

Week 7 Ethical Issues in Social Work Research

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Overview

- Ethical Guidelines in Social Work Research
- NASW Code of Ethics
- Institutional Review Boards
- Research with Special Populations
- Bias and Insensitivity Regarding Culture and Gender
- Ethical Things to Consider

Ethical Guidelines in Social Work Research

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

Ethical Guidelines in Social Work Research

- 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

- 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 already hypothesized or expected

NASW Code of Ethics

- D) Social workers engaged in evaluation or research should carefully consider possible consequences and should follow guidelines developed for the protection of evaluation and research participants. Appropriate institutional review boards should be consulted.
- E) Social workers engaged in evaluation or research should obtain **voluntary** and **written informed consent** from participants, when appropriate, without any implied or actual deprivation or penalty for refusal to participate; without undue inducement to participate; and with due regard for participants' well-being, **privacy, and dignity**. Informed consent should include information about the nature, extent, and duration of the participation requested and **disclosure of the risks and benefits of participation** in the research.

Ethical Controversies

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

Trouble in the Tearoom

- Published in a 1970 book called *Tearoom Trade: Impersonal Sex in Public Places*. Researcher Laud Humphreys wanted to study homosexual acts between strangers meeting in public restrooms in parks; the restrooms are called “tea-rooms” by those who used them for this purpose. Typically, the tearoom encounter involved three people: the two men actually engaged in the homosexual act and a lookout. To gather observations for his study, Humphreys began showing up at public restrooms and offering to serve as a lookout whenever it seemed appropriate. Humphreys wanted to go beyond his observations as lookout and learn more about the people he was observing. Many of the participants were married men who wanted to keep their homosexuality secret and thus avoid being stigmatized and losing their status in their communities. They probably would not have consented to being interviewed. Instead of asking them for an interview, Humphreys tried to note the license plate numbers of their vehicles and then track down their names and addresses through the police. Then disguising himself enough to avoid recognition, he visited the men at their homes and announced that he was conducting a survey. In that fashion, he collected the personal information he was unable to get in the restrooms.

Bogus Article

- The social worker, William Epstein, started with the hypothesis that journal editors were biased in favor of publishing research articles whose findings confirmed the effectiveness of evaluated social work interventions and biased against publishing research articles whose findings failed to support the effectiveness of tested interventions. To test his hypothesis, Epstein fabricated a fictitious study that pretended to evaluate the effectiveness of a social work intervention. Epstein concocted two versions of the bogus study. In one version, he fabricated findings that supported the effectiveness of the intervention; in the other version, he fabricated data that found the intervention to be ineffective. Epstein submitted the fictitious article to 146 journals. Half of the journals received the version that supported the effectiveness of the intervention, and half received the other version. Epstein did not enter his own name as author of his fabricated article, instead using a pair of fictitious names.

A human brain is shown from a top-down perspective, rendered in a light blue color. A dark grey rectangular box with a white border is superimposed over the center of the brain. 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 light blue color.

5 UNETHICAL EXPERIMENTS

Sci Show

Institutional Review Boards (IRB)

- 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 reasonably foreseeable risks or discomforts due to participation

IRB Proposal

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.

IRB Proposal

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

Research with Special Populations

Children

- Minors under age 18 CANNOT give informed consent
- Consent vs. Assent
 - Assent: The agreement of someone not able to give legal consent to participate in the activity
- Involving parents in knowledge regarding evaluation
- Unique needs of children in evaluation

Waiver of Parental Consent

- IRB may waive the parental permission requirement if it determines that a subject population for which parental or guardian permission is not a reasonable requirement to protect the subjects.
- This waiver might apply to studies involving neglected or abused children, or older adolescents presenting in medical situations wherein a parental consent requirement might deter the child from seeking needed care (e.g., seeking care at an STD clinic).
- The researcher should still get child assent
- *Remember that you cannot determine whether a waiver should be granted—only the IRB can do this*

Research with Special Populations

Persons with diminished capacity

- Evaluation conducted with those with intellectual disability or dementia require special consideration
- Research and evaluation on these populations requires consent from a family member or legal guardian
- Need for consideration of appropriate communication of informed consent and assent
- Severely mentally ill persons (e.g. those with schizophrenia) can give consent unless having an acute episodes

Effective Life Planning - Consent Form



Have you read the information sheet? YES NO



Have you had the chance to ask questions
and talk about the project? YES NO



Do you feel happy with the answers you
Have been given? YES NO



Do you understand that it is your choice
to help with the study? YES NO



Do you understand that you will be videoed
as part of the study? YES NO



Do you understand that you can stop helping
with the project at any time? YES NO

You do not have to say why you want to stop.
It will not affect your health care.



Are you happy to take part in the study? YES NO

Research with Special Populations

Prisoners

- History of egregious human rights violations
- The study must present potential benefits in understanding incarceration and prisoners' needs and it must incur minimal risk and inconvenience for the prisoner
- IRB must do full review, but prison may not approve project

Other Ethical Issues in Research

- Cultural competence
- Methodologies
 - Compensation and incentive payments
 - Use of control groups
 - Quasi-experimental research
 - Confidentiality: Quantitative vs. Qualitative



Bias and Insensitivity Regarding Culture and Gender

- 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

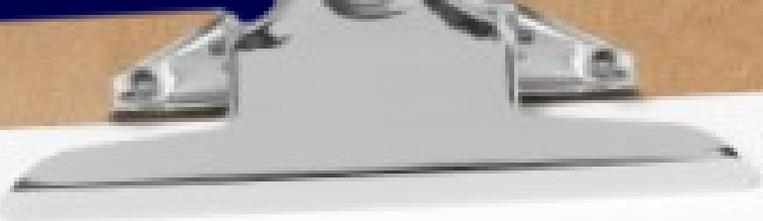
Example of Harm to Subjects

- having them face aspects of themselves that they do not normally consider.
- asking them to reveal their unpopular attitudes.
- asking them to identify their deviant behavior.
- allowing them to easily identify themselves in the final report.

How to deal with ethical dilemma?

- Examine your options carefully
- Conduct a literature review
- Check the NASW Code of Ethics for guidance
- Discuss the problem with colleagues and professional whose opinions you respect
- Ask for consultation from the nearest IRB
- Talk with your supervisor





Checklist for Informed Consent Forms

- How the research subject was chosen or invited to participate and how many will be involved
- Who is conducting the study
- The purpose of the study
- Where the study will take place and how long it will last
- What is required of the research subject
- Possible risk or discomforts
- Possible benefits of participation
- Alternatives associated with non-participation
- Any costs of participation
- Payment or incentive for taking part in the study
- Stopping or ending participation
- What happens if medical attention is needed
- Who can answer questions about the project

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 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.

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.