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Stepping Through the Looking Glass: Researching Slavery in New Zealand's Fishing Industry

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Abstract

Qualitative researchers may encounter unforeseen risks when undertaking fieldwork; however, such risks are not widely addressed in the management and international business literatures. Furthermore, risks to participants and their families, and translators, is also an important phenomenon seldom explored in the literature. In this article, we reflect on our investigations of slavery in the foreign charter vessel sector of New Zealand's fishing industry. Third parties threatened and intimidated many of those involved in our research, for example, through direct confrontation and surveillance. We contend that methodological awareness around risks and coping strategies needs further development, particularly in the management and international business literatures. Knowledge of potential risks and coping strategies can help mitigate consequences and, by doing so, enhance research designs.

Keywords

ethics, qualitative research, decisions under risk/uncertainty

Introduction

Fieldwork, despite a careful qualitative research design, can leave academics exposed to risk, to the extent that they might consider withdrawing from their research. Such was the case with our research into New Zealand's fishing industry which began innocuously in 2008, to shed light on how New Zealand companies might capture more value from their activities (Stringer, Simmons, & Rees, 2011). During the course of that research, we uncovered anecdotal evidence of modern day slavery, aboard some foreign trawlers fishing on behalf of New Zealand companies in New Zealand's exclusive economic zone. Yet, it was not until early 2011 that unexpectedly the opportunity presented itself, to undertake in-depth research into this issue. We found disturbing cases of human rights abuses, when 7 Indonesian crew members from the *Shin Ji*, a South Korean foreign charter vessel (FCV), refused to work, citing physical and sexual abuse, as well as the non-payment of wages. They were followed a month later by 32 Indonesian crew members from the *Oyang* 75, another South Korean vessel. Shocked by the accounts of horrific inhumane working conditions on board these vessels, we decided to look further into the FCV sector. Naively, perhaps, we did not foresee the extent of the problem, or the risks involved, or the impact our research would have not only on ourselves but also on the participants and their families, as well as our translators. During the course of our research, we, along with a number of participants and our translators, were threatened and intimidated by industry personnel and related parties.

Our experiences caused us to reconsider how personal and professional risks faced in the field are reflected in the methodological literature to which researchers in management and international business refer. We found that the discourse is largely centered on design, measurement, and analysis, and accounts of personal experiences were less frequent, although Van Maanen (1982) and Grisar-Kassé (2004) report negative personal experiences. Accounts of experiences pertaining to risk in the field are more widely reported in, for example, anthropology (e.g., Gill, 2004; Kinkade & Katovich, 1997; Nordstrom & Robben, 1995; Schramm, 2005) and sociology (e.g., Lee, 1995; Lee-Treweek & Linkogle, 2000). Significantly, fieldwork problems are often treated lightly rather than as a serious methodological issue (Grisar-Kassé, 2004; Lee, 1995; Lee-Treweek & Linkogle, 2000; Sampson & Thomas, 2003). Michailova and Clark (2004) maintain that "existing methodological conventions in organisation and management studies tend to pay too much attention to research as a technical question and too

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little to the personal and social experiences of the researcher" (p. 3) and that most research involves "personal or social pain, which is usually ignored or covered up" (p. 4).

We contend that the personal experiences of researchers, including the risks they can face and possible coping strategies, need to be included more systematically in the management and international business literatures on method. Furthermore, risks to participants and their families, as well as to third parties such as translators, is a phenomenon barely explored in the literatures. During the course of our fieldwork, we felt that, like Alice in Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking-Glass*, we had stepped through a looking glass to discover an alternative world; a world that seemed familiar yet was not. We follow Michailova and Clark (2004) who argue that "voicing and debating fieldwork problems enhance both the quality of the research we conduct and our credibility as researchers" (p. 5). We further contend that experiences of risks should not be underemphasized because knowledge of, and anticipating, potential risks can help mitigate consequences and, by doing so, enhance research designs.

This article is structured as follows. First, we discuss risks in the field as identified in the social science literature. Second, we introduce the fishing industry project that exposed us to threats for which the methodological literature had not prepared us. The training of researchers, reflecting the literature, does not sufficiently emphasize the potential risks that can be encountered in the field. Third, we elaborate on the particular risks we encountered in the field—risks to ourselves, to the participants and their families, as well as to our translators. We then go onto discuss our key decisions and coping strategies and the timing of them, and comment on how what was initially unintended research into the dark side of an industry, fraught with risk, resulted in a positive outcome for migrant crew members aboard FCVs operating in New Zealand's waters. We conclude the article by highlighting that academic researchers, as the critic and conscience of society, have a critical role to play where authorities refuse or fail to act.

Risks in the Field

We argue that discussing researchers' experiences in the field is crucial for both methodological and theoretical development. Typically, when reporting on fieldwork, researchers not only neglect to reflect on their own experiences and emotions but also those of their participants: whereas "in fact, the two likely go hand in hand" (Michailova et al., 2014, p. 148; see also Hubbard, Backett-Milburn, & Kemmer, 2001). Kondo (1990) views the research experience as well as the specificity of experience as both enacting and embodying theory. She states "the so-called personal details of the encounters, and of the concrete processes through which research problems emerged, are constitutive of theory; one cannot be separated from the other" (p. 24). A critical reflection of one's experience in the field, and accompanying emotions, particularly in situation where the researcher has been engaged in sensitive or risky research, along with the experiences of participants and translators, can provide a rich foundation for further theorizing (Kondo, 1990; Michailova et al., 2014; Van Maanen, Sørensen, & Mitchell, 2007).

To understand how qualitative researchers mitigate (emotional and physical) risk both to themselves and others in the field, we first turned to the literature in our home disciplines of management and international business. We found few discussions about risk or coping strategies, as traditionally researchers in these two disciplines neglect the "dark" side of business and thus we turned to other disciplines to help increase our insight. According to Belousov et al. (2007), discussions about researcher risk in the field is limited and is largely segregated by discipline (e.g., anthropology, Nordstrom & Robben, 1995; Sluka, 2012; sociology, Lee, 1995; Lee-Treweek & Linkogle, 2000; and criminology, Goldsmith, 2003). Nevertheless within some disciplines—such as anthropology where one would expect to find in-depth reflection and insights into fieldwork experiences—historically, there has been "unconscious self-censorship" as "ethnographers have avoided tackling taboo subjects such as personal violence [and] sexual abuse" because of the discipline's functionalist paradigm (Bourgois, 1995, p. 14). Furthermore, "extreme settings full of human tragedy . . . are psychologically overwhelming and can be physically dangerous" and thus researchers have tended to avoid such subject matter (Bourgois, 1995, p. 14). Sluka (2012) notes that it is only recently that methodological issues around danger are being reported systematically in the anthropological literature. In a number of disciplines, reports of researchers' unease about their safety are more commonly found in the literature than reports of violence or human tragedy (Belousov et al., 2007; Hubbard et al., 2001).

In this article, we draw largely on the social science literature particularly from the sociological and anthropological disciplines to classify risk into three categories to provide a framework for analyzing and reflecting on our own experience: first, risks to researchers; second, intimidation of participants; and third, risks to translators.

Intimidation, Risk, and Harm to Researchers

From the literature, we divide risk toward researchers into four categories: physical, emotional, ethical, and professional (cf. Jipson & Litton, 2000; Lee-Treweek & Linkogle, 2000). Researchers working in vulnerable, uncertain, or volatile situations may, in particular, be subject to increased physical risk. For example, researchers have recounted incidents of assault and murder of other researchers (Lee, 1995; Lee-Treweek & Linkogle, 2000; Sampson & Thomas, 2003) as well as intimidation and threats to their own safety (Bourgois, 1995; Gill, 2004; Schramm, 2005; Sluka, 2012).

Jipson and Litton (2000) point out that in "high-tension environments" (p. 154), researchers are more likely to encounter physical danger, either real or threatened, from within the research participant group, particularly where researchers are viewed as a threat to participants: They refer here to research of extremist groups such as White supremacists or new religious movements, where, unless and until a researcher gains credibility and is perceived as non-threatening, dangers can exist.

Researchers can become too caught up in their research or compromised by forming relationships with participants, leading to a loss of perspective and emotional cost to the researcher (Letherby, 2000; Shaffir, Stebbins, & Turowetz, 1980). Empathy for participants can lead to researchers losing objectivity, particularly where the research touches on participants' distressing circumstances and experiences. One discipline where emotional distress to researchers is increasingly acknowledged is the medical field and in particular dementia research (Lee-Treweek & Linkogle, 2000; Mills & Coleman, 1994). There is also the increased likelihood that researchers undertaking sensitive research will encounter emotional and even physical risk or upset, particularly if it involves children (e.g., Bloor, Fincham, & Sampson, 2010; Bourgois, 1995; Coulter, 2005; Lee-Treweek & Linkogle, 2000).

Researchers may also face ethical and professional risk from stakeholders, including ethical bodies and funders (Jipson & Litton, 2000; Linkogle, 2000). In particular, researchers may be at risk when their findings diverge from what was expected or perceived by their funding body, not an uncommon situation in qualitative research. In turn, professional danger can occur when researchers "break with established theoretical and methodological conventions" (Lee-Treweek & Linkogle, 2000, p. 20). Significantly, a researcher's academic career may be placed in jeopardy when they are perceived to be on the "edges of respected academic circles" (Jipson & Litton, 2000, p. 147). Liamputtong (2007), from her research into vulnerable, disadvantaged and marginalized groups, also identifies legal risk and social stigma as potential risks for researchers, for example, where researchers refuse to disclose information about illegal activities to the police.

Intimidation, Risk, and Harm to Participants

Liamputtong (2007) states that "safety issues and risks to the participants have largely been silenced within the social science domain" mostly because researchers are bound by assurances of anonymity or confidentiality to their participants (p. 37; see also Dowling, 2005). She further stresses that issues of risk to participants need to be "more visible in discussions of qualitative research methodology due to the extent and depth of involvement of the participants" (Liamputtong, 2007, p. 37; see also Lee, 1995). Furthermore, participants may face unanticipated dangers following the disclosure and publication of research findings (Langford, 2000; Lee, 1993; Liamputtong, 2007). We contend that there can also be unintended danger for the families of participants.

As researchers, we have a duty to apply the highest ethical standards to our research. To minimize dangers to participants, it is critical that a strict code of ethical conduct is followed. Ethical approval procedures are designed to protect the interests of everyone involved—including researchers and participants—and to identify ways to mitigate risk. Ethical codes, however, can create dilemmas for researchers. On one hand, researchers must comply with their ethical obligations by "doing things right," but on the other hand, researchers can feel compelled morally to "do the right thing" to protect participants from harm. This is especially relevant during fieldwork, where abusive situations involving participants are uncovered (e.g., ongoing physical or sexual abuse), and participants do not want to complain to authorities. Where researchers do not fulfill their ethical obligations to mitigate risk and harm to participants, the consequences can be fatal, an example being, "The Unfortunate Experiment" at National Women's Hospital in New Zealand where researchers identified the presence of a fatal disease but failed to inform the participants leading to potentially avoidable deaths (Coney, 1988).

Intimidation, Risk, and Harm to Translators

The literature is somewhat silent on danger to individuals on the fringes of the research project. In particular, the discourse in management and international business does not explore risk to translators. For some, translators may be viewed as actors in a purely transactional relationship. Yet, they are in fact paid adjuncts to the research team under confidentiality terms and are also participants in the research process. Furthermore, translators can play a multi-faceted role—they can be simultaneously translators of language, a "decoder of symbols," and a means to gain access to participants (Michailova & Clark, 2004, p. 13). Crucially, in their role as gatekeepers to participants, translators can be caught up in the personal aspects of the research and thus affected emotionally (see Liamputtong, 2007, who describes transcribers as vulnerable researchers). A translator not only translates language but may also have to express deep underlying emotion and angst behind disturbing events. This can have a profound effect on the translator. The experiences and emotions, including hopes and fears, voiced by an interviewee can resonate with those of the translator and lead to a deep sense of engagement and participation by the latter. Thus, translators can become vulnerable through their participation. At one level, a translator can be seen to be a key member of the research team, but on another level, may not be recognized as part of the team and thus remain invisible within the project.

Our Experience in Stepping Through the Looking Glass

Belousov et al. (2007) suggest that threats to researchers vary according to the "character of the industry in question" (p. 157); in particular, they contend that the shipping industry has "the potential to render researchers isolated and powerless" due to its hazardous environment. The fishing industry in turn has been characterized as being underpinned by a climate of fear and obsessed with secrecy (International Commission on Shipping, 2001), as well as "home to some of the worst examples of abuse in the workplace" (Environmental Justice Foundation, 2010, p. 6). We undertook unanticipated research into slavery in New Zealand's deep sea fishing industry, which we argue that even in this first-world country, can be considered a secrecy-obsessed industry and a "frontier zone." As Belousov et al. (2007) remark, "Frontiers have a certain lawless quality in comparison with borders . . . with a resulting threat of potential danger to researchers operating in them" (p. 159).

In 1979, New Zealand fishing companies began using FCVs to help develop the country's deep water fisheries. These vessels are owned, equipped, and crewed by foreign owners and contracted to fish on behalf of New Zealand companies or interests. The majority of FCVs vessels were crewed by Indonesians and Ukrainians, though Filipinos, Chinese, and Burmese have also been employed. For over three decades, the exploitation of foreign fishing crew has been a feature of the New Zealand deep sea fishing industry (Simmons & Stringer, 2014; Stringer, Simmons, Coulston, & Whittaker, 2014). In 2011, there were approximately 27 FCVs crewed by around 1,500 foreign crew fishing in New Zealand's waters.

On August 18, 2010, the *Oyang 70*, a South Korean vessel fishing legally in New Zealand waters, sank with the loss of six lives. Horrific accounts of labor and human rights abuses aboard the vessel emerged from the survivors (see Field, 2011c). Just 9 months later in mid-2011, Indonesian crew members from the South Korean FCVs, the *Shin Ji* and *Oyang 75* stopped work in protest against systematic physical, mental, and in some cases sexual abuse (Bond, 2011; Field, 2011c; Lynch, 2011; Stringer et al., 2014). For a number of weeks, the two crews refused to return to their vessels before being expatriated to Indonesia either voluntarily or under instruction from Immigration New Zealand. Our specific research into labor and human rights abuses began with interviews of crew members from these two vessels and extended to crew members of other vessels.

Our research questioned how such inhumane treatment could occur in an institutional environment where workers are protected from abuse both in theory and in practice (see Stringer et al., 2014). Over a 12-month period, we interviewed 144 industry personnel, including New Zealand and South Korean industry representatives and employees, government observers, and Indonesian, Burmese, Chinese, and Filipino crew from a number of South Korean vessels. The majority of the crew interviews were undertaken with Indonesians working aboard South Korean FCVs fishing on behalf of New Zealand companies in New Zealand waters. Semi-structured interviews lasted between 1 to 4 hr and follow-up interviews with a number of the participants were also conducted. We used four female Indonesian translators all of whom were New Zealand residents or citizens. On a number of occasions, we used two translators for rigor. Interestingly, the crew members related best to two particular translators, who were originally from a similar social-economic class in Indonesia. They perceived them to be "mother" figures.

Initially, we obtained access to the crew members through the Indonesian Society in New Zealand. To recruit additional subjects, we employed a snowballing technique, which has been extensively used in researching vulnerable populations (Atkinson & Flint, 2001; Barnard, 2005; Lee, 1993; Liamputtong, 2007). Our interviews took place in largely unconventional locations, including outside a local mosque as well as in prisons where we met crew members awaiting deportation. These were crew members who had previously deserted their vessels and remained illegally in New Zealand before handing themselves in to, or being caught by, the authorities. Many times, we were constrained as to where, when, and for how long we could meet with crew members. When the vessels were in port to unload and re-provision, crew members were particularly constrained as to when they could meet with us. Their movements were controlled by their officers and agents, and they had strictly enforced curfews. Thus, meetings were often held at very short notice in different cities or towns, depending on where and when vessels came into port. It was not unknown for crew members to be under surveillance and their cell phones confiscated, particularly when word of our research into slavery aboard the *Shin Ji* and *Oyang 75* vessels became public knowledge. Some crew members had kept meticulous records as to hours worked and payments received which they gave us along with video recordings of their conditions and illegal fish dumping.

We also interviewed former government observers who had worked aboard a range of FCVs. These are New Zealanders who had previously been employed by the Ministry of Primary Industries to collect fisheries data to ensure the effective scientific management of fisheries. Working alongside the crew, observers monitor and collect catch effort data, biological information, and other information, such as the processing of catches. However, monitoring employment conditions and the behavior of the officers toward crew was outside an observer's brief, although some had reported serious abuses to their managers. One participant recalled begging an observer for help only to be denied because the observer was concerned about his own job (Interviewee 125, 2012). Thus, observers were crucial participants in our research because they provided in-depth corroboration of the extent of physical, mental, and

sexual abuse of crew members. The former observers were initially very distrustful, nervous, and particularly suspicious of our motives. Before agreeing to meet, they checked our bona-fides and when they did meet with us, checked our identification and wanted guarantees that they would never be identified.

Our Indonesian translators were fundamental for obtaining the trust of the Indonesian participants. Once we gained that trust, they viewed us as "someone who can provide them with an audience and a voice" (Lee, 1995, p. 15). Many of the Indonesian fishing crew members stated that they had experienced repeated emotional, physical, and even sexual abuse by the Korean officers over the many months they were on board the fishing vessels (see Simmons & Stringer, 2014; Stringer et al., 2014). Over time, they spoke very frankly about their experiences and feelings. This emotionally affected our translators, who carried the burden of knowledge. One commented, "I was very upset and disgusted . . . It is absolutely wrong. No human has the right to enslave another human. We are all equally human" (Translator 1). Another commented, "I remember vividly one morning feeling physically and mentally exhausted with this problem that seemed to just get bigger and bigger. And I could not see any direct and obvious solution. There was a sense of heaviness that overwhelmed me" (Translator 2). Translator 3, overcome by the enormity of the problem, frequently asked, "When will this ever end?"

For us, it was impossible not to empathize with our translators and participants. On one hand, crew members told us about their wives, children, and their aspirations, and of the need to work aboard foreign fishing vessels to buy a house, pay for their children's schooling, and to support their families. On the other hand, they recounted their dreadful ill-treatment and abuse. We were deeply moved by one interviewee, who tearfully recounted the repeated rape, of his friend, by a Korean officer, in the bunk below him (Interviewee 105, 2011). He continued to be distressed as his fear had prevented him from stopping the rapes. As we write, these very personal accounts still haunt us. In the words of Whiteman (2010), we "felt the pain, the injustice and the hopelessness right into [our] very core" (p. 328).

As our research findings became public knowledge through seminars and the media, we encountered increasing risk. We now detail some of our experiences: first, intimidation against us, the researchers, from people outside but connected to the participant group, that is, former employers and their private investigators; second, intimidation and threats aimed at the participants and their families; third, intimidation and threats targeted at our translators.

Intimidation of Researchers

As Van Maanen (1982) aptly puts it, a "reasonably well done study will make some people mad" (p. 147). During our research, we compiled information that was incriminating and commercially damaging. Private investigators were hired to investigate us to obtain information about our research and identify our participants. This caused us to be extremely cautious in our day-to-day activities and at times very anxious when we went to meet participants. We experienced heightened concerns after discovering one of our vehicles had been broken into as well as when an out-of-the-ordinary delivery was made to the same researcher's home. In addition to taking greater care in terms of our personal safety, we restricted the use of email and put into place enhanced data protection measures.

The university, where we are employed, received two Official Information Act (OIA) requests. The first was for the release of correspondence between us and certain individuals, and the second sought to obtain videos of illegal activities that occurred aboard a number of FCVs. While the OIA requests were legal, we were concerned that the release of information would potentially be dangerous to our participants and translators. Although the release of the information was denied by the university on a number of grounds, this was a very uncertain and stressful time for us. Furthermore, some in the industry used the media to claim that our research was "ludicrous and bizarre," that we were xenophobic, and that our research was funded by certain interests within the industry who sought to gain a monopoly (Field, 2011a, 2011b).

One evening, a direct confrontation occurred, when Indonesian crew members from one South Korean vessel and two of our translators accompanied us to dinner, following a meeting with government officials. Their meeting with crew members was independent of our own, and we invited the crew members to dine with us, as they had received no wages from their employer and were in effect relying on the charity of New Zealanders for food. At dinner, we encountered an incidence of situational danger (Lee, 1995) whereby our presence provoked hostility. By chance, the crew members' former employer and his wife were dining at the same restaurant as us. During dinner, some of the people who had participated in our study became agitated as the wife of their former employer took photos of them and made phone calls. They then noticed a second employer and his associates waiting outside the restaurant.

Clearly a confrontation was approaching. We asked the restaurant staff if we could leave through the back door to avoid the confrontation that was clearly imminent. They refused. As we left the restaurant, both former New Zealand employers as well as three of their associates were waiting for us. They subjected us to intimidation to the point we were fearful for the safety of the participants, the translators, and ourselves. We were stalked and photographed, and our vehicles were followed which forced us to take a series of evasive maneuvers over the next hour to lose them. While nothing of a violent nature occurred, the participants in our study were

left very shaken, as were our translators, and to a lesser degree ourselves. Some of the participants expressed their frustration that they felt unsafe and "were really afraid of the person inside the restaurant" (Interviewee 34, 2011). This incident caused us to be very mindful that ethical and risk management considerations had to be foremost on our minds. In fact, something as simple as dinner can put people in danger.

Intimidation of Potential Participants and Families

The intimidation of potential participants was widespread and not just restricted to the Indonesian fishing crew in New Zealand but also former crew in Indonesia. New Zealanders working in the fishing industry also experienced intimidation. Crew aboard different vessels were frequently told by Korean officers and a New Zealand agent not to talk to our translators. Some had no intention of doing so, but after being told so many times not to, they decided to make contact (Interviewees from a number of vessels, 2011). When the *Oyang 75* crew were engaged in industrial action in Christchurch, another South Korean FCV was diverted to another port and security guards were employed to ensure that crew members were confined to their vessel while in port. Their cell phones were also confiscated (Interviewee 121, 2011). Some crew members were followed when in port and others were threatened by their Indonesian agents that if they talked to our translators or to us, they would be sent home and denied future work (Interviewees 75, 87, and 88, 2011).

If crew members were sent home, this could result in the loss of the collateral they had signed over to manning agents to secure their jobs. Manning agents have considerable power over the crews and their families. While crews were on strike, their families in Indonesia were subject to intimidation and threats: "Agents in Indonesia contacted my family. My mom was shaking and crying" (Interviewee 35, 2011). Manning agents visited one crew member's family to obtain the motorbike which had been used as collateral (Interviewee 52, 2011). Another interviewee's wife was told by the manning agent to make sure her husband, on strike in New Zealand, went back to work, otherwise she would face a US$5,000 penalty (Interviewee 42, 2011). During the *Oyang 75* labor dispute, agents came to New Zealand to control the crew. The agents began to call in collateral and withhold wage payments (Interviewees 44, 53, 59, and 62, 2011). The intimidation of potential participants escalated when agents and private investigators from one Korean parent company traveled to Jakarta and in cooperation with manning agents, tracked down and interviewed returning crew, to determine who had disclosed information.

In mid-2011, we presented our preliminary findings to senior New Zealand government officials in confidence. During the presentation, we commented on one New Zealand company, which we saw as a positive exemplar in respect to their employment practices pertaining to Indonesian crew. Shortly afterward, the New Zealand company was told by an agent of a foreign charter operator that they were talking too much and to be quiet (Interviewee 90, 2011).

We were surprised to find that, like the Indonesian crew, New Zealand observers operated in a "climate of fear." They had been told by a manager "if you talk to anybody about what happens at sea, you will be fired . . . you will never work in this country again" (Interviewee 6, also Interviewees 16, 84, and 86, 2011). Private investigators also sought to discover which observers we had talked to (Interviewee 5, 2011). Thus, it took time to build up trust and rapport with them. Some refused to discuss information over the phone and would only meet at carefully selected remote locations. Following the release of our research, the climate of fear intensified and when interviewing one observer for the first time, we were required to show picture ID to verify our identity. Another observer, when meeting with us at his house, drew the curtains despite it being mid-day. Once it became known that observers were among the participants in our study, they were reminded of their contractual obligations by the Ministry of Fisheries[1]:

> You may be in a situation where you receive a request for information from the media, or another party, in regard to what you have observed while working as an Observer . . . As you do not have the authority to speak to the media, you must direct any media inquiry to the Manager of the Observer Programme. This also applies to requests for information from any other parties outside of the Ministry.[2]

The lengths to which certain factions in the fishing industry went to, to silence crew is perhaps best illustrated by an extension to our original research by renowned slavery expert, E. Benjamin Skinner. Published in *Bloomberg Businessweek* in February 2012, Skinner's article featured a crew member who he called Yusril and who was also one of our own participants. Within 36 hr of Skinner's article being published online, Yusril had been identified. He sent a text message to Skinner, "Strangers in my house. I'm very scared. Leaving with my family. Please help." Skinner contacted the U.S. Embassy in Indonesia who provided protection to Yusril. In a subsequent radio interview, an emotional Skinner (2012) stated,

> This is a message I have to send very directly to anyone who is harassing my sources. You can come after me on my journalism; my reporting on this piece is bullet proof . . . You can come after me as much as you like . . . but it is unconscionable to go after a 28 year old source, his 22 year old wife and their 1 year old son and drive them into hiding . . . that is as despicable a corporate practice as I have ever heard.

Intimidation of Translators

One of our translators found herself in a precarious situation. In an effort to break a deadlock with one vessel crew, our

translator recounted that a company director sought first to bribe her and at a subsequent meeting, stated in a menacing manner, "I am Korean and I can kill" to the point that she truly believed that if she did not convince the crew to go back to the vessel, her life would be in danger. In another incident, a Korean officer tried to physically strike her and was prevented from doing so by Indonesian crew members. Both these incidents were reported to authorities. For this translator, in particular, there have been emotional and physical costs. Working with the Indonesian crew and co-creating their emotionally charged experiences, she has struggled with health problems. Furthermore, during the fieldwork, a relative of one of our translators, a fisherman, returned to Indonesia to see family. While in Indonesia, he sought to renew his New Zealand work visa. However, he was unable to do so, as a New Zealand company had called his agent requesting that he be blacklisted because our translator was causing too many problems in New Zealand (Interviewee 22, 2011).

Discussion

Lee-Treweek and Linkogle (2000) assert that "risk and danger are often concealed aspects of social research" (p. 9). This quote aptly encapsulates aspects of the research journey we embarked upon. Our research into modern day slavery in New Zealand's fishing industry emerged out of our original research project into how internationalized fishing companies create, deliver, and capture value (Stringer, Simmons, & Rees, 2011). However, we soon discovered that fishing companies had a dark side. While we could have chosen not to pursue this research angle, it was important to fully understand the industry in the context of our wider research agenda, and so we persevered. At the "frontier," we were confronted with the FCV sector—insulated and isolated from the norms that prevail on land—operated by first-world fishing companies. After the first participants described their horrific treatment, the option to retreat was no longer available. To do so would have been morally wrong.

As Michailova et al. (2014) suggests, to gain the trust of our audience, we need to "provide rich details about how important decisions were made in the research process" (p. 154). We now go onto discuss some of the ethical dilemmas we faced—as Appell (1978) so fittingly puts it: "moral dilemmas are intrinsic to social inquiry" (p. ix). We also discuss the reasoning behind our key decisions as well as our coping strategies to address and manage the risks our participants, in particular, were encountering. Table 1 details a summary of the risks and the coping strategies we used to mitigate them.

Early on, we assessed the risks and seriousness of the problem with peers, after which we undertook interviews as a team. Dual interviewers working as a team is a common criminal investigation strategy that increases the robustness of interviews, while enhancing personal safety and security to mitigate risks in the field. It also permitted us to gain deeper insight into the issues, and in particular, non-verbal cues than if we had undertaken the interviews individually. Later events proved this to be a particularly wise and important decision. Frequently, we reflected on whether we could have further mitigated the risks that we, along with our participants, encountered or if we could have dealt with these situations differently. We would have changed little.

Mindful of bias, we were careful to remain objective during the research. This was important, as we engaged with one major employer and several recruitment agents to understand their perspectives; they were, however, very cautious in their dealings with us. Nonetheless, one senior executive admitted being responsible for the abuses but was emphatic that the pay and conditions were merely the industry standard. Several recruitment agents reinforced this.

In our interaction with participants, we applied what we knew about preventing risks to ensure their protection. This included meeting in safe and secure locations away from the vessels. Of key concern to us was adhering to the university's ethical practices and procedures. Faced with eye-witness accounts of outrageous behavior and serious criminality, we were confronted with a dilemma. On one hand, we had an ethical and moral obligation to report criminal behavior, particularly where it could put an end to ongoing human rights abuses. On the other hand, we also had to maintain the participant's trust and our obligations of confidentiality. Nonetheless, urgent action was required—ethically and morally reporting the maltreatment of migrant workers could not wait until the end of a potentially lengthy publication pipeline. Fortunately, the crew themselves had been urging us to publicize their desperate situation and they themselves had also been engaging with NGOs and officials. After taking further advice from senior colleagues, we decided that given the circumstances, the early reporting of our findings was warranted. This involved three key strategies. First, we acted quickly to share our findings with senior officials of a key government agency and immediately afterward with officials from two enforcement agencies. Two weeks later, the government launched a Ministerial Inquiry. The issues of concern inter alia included mistreatment and underpayment of crew, vessel safety standards, and breaches of fisheries and environmental laws.

Second, we decided to hold a seminar—initially planned as a departmental seminar but it soon evolved into a public seminar that attracted media attention. The seminar was held 6 weeks after we first approached senior officials. Through the seminar, we were able to contribute to the public debate (domestically and internationally) on these issues (Whiteman, 2010). Third was the release of an online working paper. Leading up to the seminar, media were making inquiries with the university. They, in turn, encouraged us to expedite the working paper, which was released publically a month after the seminar (Stringer, Simmons, &

Table 1. Summary of Risks and Coping Strategies.

	Risks encountered	Coping strategies to mitigate risk
To researchers	• Private investigators hired to investigate and follow researchers. • Direct intimidation by company officials and their associates—Stalking, photographs taken, and vehicles followed. • Press statements and reports made to government officials to discredit the research.	• Researchers worked in teams to increase the security and safety of researchers, participants, and translators. Extra vigilance to personal safety, employed additional data protection mechanisms. • Established 24/7 contact facility with university police liaison officers and closely liaised with senior colleagues. • Significantly increased the number of participants and the collection of corroborating data to enhance rigor.
To participants and families	• Employment at risk from breaching catch-all confidentially agreements, even if sharing information about criminal activities—Not protected by whistle-blowing laws. • Coerced into not talking to researchers and translators—Loss of pay and bonuses, loss of employment "conditions precedent" securities, and/or dismissal. • Pressured by manning agents to remain silent. Movement restricted to prevent participants engaging with others. Prohibited from making phone calls, cell phones confiscated. • Wives and parents intimidated into silencing participants. • Private investigators used to identify participants and to compel them to retract their interview data. • Private dissemination of research to officials can lead to the inadvertent identification of secondary participants.	• Interviewed at safe locations to ensure confidentiality, i.e., outside local mosques, at lawyers' offices, or at safe houses. • Participants complained to authorities to launch investigations to protect their rights. • Researchers engaged with senior government officials to report the extent of abuse that was occurring. • Participants engaged with NGOs for support and to highlight the wider implications of their plight. • Researchers released findings early, to mitigate risk to crew members. • Researchers were steadfast in maintaining the confidentiality of all participants, even when officials requested their details.
To translators	• Private investigators hired to identify and investigate translators. • Subjected to financial inducements to influence how the translators acted. • Intimidation of translators through threats to family members. • Direct physical threats to safety of translators.	• Translators socialized into the research team to share confidences, secure emotional support, and take informed advice. • All inducements, threats, and intimidation reported to researchers and authorities who provided support and a 24/7 contact facility. • Complaints made to authorities who launched investigations and warned vessel agents against contacting translators.

Coulston, 2011). The driver of our decision to quickly publicize our findings was to shine a spotlight on the crew's appalling inhumane treatment aboard some South Korean FCVs in New Zealand's waters. We were reminded that researchers "have a moral obligation to all groups or stakeholders affected by their research" (Wright, 2011, p. 501) and that ethical responsibilities continue beyond the research project "as one may have a lasting effect on research participants" (Liamputtong, 2007, p. 24; see also Humphries & Martin, 2000; Miller & Bell, 2002). We were particularly mindful of advice from the literature about the negative impact that disclosure of empirical findings can have on participants (e.g., Langford, 2000; Lee, 1993; Liamputtong, 2007). Yet, we were compelled to act so that our participants would not have to endure their appalling conditions, longer than was absolutely necessary.

Despite more than 100 complaints (Devlin, 2009; Stringer et al., 2014) about substandard working conditions for foreign crew since the early 1990s, enforcement agencies had determined in all cases that they were minor employment disputes and cases of workplace bullying. Our research was the catalyst needed for these agencies to undertake proper investigations. One agency subsequently launched a number of prosecutions, while the lead agency acknowledged that it had

> been unwilling or unable to fully resolve problems in the industry . . . a lack of action in the past has allowed the situation to deteriorate and this lack of oversight allowed the operators of many FCVs to exploit crew members under their control.[3]

Our research attracted international media attention (e.g., *Bloomberg BusinessWeek* and Agence France-Presse), which

put an international spotlight on the crew's plight. This led to improved oversight of the sector: A multi-agency government taskforce was formed, policy was reformed (e.g., immigration instructions, audit procedures, and enforcement policies), and legislation to further strengthen oversight was subsequently enacted by Parliament. Faced with increased monitoring and enforcement, vessel operators and officers improved their behavior. Subsequently, interviewees (14, 23, 70, and 79, 2012) reported that some of the insidious practices that prevailed—physical and sexual abuse—had declined, while wages had increased. In this way, our unforeseen journey through the looking glass into the dark side of international business led to a restructuring of the FCV sector that will ultimately provide better working conditions for migrant crew.

Conclusion

In this article, we addressed the gap identified by Michailova and Clark (2004) and Peterson (2000): the need to address methodological risks in the literature more explicitly. A reflection on risks encountered in the field, how these risks were managed, and the coping strategies implemented, along with the emotions involved, can aid in theorizing: "experience and evocation can *become theory*" (Kondo, 1990, p. 8). The lack of discussion around methodological risk is not only a shortcoming in the management and international business literatures but also an implicit deficit in research training. Often teaching content reflects what is available in the literature; primarily technical and rule-based in nature. Thus, management and international business literatures should in future address such issues. As Michailova et al. (2014) explain, "research method texts remain silent on the ways in which fieldwork affects us and our theorizing and how we affect the field" (p. 155).

Our key empirical contribution is the identification of three levels of explicit and tangible risk to researchers, participants and their families, and translators, as well as our coping responses in dealing with these risks. First, researchers can be subject to activities designed to influence or curtail their activities. This has important implications for researchers faced unexpectedly with risk and dangers in the field. Even though a research design meets institutional ethical requirements, it should also include a wider assessment of risk. Researchers need to be sensitive to the fact that some businesses may simultaneously undertake legitimate and illicit activities, and thus before commencing their research, researchers must determine the contextual idiosyncrasies of the industry. Second, participants can be exposed to levels of risk and danger designed to bring about their silence, or as we found, a retraction of their allegations. Consequently, trust and obligations of confidence are of the utmost importance, even when participants may release researchers from obligations of confidentiality. Researchers must also consider the fallout of their research, not only on the participants themselves but also on their families, particularly their children. Indeed, their safety is paramount. Moreover, translators, integral members of the team, are privy to researchers' information and, in the case of our translators, they also regulated access to participants. This was why our translators were targeted—to impede our ability to carry out the research. The risks and dangers faced by translators are far greater than those for researchers because the former may not enjoy the same institutional protections. Hence, every effort should be made to minimize risks to translators. As a matter of best practice, translators must be properly briefed and debriefed, particularly when the translator relates to psychological and emotional aspects of interviewees' lives.

Ultimately, academic researchers as the critique and conscience of society have a critical role to play where authorities refuse or fail to act. Thus, management and international business researchers ought to be more concerned with the illicit aspect of businesses. Neglecting illicit activities can lead to findings being distorted. Many previous studies had found that New Zealand's fisheries were world leading. Yet as we unexpectedly found, many of the more than 45,000 migrant workers who crewed rundown FCVs in New Zealand waters since 1983 were subjected to horrific inhumane labor practices. Clearly previous studies reflected but one side of reality. This needs to change.

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Notes

1. Now the Ministry of Primary Industries.
2. Email sent to Observers from the Ministry of Fisheries.
3. Department of Labour Memorandum on "Assessment of information re fishing industry," released under an Official Information Act request, June 6, 2012.

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