

RESEARCH METHODS

Workshop 1: Ethics

Research ethics ... why?

- Ethics are incredibly important when carrying out psychological research and refer to correct 'rules' of conduct that are necessary to adhere to
- Ethics are the moral principles by which we conduct ourselves as researchers
- Ethical considerations are necessary as they act as considerations of what is acceptable to do in a study
 - *Researchers always have to balance between what they want to find out and the rights of the participants*

BPS Code of Human Research Ethics

- The BPS Code of Human Research Ethics provides these guidelines for psychologists carrying out research



- Students and professionals alike have this obligation
- In the case of professionals, we are governed by the BPS
 - *Power to impose sanctions against individuals and institutions*
 - *Imposed on students (and professionals) by an ethics panel within the institution comprised of professionals within the field*

But why?!

- We need to ensure no undue harm is caused to participants or animal subjects
- To counteract power issues
 - i.e., your protection against researchers' evil ideas!

Ethics

Psychologists deal with people in many contexts:

- Students on psychology courses
- Participants in research studies
- Patients
- Clients in business settings
- And sometimes animals..

Human beings and animals are sentient living things – they can experience fear, pain, etc

We are thinking creatures who are capable of feeling guilt, embarrassment, etc, which is why we need safeguards.

Ethical guidelines



The British Psychological Society

Promoting excellence in psychology

- Can be accessed on the BPS website:
 - <https://www.bps.org.uk/news-and-policy/bps-code-human-research-ethics-2nd-edition-2014>

Respect

Integrity

Responsibility

Benefit and Harm

Four ethical principles

The main issues

Respect for our clients/participants

- The right to informed consent
- The right to withdraw from studies / treatment
- The right to be fully informed of the study they are taking part in

The main issues

Integrity

- We report our findings truthfully and honestly – even if they aren't what we wanted to see!
- We respect the work of others, even if we disagree with it
 - *Prove it wrong scientifically!*

Responsibility

- We are in positions of trust and must not abuse this!

The main issues

Benefit and Harm:

– *Beneficence and Nonmaleficence*

- The benefits of the research versus the harm that can be caused by the research
- In human testing we aim for no harm at all... but what about animals?
- Is temporary distress harmful? What is the research is highly significant?

Main considerations (BPS)

Informed consent

Deception

Right to withdraw

Protection from harm

Debrief

Confidentiality

Informed consent

- Participants must give fully informed consent to take part in any research.
 - ❖ The purpose of the research
 - ❖ Any procedures involved
 - ❖ Any foreseeable risks or discomfort
 - ❖ Benefits of the research
 - ❖ Length of time
 - ❖ Rights of the participant (confidentiality, withdraw, etc)
 - ❖ Details of the researcher

Informed consent

- Participants must give fully informed consent to take part in any research.

It may be necessary to withhold certain information!

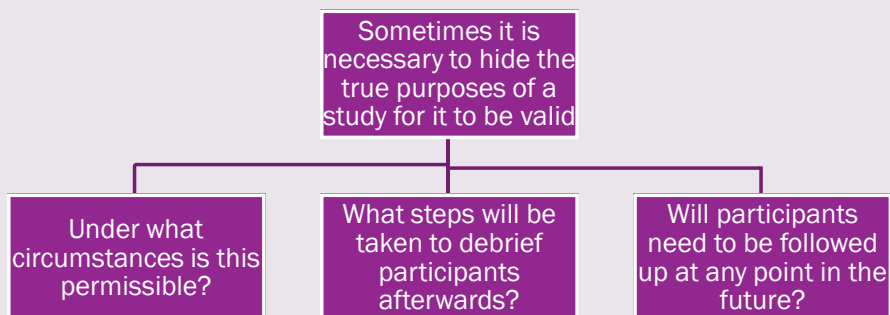
For example, if it would inform the participant what the study is about and influence their responses or if there is no other way to carry out the study

- ❖ Details of the researcher

Deception

- Where participants are misled or wrongly informed about the aims of the research
- Sometimes necessary in order to avoid demand characteristics
- Participants must be deceived as little as possible; however, if deception is necessary, the true nature must always be revealed in the debrief with the opportunity to withdraw data

Deception



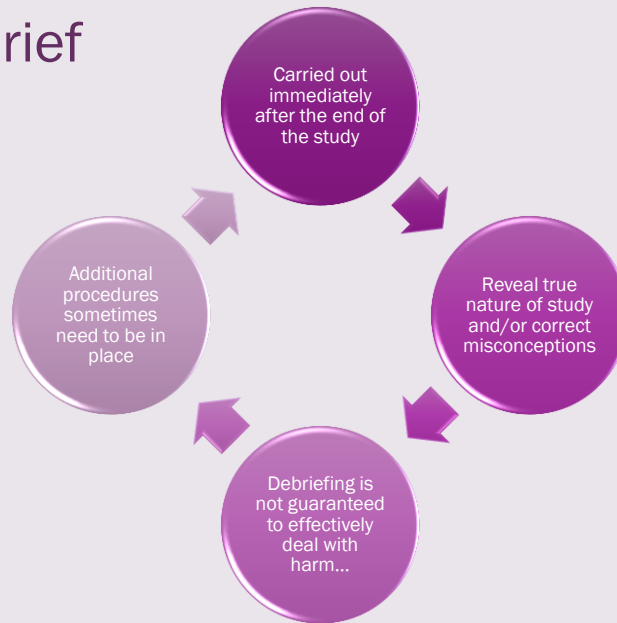
Right to withdraw

- Acts as a failsafe for informed consent
 - *The right to withdraw **at any time without fear of penalty***
- From the start of the study, participants should be informed of their right to withdraw
- Right to withdraw should also be included in the debrief
 - *Participants can withdraw their data following the study if they are uncomfortable following the debrief*

Protection from harm

- Participants must be protected from physical and mental/psychological harm
- Participants should not be made to feel embarrassed, frightened or offended
- The risk of harm should be no greater than what any individual would encounter in their ordinary life...

Debrief



Debrief

- Participants must **always** be fully debriefed at the end of the study, which must include full disclosure of the nature of the study (aims and hypotheses) and the opportunity to withdraw data

Anonymity / Confidentiality

- Up until the end of the debrief, it is the participants – they are entitled to withdraw or even rip up your debrief form if they don't like what they hear!

Confidential:

- *data will be stored so participants can ask for data to be removed/destroyed at any point after the study*

Anonymous:

- *it cannot be destroyed after the debrief as there is no way to tell which is their data!*

Anonymity / Confidentiality

- Is your data:
 - a) confidential?
 - b) anonymous?

Confidential:

- ❖ How will you ensure any hard copies or electronic data is stored confidentially?
- ❖ Locked filing cabinets, password-protected files, etc

Anonymous:

- ❖ Any identifiable information from questionnaires, transcripts, etc should be removed – replaced with a unique ID number.
- ❖ Consent forms should be stored separately from main data
- ❖ Qualitative data must use pseudonyms or ID numbers in place of real names

Other issues...

- Consent for children
 - *You need to be very careful if using children under the age of 18 for your research.*
 - *Some children aged 16 and upwards may be judged competent to give consent themselves; other will need parental consent to take part*
- Potential for distress and anxiety
 - *"I wasn't worried until I completed this questionnaire"*



YOUR TASK!

Famous psychological studies and their ethical issues