

No matter how knowledgeable you are in theoretical linguistics, no matter how skilled you are in techniques of description and analysis, you're not going to achieve what you set out to do if you are sick or dead.
(Newman 1992: 3)

Health in the field, as anywhere, depends in part on the diet available. Researchers typically have to balance their desire for a supply of fresh and attractive foods of the kinds they enjoy with their desire to avoid spending a large portion of their time cooking, shopping, or even growing food or hunting and gathering it... We note that the single most frequently mentioned arrangement for food preparation is to hire a local cook and have that person do the cooking (and usually the shopping as well). (Howell 1990: 57)

(iv) Gender and sex.

Clearly a woman—especially a single woman—going into the field has to be prepared to face what the anthropological literature quaintly calls ‘hustling’.

(v) Emotional reactions and culture shock.

Frank discussions of individual's experiences and a good reading list would be invaluable. Students should be familiar with the concept of culture shock and its many manifestations. I know now that things like uncontrollable crying and loss of self-confidence in one's work are commonplace. Although knowing such things intellectually may not provide complete protection from feeling them, it does usually help to know one is not alone in one's reactions.

... one characteristic does seem to stand out in all the accounts of fieldwork that I am familiar with. I am referring to the associated problems of disorientation, worry, depression, fatigue, loneliness, stress, and the like. (Wengle 1988: xviii)

p. 471 (vi) Missionaries.

No matter what one's religious beliefs are, and no matter what one thinks about the goals and methods of missionary organizations, a non-missionary fieldworker may have to deal with the issue of missionary linguists who have preceded him or her. For me this was a real problem, since I encountered attitudes ranging from mild suspicion to downright hostility based on the assumption that all linguists are missionaries. During a later field trip, my companion and I were even denied permission to work in a neighbouring town because the authorities assumed (and could not be convinced otherwise) that we were missionaries. My point here is simply to emphasize that a beginning fieldworker should be forewarned about the potential problems that they might face due to the prior presence of missionaries, and should understand the religious politics of the place that they go to.