

Ethical challenges of researching the exposure of informal outdoor workers to the health impacts of climate change in urban Vietnam

Wellcome Trust Climate Impacts Award

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Who are these workers?

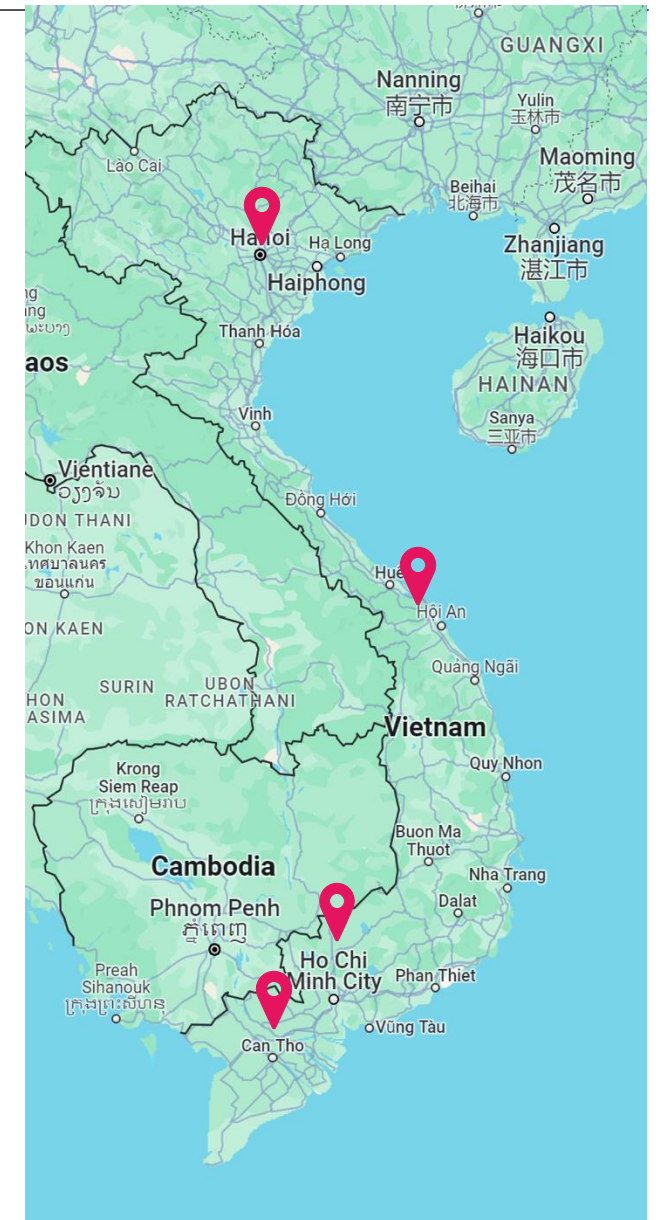
- street vendors,
- construction workers,
- porters, and
- motorbike taxi riders,

who play pivotal roles in sustaining urban economies but often experience **multiple marginalisations**.



Project Background (Feb 2024- July 2026)

- ❖ Examines the **health risks and adaptive capacities of informal outdoor workers** under conditions of climate change in four major cities in Vietnam: Hanoi, Danang, Ho Chi Minh City and Can Tho.
- ❖ Focuses on **street vendors, construction workers, porters, and motorbike taxi riders**
- ❖ **Use mixed methods and co-construction** to assess their exposure, health vulnerabilities and adaptive capacities and strategies to climate-related hazards
- ❖ Aim to **protect workers' health** and support a shift towards a **health-centric approach** to climate adaptation and mitigation in policymaking.



Three Ethical Issues

- ❖ Risks of reprisal for workers participating in the research
- ❖ Intersectional vulnerabilities other than climate change
- ❖ Turning academic research into social policy



(I) Risks of reprisal for workers participating in the research

- ❖ We **engage with workers directly** in the research process to give workers a voice in shaping our evidence base
- ❖ However, empowerment has its risks
- ❖ Workers may face reprisals from authorities or employers, particularly given their lack of legal protections.
- ❖ To address these risks, we prioritise safeguarding:
 - ✓ informing participants of potential risks,
 - ✓ obtaining informed consent in accessible language, and
 - ✓ carefully anonymising data to protect their identities.



(II) Intersectional vulnerabilities other than climate change

- ❖ Outdoor workers face a **multitude of vulnerabilities**, including chronic job insecurity, exclusion from basic health and social protections, lack of residency or citizenship status, etc.
- ❖ We must ensure that **climate risks do not overshadow these immediate, critical concerns**, such as daily subsistence and human rights.
- ❖ We take an **intersectional approach**, recognising that climate-related risks often exacerbate existing inequalities for these workers.
- ❖ This approach helps us to avoid presenting climate resilience as a competing priority with basic livelihood needs.

Beyond silos

Vulnerability to climate change is mainly not about climate change but is a layered, multi-dimensional vulnerability with multiple sources that make people susceptible to the effects of climate change



(III) Translating research into policy

We face many ethical challenges in bridging the gap between academic research and actionable policy interventions.

- ❖ How to undertake research that frames the issue in a non-reductionist way?
- ❖ How to ensure that research is translated into policy recommendations that are attuned to local governance realities?
- ❖ How to ensure that these recommendations are communicated, taken seriously and, where appropriate, acted upon?

Research into policy. Why wouldn't you?

- Normatively, research *should* have 'relevance' and 'impact'. It makes academic endeavours meaningful
- Normatively, policy makers *should* take advantage of academic research. It has the potential to improve policy making



Conclusion

- 1. Participatory research** that values workers' lived experiences is essential. However, this must be managed carefully to prevent exploitation or further risk to participants.
- 2. Interdisciplinary research** is also instrumental, although it is challenging to navigate varying methodological preferences, specialised languages, and evaluation of evidence.
- 3. Co-construction** can address these challenges by establishing shared understandings at an early stage and holding regular knowledge-sharing sessions throughout the project period to foster a culture of openness that respects and integrates diverse disciplinary and cultural perspectives.



Thank you!

