

Part One: Ethics Scenarios

Imagine you are a member of a University Research and Ethics Committee. The purpose of this committee is to ensure that all research carried out is a) based on appropriate scientific research methods and b) is ethical. For each of the following scenarios consider the following:

- Does the proposed method suit the type of research question?
- Is there a better alternative way of answering this question?
- What are the potential limitations of the proposed research and how could the research team deal with these?
- What are the ethical issues associated with this research?
- What further information is needed in order to fully evaluate these proposals?

Research Proposal 1

A researcher is interested in exploring why some people may be more likely to help others in need. The researcher intends to hold a focus group and explore the reasons why people may help others, why they may decide not to help others and how often they engage in helping behaviour.

Research Proposal 2

A student wants to explore the effects of alcohol on perceived attractiveness of members of the opposite sex. The student intends to mix some alcohol with a soft drink and to give the participant a questionnaire rating attractiveness of female photos before and after. The student will not tell the participant that he/she has been given alcohol.

Research Proposal 3

A researcher wants to explore people's implicit attitudes towards gay couples, using a computer-based task. Participants will be told that the purpose of the study is to explore processes of visual attention.

Research Proposal 4

A research team wants to explore the psychological impact of going cancer surgery. The research team wish to give patients questionnaires measuring anxiety, distress, negative emotions and coping styles one day before surgery, one day after surgery, three months later, five months later, 6 months later and at one –year follow-up. They also wish to interview some patients about their experience before and after surgery.

Part Two: Ethics Panels

For this session you will be taking on the role of an ethics panel. Below are summaries of two studies all of which have been submitted by researchers to your ethics panel for consideration. You are to get into groups of 5-6 people, read these summaries and discuss them with the other members of your panel considering the following:

- What are the ethical issues raised by this study?
- Consider issues such as the sample and how they are to be recruited, informed consent, the methods used, possible problems that may arise, confidentiality, and potential benefits of the study.
- Consider aspects of the study that you consider ethically commendable as well as ethically dubious.
- Would you give ethical clearance for the study to go ahead? If not, why not?
- Are there any additional procedures that you would insist on to ensure the study is ethical before giving approval?

Study 1: Observational study of adolescent gambling in UK amusement arcades

Background

- This observational field study will explore the social world of slot machine playing using data collected via the monitoring of several UK amusement arcades. It will aim to examine the level of adolescent gambling, the behavioural characteristics of arcade clientele and the players' motivations for gambling.

Methodology

- Participant and non-participant observation methods will be used, and on occasion informal interviews with participants will also be conducted. In participant observation, the researcher will pose as a 'punter'. Data will be anonymous, confidential and be recorded onto a pocket tape recorder, although on occasions immediate retrospective notes will also be taken. Observation sessions will take place between 11am and 9.30pm. Session length will vary between 30 mins and 3 hours depending on how busy the arcade is at the time. The results of the study will be published in peers-reviewed journals and will expand the psychological knowledge of the reasons behind adolescent gambling.

Study 2: A twin study of attachment in preschool children

Background

- Recent behavioural genetic research findings raise fundamental questions about how the family environment influences children's social and emotional development. Current findings underscore the influence of genetic factors on parent-child interaction. The aim of this study is to investigate the extent to which individual differences in child-parent attachment are mediated by genetic, shared environmental and non-shared environmental influences.

Methodology

- Same sex monozygotic (MZ) and dizygotic (DZ) twins pairs will be used in the study, all with a mean age of less than 45 months. The twins and parent will be assessed on a task known as the strange situation. This is a seven episode experimental procedure designed to assess how a child uses a parent as a secure basis for exploration. The procedure will be described to the parent and one of the twins will be led to a room within the university department to participate in a range of cognitive tests. The parent and other twin will be led into an adjoining room, equipped with comfortable chairs and various age-appropriate toys. The strange situation procedure will be implemented thus: 1. A brief period of parent-child interaction 2. A stranger will enter the room, approach the child and interact with him/her. 3. The parent will then leave the room in response to a prearranged cue. 4. The parent will return and the stranger will leave the room. 5. The parent will then leave the room leaving the child alone. 6. The stranger will enter the room again. 7. Finally, the stranger departs and the parent will return to the room.