

Cross-Cultural Worker Singles Issues: Safety & Security

John locked the gate as he left the agency compound about noon and hailed a passing taxi. He gave the driver the address and sat back in the seat. About a block down the street, the driver pulled over to pick up another passenger who climbed in and sat on John's left. In the next block the driver pulled over to pick up a passenger who climbed in on the right.

It was too late when he realized that he was being robbed, and all he could do was give them nearly \$1000 of agency money as the thieves took him to another part of town and dropped him off. As the taxi pulled away he was glad he had not been harmed, but he felt foolish that he had lost the money and realized that he, a TCK, should have known better.

As darkness fell one summer evening Mary set out to walk a few blocks up the street to meet Sally so they could work on their report due at the end of the week. She was thinking about what they would say in the report when she suddenly realized that the man behind her was following her. She could barely see him in the twilight, but when she walked faster, so did he, and when she slowed down so did he.

Her heart began to pound, and she could not remember where there was a store she could enter quickly and feel safe. Finally she saw a pharmacy across the street where she could go, and she watched him pass on by. Then she realized he was one of her English students.

John did not think that he had a lack of security and safety, but he did. Mary thought that she was not safe and secure, but she was.

Let us consider safety and security in several important settings: at home, on the streets, on public transportation, and in public places.

In Your Dwelling

Use everything available for your safety and security. Be careful not to become complacent and leave things open. If you live in a house, you may be protected by a wall or fence around the lot as well as the locks on the doors. Each door may have a lock in the door knob as well as a deadbolt elsewhere on the door, so keep both locked. Make sure that these security items really work. The fence or wall may have a gate that can be locked as well. Keep all doors and gates locked.

If you live in an apartment building there may be a lock on the entrance to the building as well as one on the door into your apartment. Certainly keep your apartment door locked, and if other tenants lock the building entrance, you lock it as well.

When a man knocks on the door or rings the bell at the door or gate, open it only if you know him. If it is at a gate in the wall, you can see him there. If you have a peephole in the door, and you cannot see a woman who is there, ask her to step back so that you can see her clearly. If a child is knocking, look for any adults that may be there too.

Be careful of people claiming to be from a utility provider and do all you can to verify that is really who they are. Also get to know your neighbors who may be sources of safety when you need it most.

On the Street

It is best to walk or jog with friends because there is safety in numbers. Even adding one friend or walking a dog on a leash

may be helpful. However, sometimes people need to walk alone, and here are several things that will increase your safety.

- Be aware of your surroundings.
- Stay in populated areas.
- Use busy streets.
- Avoid isolated areas.
- Try to remain always in sight of others.
- Don't wear headphones so that you can hear people approaching from behind.
- Select places of refuge along your route.
- Carry your cell phone with safe numbers on speed dial to use if things turn bad.
- Use various routes to the same destination.
- Keep some identification hidden on you.
- Carry a wallet with some cash that you can give if robbed.
- Be careful of people who "need" assistance.
- Walk purposefully and confidently
- Avoid "bad" parts of town.
- Avoid crowds or demonstrations.

On Public Transportation

Several kinds of public transportation are often available. They vary on how many people are involved and how far they are traveling together. A taxi involves just a few people sharing the vehicle on relatively short trips. Busses and subways involve many people and trips anywhere in the city. Planes and trains involve many people and very long distances, often across the country or to other continents.

Probably calling a taxi and waiting for it to come pick you up is the safest way to go. That means you do not have to spend time on the street waiting to hail a taxi, and you know that it is likely a reputable driver. You can

wait in a safe building and just walk to the taxi as it arrives. When hailing a taxi, be sure you know how to pick a safe taxi, often one radio dispatched by a reputable company. Hailing a taxi at random carries the risk of entering a vehicle where you may find yourself alone with a driver or in a group who may have robbery or assault in mind.

Riding a bus or subway may involve crowds of people often pushing against you as you enter or leave the vehicle. Holding on to something for support as you ride also makes you vulnerable to pickpockets. Carry important papers, credit cards, and cash in some way that no one can get them from you.

Travel by rail or air involves long trips during which you may sleep sitting beside strangers, or you may sit next to an aisle in which many strangers pass and can take anything in sight when you leave your seat. Boarding or leaving is much like a bus or subway. Do not dress in "expensive" clothing or flash money around so that people get the impressions you are wealthy. People have been followed several miles before being robbed or assaulted.

In Public Places

Wherever you are, be aware of your surroundings. If you feel uneasy about a situation, pay attention to those uneasy feelings and leave or call for help. Nearly everyone will frequently be in churches, restaurants, and retail stores as well as markets. Consider where you want to be in these places.

In church some missionaries want to sit with special groups, such as children or teenagers, and this is good. Some prefer to sit near the door to greet people as they come

in or to make contact with any who leave the service early.

People vary in where they prefer to sit while eating in a restaurant. Some prefer to sit in a booth rather than at a table out in the dining area. Others want to have a wall at their back. Still others want to face the door so that they are likely to notice danger if it enters.

While shopping in stores or markets, keep an eye on what is happening around you. Avoid dangerous sections of town if possible without compromising your ministry. When in these public areas nationals may try to “connect” with you. Here are some suggestions that are often culturally acceptable

- Dress modestly
- Ignore “Cat calls.”
- No answer is better than anything you can say.
- Do not make eye contact.
- Keep walking if alone and no others present.
- If friendly vendors are along the street, stop and talk with them.

Male- Female Differences: Bible and Today

Up to this point there have been few differences between males and females related to safety and security. However, some issues are different depending on the cultures where they are serving. In some cultures where they serve, women are quite vulnerable to the actions of national men.

- New Testament. Some religious leaders asked Jesus if they should stone a woman caught in the act of adultery. They noted that their Law commanded that. They ignored the fact their law also commanded them to stone the man (John 8:1-5). Their culture treated men and women differently.

- Old Testament. The religious leaders were quoting from Deuteronomy 22, a passage that refers not only to married women but also singles. The Old Testament culture also treated men and women differently. Consider these:
 1. An engaged woman should be stoned to death if she did not scream for help when raped in town (v. 24).
 2. If a man raped an unengaged virgin, and they are discovered, he must marry her and can never divorce her; however, he must pay her father 50 pieces of silver (vs. 28-29),

Some cultures today have similar laws, so single women must be very careful about how they interact with men. Remember that most men have internalized at least part of their culture’s view of women. It is best to be friendly without being flirtatious. Be polite and acknowledge others by culturally appropriate means. Be a “friend” without soliciting unwanted attention. If you show fear, you may come across as an easy target. If they give unwanted attention, immediately let them know, in a culturally appropriate way, that you are not interested.

This does not mean that single women need to be suspicious of every male. Some men may be genuinely interested in the message the woman is bringing; however, others may be interested in a green card or sexual contact right then. Likewise, single males may be approached by women seeking God, but others are interested in a husband or in prostituting themselves for needed money.

All singles have to make decisions about interacting with nationals of the opposite sex. Be aware of what can happen, open to God’s leading, and consider fully what others in your agency tell you.

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