

# Week 7 Ethical Issues in Social Work Research

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# Overview

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- Ethical Guidelines in Social Work Research
- NASW Code of Ethics
- Institutional Review Boards
- Bias and Insensitivity Regarding Culture and Gender

# Ethical Guidelines in Social Work Research

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- Voluntary Participation
- Informed Consent
- No Harm/Distress to participants
- Protect Subject's Privacy & confidentiality
- No Deception

# Ethical Guidelines in Social Work Research

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- Anonymity and Confidentiality
  - *Anonymity- subject does not provide identifying information; identity of subjects is not known.*
  - *Confidentiality- Subject provide identifying information; researcher knows identity of subjects but promises not to reveal it.*
  - *Never use the term anonymous to mean confidential*

# Ethical Guidelines in Social Work Research

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- Deceiving Participants
  - Deception is unethical, and if it is necessary it must be justified by compelling scientific or administrative concerns
- Analysis and Reporting
  - Negative findings should be reported
  - Do not imply that unexpected findings were hypothesized or expected

# NASW Code of Ethics

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- (b) Social workers should strive to become and remain proficient in professional practice and the performance of professional functions. Social workers should critically examine and keep current with emerging knowledge relevant to social work. Social workers should routinely review the professional literature and participate in continuing education relevant to social work practice and social work ethics.
- (c) Social workers should base practice on recognized knowledge, including empirically based knowledge, relevant to social work and social work ethics.

# Ethical Controversies

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- Observing Human Obedience
- Trouble in the Tearoom
- Social Worker Submits Bogus Article to Test Journal Bias

A close-up photograph of a human brain, showing its characteristic folds and grooves. The brain is centered in the frame. Overlaid on the brain is a dark, semi-transparent rectangular box with a white border. Inside this box, the text "5 UNETHICAL EXPERIMENTS" is written in a bold, white, sans-serif font. The number "5" is significantly larger than the other text. The background of the entire image is a solid, vibrant green color.

# 5 UNETHICAL EXPERIMENTS

*Sci Show*

# Institutional Review Boards

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- Studies involving human subjects need to obtain approval from an independent panel of professionals called an Institutional Review Board (IRB)
- IRB responsibilities:
  - Identify risks and clarify whether risks are minimized or not
  - Indicate that risks to subjects are reasonable in relation to the anticipated benefits to subjects
  - Determine that subjects are appropriately informed about any reasonable foreseeable risks or discomforts due to participation

## A. PROTOCOL DESCRIPTION

*(Note: incomplete or handwritten responses will be returned without review)*

1. **PURPOSE** Briefly describe the context and goals of your research project. Summarize the background, nature, rationale and significance of the proposed study. In outline form, clearly state the objectives of the research.
2. **SUBJECTS** Describe the involvement of the human subjects in this project. Who are the subjects? What will they be doing? How many subjects will be involved in the project? What is the relationship (if any) between the researcher and the subjects?
3. **RECRUITING** Specify how subjects will be recruited (e.g. advertisements, announcements in class, e-mail, internet, etc.). **NOTE:** Be aware of privacy provisions when designing recruitment activities.
4. **DURATION** Indicate the duration of anticipated research as applicable **from the viewpoint of the participant** (the length of each session and the number of sessions).
5. **SETTING/LOCATION** Describe the setting (e.g., a classroom) and the location (e.g., name of school) where the research will be conducted. *(NOTE: If research is to be conducted at another institution or facility (e.g. a school, community center, place of business, etc.) a signed copy of the permission letter from that institution authorizing the researcher to collect data on its grounds must be attached).*
6. **OBTAINING CONSENT** State in detail your plans for obtaining each subject's informed consent to participate in this project Describe how this information will be conveyed to subjects. **BE SPECIFIC!** Outline the steps chronologically (attach copy of informed consent form). **NOTE:** *At least 2 copies of the forms should be handed out to participants, with one for them to sign, date and hand back and one for them to keep for their records. If research involves minors, explain in detail the assent process. Attach copy of verbal assent script or written assent form. An additional ICF must be submitted in case the participants are being photographed or recorded via digital media.*
7. **BENEFITS** Explain benefits of participating in the study **for participants**. If none, state this. Then explain the benefits of the study in general and to the public. List all possible or expected benefits.

8. **RISKS** One of the key elements of an expedited project is that there are minimal risks to the participants. First, describe any possible risks (physical, psychological, sociological, legal, financial, or other) that can result from participation in this project. Then, describe how there are only minimal risks to participants for taking part in your study.
9. **PRIVACY & CONFIDENTIALITY** These are separate issues. You must address both. **Privacy** applies to the person (e.g., how potential participants are identified and contacted; who is present during the research activities; how public is the setting; is the researcher accessing the minimum amount of information necessary). **Confidentiality** applies to the data (e.g., identifiable data; access to data; under what circumstances data may be shared) Describe in detail how privacy will be protected and confidentiality will be maintained.
10. **STORAGE** Specify how you will keep your data secure, and maintain confidentiality during and after the research. Be specific and describe how data will be stored throughout the duration of the project and upon its completion. PLEASE NOTE THAT ALL CONSENT FORMS AND DATA MUST BE KEPT UNDER LOCK AND KEY FOR 5 YEARS.
11. **DISPOSAL** Describe how you will ultimately dispose of your data after you have completed your research (e.g. shredding). PLEASE NOTE THAT ALL RESEARCH RECORDS MUST BE MAINTAINED FOR AT LEAST FIVE YEARS AFTER THE COMPLETION OF THE RESEARCH.

Expedited IRB Review

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12. **MEASURES** Are you using any scales or instruments you did not create yourself? If so, list the names of those scales and provide a copy of the permission to use the instrument. If it is in the public domain, please indicate below. If you purchased the scale, provide proof of purchase.

## B. SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS

# Bias and Insensitivity Regarding Culture and Gender

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- Bias and insensitivity about gender and culture have become ethical issues for many social scientists
- Gender and cultural bias and insensitivity can hinder the methodological quality of a study and therefore the validity of its finding

# Discussion

- While parents await their children in the waiting room of a Child Guidance Center, the center's social worker staff instructs them to complete a questionnaire on child-rearing attitudes. The staff will use the findings of this study to prepare a proposal for funding for a parent education program.
- A community organizer decides to observe and interview people, and write about a demonstration against police brutality that is expected to be a lawful. The demonstration unexpectedly becomes violent, and property is destroyed. Law enforcement officials show up and demand that the organizer identify people observed breaking the law. Rather than risk arrest as an accomplice after the fact, the organizer complies.

# Discussion

- Social workers in a battered women's program conduct an evaluation of the effectiveness of the services provided by the program, hoping to bring visibility and resources to the program by publishing the findings. The findings, however, unexpectedly indicate that the services are not effective. In light of these findings the social workers decide they must not have conducted a proper study of the services that they are convinced are effective, and they decided not to let anyone know about the study.
- Two social work students decide to carry out their class research project by observing the nocturnal activities at a shelter for the homeless. The shelter has a limited number of beds and cannot accommodate everyone seeking housing. The two students show up and wait in line early enough to get beds and then watch and record the goings on at night while they pretend to be asleep.

# Discussion

- A new intervention is advertised as an extremely effective and powerful grief therapy for posttraumatic stress disorder among victims of sexual assaults. Although sufficient resources exist to provide this treatment to all clients at a rape crisis center, the decision is made to provide it to only half the clients, so its effects can be compared to the effects of the center's routine services.