
Surviving Fieldwork: A Report of the Advisory Panel on Health and Safety in Fieldwork

Nancy Howell

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With the publication of *Surviving Fieldwork*, Nancy Howell makes a major contribution to the discipline of anthropology. She addresses issues that anthropologists traditionally have either ignored, or refused to acknowledge. More specifically, the book represents the first systematic attempt to identify and examine the potential health hazards of conducting field research in various parts of the world.

Howell makes effective use of data obtained from a random sample of anthropologists, as well as other sources of information, to demonstrate that the issue of health and safety in fieldwork can no longer be ignored. She argues convincingly that professionals, administrators, students and funding agencies must share the responsibility of: (1) acknowledging that researchers may be exposed to a variety of health or safety risks while in the field, (2) developing training techniques that may help reduce those risks and (3) working towards correcting the current problems.

Howell examines a wide assortment of topics ranging from the hazards of "exposure" to feelings of "loneliness" and "depression" in the field. Each topic is discussed briefly within the context of the statistical data derived from the random-sample survey. The evidence clearly indicates that malarial infection, hepatitis and vehicle accidents "present frequent and serious problems for anthropologists" (p. 192). Although Howell handles all topics with care and sensitivity, Chapters 8 (Injury Accidents), 12 (Mental Health and Illness in the Field), and 13 (Families in the Field) are particularly well presented and worth reading. Howell achieves a balance between the presentation of survey data and the inclusion of actual statements, including her own, concerning personal experiences with tragedy and suffering. These statements contribute an important human dimension to the study.

I strongly recommend the book as a required text in graduate, and possibly undergraduate, courses that deal with fieldwork, research methods and related topics. At the very minimum, it should be required reading for all students preparing to enter the field. *Surviving Fieldwork* will not only introduce students to the types of dangers they are likely to encounter in specific areas of the world, it will also provide a solid base for discussing the types of actions individuals can take to prevent, or deal with, the negative effects of potential health risks.

Nancy Howell and the American Anthropological Association have taken the first step towards addressing the issue of health and safety in fieldwork. It is time to respond with positive action. The onus is on the anthropological community to empower young scholars with the knowledge and skills they need to begin their work from a position of strength.