

Researcher welfare: researching sexual violence against children

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Context

- Working in this field is a privilege, but can come at personal cost
- All bring different biographies and experience to this
- Unlike requirement for clinical supervision in counselling, no such equivalent for researchers
- Can transfer learning from these fields but unique challenges of research role including:
 - difficulty of hearing but not actioning/challenging
 - often limited engagement
 - not knowing what happens afterwards

Context

- Many (brief) references to need to consider researcher welfare in existing documents, but little practical advice on how to do this
- Important for researchers
- Important for our participants
- Important for managers/employers/commissioners
- Many ways in which our wellbeing can be negatively impacted – identifying these is an important first step
- Owning our vulnerability and humanity, and working with this rather than trying to deny it.

Some potential concerns/difficulties

- Worrying about the 'what ifs':
 - What if I say something insensitive
 - What if they get upset
 - What if I have to break confidentiality
- Worrying you didn't 'do well'
- Impact of hearing difficult or traumatic narratives
- Feeling powerless to change anything
- Guilt at 'triggering' a participant
- Being triggered yourself
- Being unable to 'move on'

What we have found helps

- Manage responsibility placed on staff in line with experience and capacity
- Project specific training and preparation/practicing scenarios
- Recognising our own limitations and needs
- Normalising emotional responses – no ‘one size fits all’
- Recognising range of potential triggers & times this might happen
- Identify ‘what works’ for you; how we can support this – permission for us to look out for you
- Ensure appropriate support structures are in place for participants – someone else is ‘holding’ them

What we have found helps

- Managing schedule/intensity of fieldwork engagements
- Senior member of staff always on call
- ‘Checking in’ not just reporting in
- Balancing participant confidentiality with need to process/download – how to process what you hear respectfully
- Peer support within team; support outside of work
- Scheduled ‘processing time’/lighter workload around engagements
- Access to additional support (where funding permits)
- Recognition of post engagement risks (transcription, analysis)

For more information and resources visit
our website www.beds.ac.uk/ic

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