facing increasing demands on technological resources because of shifts to remote working and remote learning for schoolchildren. Student researchers must choose carefully how best to engage with participants and should choose the least resource-intensive method that suits the study. Student researchers must also be mindful of ethical requirements for participant privacy during synchronous data collection, which may be more or less difficult to achieve for certain households. Technological access must be investigated during the recruitment process (for example, by a question on the participant information sheet (PIS). If access constraints cannot be mitigated by the University or CBOs, students should work adaptably as best they can.

The use of creative or participatory methods. Creative and participatory data collection methods are commonly recognised as empowering to vulnerable people, and with careful thought, these can help ensure participants' control over how much and what they disclose within the research encounter. Whilst they introduce some ethical and logistical complexities, when conducted carefully, their use can ameliorate other ethical concerns and be adapted across logistically constrained contexts. However as such methods have not commonly been used remotely, the student researcher must take care to positively demonstrate their proficiency, skill, ethical adherence and the benefits to participants in documents such as ethical approval forms and the dissertation.

GDPR and data handling. Student researchers are required to maintain up-to-date knowledge of the University's guidance on data handling and storage as applied to different apps, platforms, and hardware, and to ensure ethical compliance. Current University ethics guidance provides details of various options for data collection such as closed conversations via Zoom, Google Hangouts and WhatsApp groups which are appropriate when full consent is given and data is afterwards deleted (See: *University of Brighton/SASS Ethics Guidance to Changes in Research Practice for UGs and PGTs (COVID-19)*. If a student researcher does not feel able to be ethically- or GDPR-compliant because of either their own circumstances (e.g., limited technological access, their set-up when working from home) or their participants', they **must** address this with their supervisor immediately and should not proceed with data collection until resolved.

Working with vulnerable participants and/or vulnerable groups and widening the purview of 'vulnerability'. Some groups and individuals are generally considered to be 'at-risk' and research with them is therefore typically subject to increased ethical oversight. However, in the context of COVID-19, people in vulnerable groups face additional challenges, for example due to housing precarity, economic instability, food insecurity, isolation, increased caring responsibilities, increased levels of domestic abuse, and removal/changes to support services. We advise that if student researchers wish to conduct research focused on **vulnerable groups**, they explore with their supervisors using secondary data analysis as a preferred option. If no such analytical option exists or is appropriate, primary data analysis **must be with the approval of your supervisor** and you must demonstrate that you are understand your ethical responsibilities towards your participants' well-being and have a clear strategy for minimising risk of harm that reflects the current context. Additionally, **individuals who may not have previously been considered vulnerable** may now be under increasing emotional strain, have exacerbated physical or mental health difficulties, or new financial risks. Whether individuals are newly considered 'vulnerable' will be decided on a case-by-case basis by student researchers, supervisors, and ultimately the relevant Tier 1 and Tier 2 assessors. Where student

researchers wish to conduct research focused on people who would not typically be considered vulnerable, they are advised to demonstrate sensitivity to the possibility that such individuals may now be vulnerable and have a clear strategy for minimising risk of harm that reflects the current context, such as ensuring that you are familiar with the process of managing disclosures of risk of serious imminent harm to self or others within the context of remote working, and not pressing should a participant indicate that they do not wish to pursue a line of discussion.

Working with non-statutory community-based organisations (CBOs). Given demands on community organisations and agencies, student researchers are asked to carefully consider whether their research interests require the involvement of such bodies at this time. Timelines for organisational approvals are liable to be increased, which increases risk for project failure or substantial increases in time-to-complete. However, particularly (but not exclusively) where student researchers have pre-existing relationships with such organisations, there may be a compelling case for continuing to work with CBOs. If you wish to work with a CBO, this **must be with the approval of your supervisor**. Be adaptive and not demanding, and work with your supervisor on how to handle the CBO position. You will be expected to (1) minimise resource and time demands on the CBO when communicating with the organisation and in your choices of research design; (2) carefully consider the benefits to the organisation and participants of participation in your study; (3) be aware of whether alternatives are in place should the CBO not be able to provide support in the way they had been, or consider delaying data collection until social distancing measures have eased and the CBO services are restored.

Working with statutory agencies including the NHS. Given demands on key agencies such as the NHS and schools, student researchers are asked to carefully consider whether their research interests require the involvement of statutory agencies. Timelines for external ethical approvals are liable to be increased, which increases risk for project failure or substantial increases in time-to-complete. It is our guidance that engagement with statutory agencies would generally be **inappropriate** at this time. If you nonetheless wish to pursue this avenue, this must be with the approval of your supervisor **and** the module coordinator.

Research focused on issues arising from COVID-19. Already many studies are emerging that directly relate to personal experiences and social issues arising from COVID-19, social isolation measures, and changes in service provision. As community psychology students, it is appropriate to take this into account when devising your projects and to consider this as a focus for your research. When doing so, you must ensure that in addition to addressing the aforementioned considerations, you maintain awareness of the possibility of oversaturating participants with research on this topic, and that research on this topic may be emotionally sensitive (see guidance on expanding the purview of vulnerability). One option may be to conduct any research focused on the experience of lockdown *after* restrictions on movement have lifted and a measure of normality is restored.

Conducting research when the researcher is overseas. International students (or UK citizens temporarily resident abroad) may be recruiting UK-based participants for their research. These student researchers are still required to adhere to the current ethical guidance and pedagogical instruction described in this document, including considerations of expanded vulnerabilities. You must ensure that you are able to understand the current UK context well enough to be responsive to changes in Government guidance, University and School-level Ethics guidance, and knowledge of the community context as relevant to your research (i.e., if a participant

information sheet (PIS) recommends seeking support from a given organisation, knowing that that organisation is still providing its services).

Conducting research with overseas participants. Conducting research with overseas participants still carries a requirement for Tier 2 ethical approval. Student researchers are required to adhere to the current ethical guidance of the University and the pedagogical instruction described in this document. You may not conduct face-to-face data collection even if the country where participants reside has not instituted social distancing measures. Where social distancing measures or other public health measures have been instituted in participants' country of residence, the stricter of those measures (compared to the UK) should be observed and any additional regulations in that country must be observed. You are expected to maintain knowledge of the community context as relevant to your research (i.e., if a participant information sheet (PIS) recommends seeking support from a given organisation, knowing that that organisation is still providing its services).

Participant recruitment and engagement materials. Whilst it is not a requirement of University Ethics Committees that the COVID-19 context be specifically referenced in Participant Information Sheets or other participant engagement materials, student researchers may consider adding appropriate text with regards to vulnerability, exploitation and thanking participants for their time (See Section 3: Examples of Information Sheets and Consent Forms for Remote Data Collection during COVID-19). Particularly for research on sensitive topics, consider ensuring that the participant has provided a valid email address so that if a safeguarding issue arises requiring breaking confidentiality, you are able to follow disclosure protocols appropriately.

Maintaining your own well-being

Many student researchers (rightly!) choose to conduct research that is intrinsically intellectually and/or emotionally challenging. Similarly for many student researchers, charged moments an arise in the research process. Please ensure that you exercise good care over your well-being as you proceed with your research during this time when you yourself may be experiencing various challenges and constraints. Use your support systems and prioritise your health, well-being and security. Keep in touch with your supervisor, tutor or module coordinator if your personal circumstances change or you are finding it difficult to engage with your research.

Section 2: Resources for research design

Journal articles and blogs: Guidance on remote participatory research

Tamí-Maury, I., Brown, L., Lapham, H., & Chang, S. (2017). Community-based participatory research through virtual communities. *Journal of communication in healthcare*, *10*(3), 188-194.

Glassman, M. (2019). The internet as a context for participatory action research. *Education and Information Technologies*, 1-21.

Lloyd, S. & Lorenz, L. (30 March 2020) Can I Do a Photovoice Project Remotely? You, You Can! Available at: http://www.photovoiceworldwide.com/blog/

Roberts, L. D. (2015). Ethical issues in conducting qualitative research in online communities. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 12*(3), 314-325. doi:10.1080/14780887.2015.1008909

Books on secondary and remote data collection and analysis

Braun, V., Clarke, V. & Gray, D. (Eds.) (2017). *Collecting Qualitative Data: A Practical Guide to Textual, Media and Virtual Techniques.* Cambridge University Press.
Includes coverage of ethical issues.

Fielding, N.G., Lee, R.M., & Blank, G. (Eds.). (2016). *The SAGE Handbook of Online Research Methods* (2nd ed.). London: Sage
Section contents
1. Online Research Methods
2. Designing Online Research
3. Online Data Capture and Data Collection
4. The Online Survey
5. Digital Quantitative Analysis
6. Digital Text Analysis
7. Virtual Ethnography
8. Online Secondary Analysis: Resources and Methods
9. The Future of Online Social Research

Poynter, R. (Ed.).(2010). *The handbook of online and social media research: Tools and techniques for market researchers.* John Wiley & Sons.

Sloan, L., & Quan-Haase, A. (Eds.). (2017). *The SAGE handbook of social media research methods*. Sage.

Roberts, S., Snee, H., Hine, C., Morey, Y., & Watson, H. (Eds.). (2016). *Digital methods for social science: An interdisciplinary guide to research innovation*. Springer.

Journal articles: Examples of and guidance on remote data collection approaches

Using social media as a tool for empowering research

Kornbluh, M., Neal, J. W., & Ozer, E. J. (2016). Scaling-Up Youth-Led social justice efforts through an online School-Based social network. *American Journal of Community Psychology, 57*(3-4), 266-279. doi:10.1002/ajcp.12042

Digital Ethnography

LSE Digital Ethnography Reading List (particularly pgs 1-7 and 10-13), accessible at: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1mggzt7ViY5vxY3P9Sphn-9d7_BrdJXFJ/view

Analysing discourse within traditional media (e.g. commentary pieces and letters to editors).

Jowett, A. (2017). 'One can hardly call them homophobic': Denials of antigay prejudice within the same-sex marriage debate*. Discourse & Society, 28*(3), 281-295

Farvid, P., & Braun, V. (2006). 'Most of us guys are raring to go anytime, anyplace, anywhere': Male and female sexuality in Cleo and Cosmo. *Sex roles, 55*(5-6), 295-310.

Conducting remote interviews and focus groups (NB articles based on Skype are also relevant for Zoom, WhatsApp, etc)

Lo Iacono, V., Symonds, P., & Brown, D. H. (2016). Skype as a tool for qualitative research interviews. *Sociological Research Online, 21*(2), 1-15.

Deakin, H., & Wakefield, K. (2014). Skype interviewing: Reflections of two PhD researchers. *Qualitative Research, 14*(5), 603-616. doi:10.1177/146879411348812

Drabble, L., Trocki, K., Salcedo, B., Walker, P. & Korcha, R. Conducting qualitative interviews by telephone: Lessons learned from a study of alcohol use among sexual minority and heterosexual women. *Qualitative Social Work, 15*(1), 118-133.

Holt, A. (2010). Using the telephone for narrative interviewing: A research note. *Qualitative Research, 10*(1), 113-121.

Hanna, P. (2012). Using internet technologies (such as Skype) as a research medium: A research note. *Qualitative Research, 12*(2), 239-242.

Jowett, A., Peel, E., & Shaw, R. (2011). Online interviewing in psychology: Reflections on the process. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 8*(4), 354-369.

Murray, L. Online opportunities for mobile and visual research. In Silva, Carlos Nunes (Ed.) (2012). Online Research Methods in Urban and Planning Studies: Design and Outcomes. IGI-Global. [Email module coordinator for access]

Stewart, K. & Williams, M. (2005). Researching online populations: the use of online focus groups for social research. *Qualitative Research, 5*(4), 395-416.

James, N. & Busher, H. (2006). Credibility, authenticity and voice: Dilemmas in online interviewing. *Qualitative Research, 6*(3), 403-420.

Analysing secondary data or naturalistic data generated online

Jowett, A. (2015). A case for using online discussion forums in critical psychological research. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 12*(3), 287-297

Marwick, A. E. (2014). Ethnographic and qualitative research on Twitter. *Twitter and society,* 109-122. Available at:
http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.433.6263&rep=rep1&type=pdf

Recorded Webinar on Conducting Qualitative Fieldwork During COVID-19

Hosted by Deborah Lupton supported by NVivo. Available at:
https://go.nvivobyqsr.com/Covid

Guidance for Doing Fieldwork in a Pandemic

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1clGjGABB2h2qbduTgfqribHmog9B6P0NvMgVuiHZCl8/preview#

Suggested citation: Lupton, D. (editor) (2020) Doing fieldwork in a pandemic (crowd-sourced document). Available at:
https://docs.google.com/document/d/1clGjGABB2h2qbduTgfqribHmog9B6P0NvMgVuiHZCl8/edit?ts=5e88ae0a#

39-page guide including brief descriptions of methods and related references. Table of Contents is as follows (hyperlinks enabled):

Photo/Video/Voice Elicitation

Diaries/journaling

Doing Online Interviews (added by Alexia Maddox)

Re-enactment Videos

Using Wearable Cameras (and other first-person perspective tech)

Epistolary Interviews

Online Discussion Platforms

Online, Synchronous, Video-Based Focus Group Interviews (added by Nathan Browning)

Cultural/Mobile Probes

The Story Completion Method

App-based Methods

Using Facebook Groups

Using Google/Microsoft Forms for Data Collection

The Ethics of Moving from Face-to-Face Fieldwork

Books on Innovative and Creative Methods

Autoethnography (added by F. Güzin Agca-Varoglu)

Duoethnography (added by Vibeke Oestergaard Steenfeldt)

Autobiographical Design and Research-Through-Design (added by Cayla Key)

Netnography/Virtual Methods (added by Gabriella Wulff)

Digital Methods and Quali-Quant analysis (added by Anders Kristian Munk)

Using YouTube (and Online Video) for (Teaching) Observational Studies (added by Robin Smith)

Using Podcasts to Study Culture

Big Brother Style Observations

Experimenting with Online Live Action Role Play (O-LARPs) (added by Alex Taylor)

LSE Digital Ethnography Collective Reading List

Arts-based Project Combined with Skype Interviews (added by Nicole Brown)

Creating Social Media Platforms/ Groups for Research and Researching Social Media Platforms

Online Surveys, Virtual Interviews and Social Media Screenshots (Added by Jessica Ringrose and Kaitlynn Mendes)

Digital Mapping and Geospatial Technologies

Tracking/mapping how people use online systems and platforms to track movement or migration patterns, or to explore a particular phenomena

Live Streaming Apps

Photojournalism and Documentary Photography

Using Internet Video Calling and Desktop Sharing as a Discrete Research Method

Studying Europe online

Section 3: Signposting to Key Ethical Guidance

University of Brighton Guidance on Research Ethics: Online Research

Available at:
https://staff.brighton.ac.uk/ease/ro/CREC%20Published%20Documents/Guidance%20on%20issues%20in%20research%20ethics%20v5%20May%202018.pdf

University of Brighton/SASS Ethics Guidance for Modified Research Practice for UGs and PGTs (COVID-19)

Available on SS796 Research List, Student Central and online at the following link: https://staff.brighton.ac.uk/ease/ro/_layouts/WordViewer.aspx?id=/ease/ro/CREC%20Published%20Documents/CC%20COVID%2019%20Data%20Collection%20Contingency%20plans%20UG%20PGT.docx&DefaultItemOpen=1

Association of Internet Research : Ethical Guidelines 3.0

[*Available at the following reference/link*]: franzke, alineshakti, Bechmann, Anja, Zimmer, Michael, Ess, Charles and the Association of Internet Researchers (2020). Internet Research: Ethical Guidelines 3.0. https://aoir.org/reports/ethics3.pdf

BPS Ethics Guidelines for Internet-Mediated Research

British Psychological Society (2017). *Ethics Guidelines for Internet-Mediated Research.* INF206/04.2017. Leicester: Author. Available from: www.bps.org.uk/publications/policy-and-guidelines/research-guidelines-policy-documents/research-guidelines-poli

Examples of Information Sheets and Consent Forms for Remote Data Collection during COVID-19

https://healthwellbeing.kmi.open.ac.uk/haw-data/uploads/2020/04/Information-Sheet_FINAL_030420-1.pdf Used by the **Purpose of the COVID-19: Technology, Self-isolation, Loneliness & Leisure Activities Study** accessible at

https://healthwellbeing.kmi.open.ac.uk/covid-19-technology-social-connections-loneliness-leisure-activities/?fbclid=IwAR0VJCiTyfz_5JudIonL8eWJJwHp1b9vD4-vjfjZ58PEX9clnMvmESa6y6o

Note the following relevant section of the information sheet:

Risk of Harm • Participants may feel exploited, vulnerable given the nature of the topic of this study and the ongoing COVID19 pandemic. Therefore, information/weblinks will be made available relating to how one should keep safe online via national helplines and the UK Government website https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus https://www.samaritans.org/

And this thank you text:

During this time of crisis, we would understand many people are dealing with various concerns and issues.

We really do appreciate your time in taking to complete this online survey and contributing to valuable research during the COVID-19 pandemic