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# Surveying Under Adverse Conditions

Conducting Research with Violent  
Populations & within High-Crime  
Neighborhoods



# The Intersection of Survey Research and Crime and Justice

- Research with prisoners
  - Human subjects protections
  - Prison settings
- Violent neighborhoods
- Violent individuals



# Research with Prisoners

- You conduct interviews in prison??



# Federal Regulations Regarding Research with Prisoners

Federal regs specify 7 special provisions for research involving prisoners:

- I. Research must fall into 1 of 4 categories:  
(i) cause or effect of incarceration & criminal behavior; (ii) institutional structures; (iii) conditions affecting prisoners as a class; or (iv) research on practices deigned to improve health & well being
- II. Research benefits to prisoners shouldn't interfere with ability to weigh risks of research


# Special Provisions—continued

- III. Risks involved are commensurate with risks that would be accepted by non-prison volunteers
- IV. Procedures for selection are fair
- V. Materials/information presented in language that is understandable
- VI. Assurance that parole boards won't take participation in research in making parole decisions/prisoner understands that participation will have no effect on parole
- VII. Provisions for IRB follow-up examination, if necessary

# Prison & Jail Settings

- Every state is different; every institution is different
- Some agencies will have their own IRB
- Talk to warden and senior correctional administrator
- Do your homework on layout of prison/administrative buildings, institutional regulations (e.g., no open toe shoes), what to do with incentives
- Only carry Identification and papers needed
- Know your subjects (i.e., criminal history)
- Locate subjects (again) the week before interview

## Prison & Jail Settings (cont.)

- If research topics are sensitive, ask for private space for interview, but not too private!
  - Interview in pairs, when budget permits
  - Utilize informed, written consent. Disclose when must report prisoner's statement of intended (future) harm
  - Stop interviewing if you feel uncomfortable
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# Violent Neighborhoods - the Issues

- Dangers are often incidental to the topic itself
- Residents mostly distrustful of surveys
- Little police presence
- Confusing physical layout of public housing developments
- Visible drug dealing, prostitution, disorder, etc.
- Risk to interviewers when carrying “incentives”



# Violent or Disoriented Individuals

- People with MH issues and violence in past are interviewable
- Some markers for disorientation and potential violence
- Homicide in past history does not necessarily make them a risk, etc.

# Overcoming the Issues

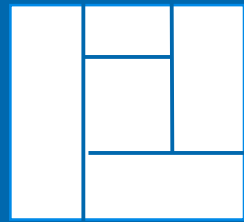
- Provide extensive training. Use at-risk scenarios
- Partner with local, respected agencies
- Use local/community interviewers
- Use locals as liaisons to interview process
- Meet with community police officers before research begins
- Carry identification, mobile phones
- Interview in pairs, when budget permits

# Overcoming the issues (cont.)

- Interview during daylight hours
- Use a car
- Conduct interview on front porch or yard, if possible. If not, in the front room near the door
- If many people are in house, try to re-schedule interview
- Minimize your relationship with police agencies so Rs don't feel threatened or perceive you as a snitch
- Incentives: Don't carry cash. If you have to, use store gift cards

# Summary

- Remember that the dangers are never totally manageable and researchers can be unlucky, so prepare, prepare, prepare



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<http://jpc.urban.org/>

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