

Research Methods I

Ethics

Research ethics.. why?

- Ethics are exceptionally important when carrying out psychological research and refer to correct 'rules' of conduct that must be adhered
- 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

- Provides guidelines for carrying out research

As
researchers
we have a
moral
obligation...

To participants

To the field of psychology

To employers/funders

To ourselves

- Students and professionals have this obligation
- 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 must ensure no undue harm is caused to participants or animals
- To counteract power issues

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.

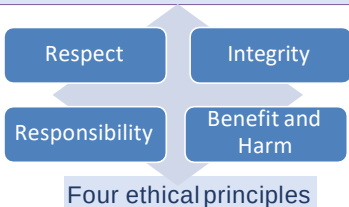
Ethical guidelines



The British
Psychological Society
Promoting excellence in psychology

- Can be accessed on the BPS website:
<https://www.bps.org.uk/our-members/standards-and-guidelines>

Code of Human Research Ethics and Code of Ethics and Conduct



The main issues

Respect for clients/participants

- The right to informed consent
- The right to withdraw from studies/ treatment at any time without penalty
- The right to be fully informed of the study before taking part

The main issues

Integrity

- Report findings truthfully and honestly- even if they are not what we wanted to see!
- Respect work of others, even if we disagree with it
 - *Explain how it is wrong scientifically!*

Responsibility

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

The main issues

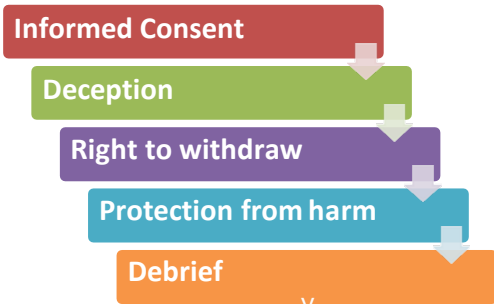
Benefit and Harm:

- 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 if the research is highly significant?

Main considerations (BPS)

Informed Consent



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graph TD; A[Informed Consent] --> B[Deception]; B --> C[Right to withdraw]; C --> D[Protection from harm]; D --> E[Debrief]
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Deception

Right to withdraw

Protection from harm

Debrief

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 participant (confidentiality/withdraw)
 - !• Details of the researcher

Informed consent

- Participants should be presented with an information detailing key information about the study prior to being presented with a consent form.
- This allows them to make an informed decision about whether they want to go on to provide consent or not.
- Participants must give fully informed consent to take part in any research.

Informed consent

It may be necessary to withhold certain information!

E.g., if it would inform the participants of what the study is about and influence responses or if the study cannot be conducted in other way

Deception

- Where participants are misled or wrongly informed about the nature and aims of the research.
- Sometimes this is necessary 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 for participants to withdraw their data

Deception

Sometimes it is necessary to hide the true purpose of a study for it to be valid

Need to consider circumstances this is permissible

Need to think of steps to debrief participants appropriately afterwards

Need to consider whether participants need to be followed up in the future

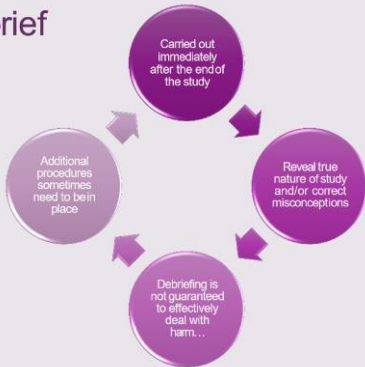
Right to withdraw

- Acts as a failsafe for informed consent
 - *The right to withdraw at any time without penalty*
- From the start of the study, participants should be informed of the 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, stress, distress, and discomfort
- 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.
- This must include full disclosure of the nature of the study (aims and hypotheses) and the opportunity to withdraw their data.
- The debrief procedure may also need to include returning participants to a pre-study state.
- They must also be offered the opportunity to ask the researcher questions or raise concerns about the study
- A debrief sheet outlining this information should be provided
 - This should also include the researchers contact details.

Main considerations (BPS)

Anonymity



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graph TD; A[Anonymity] --> B[Confidentiality]; B --> C[Privacy]; C --> D[Risk]; D --> E[Ethics Review Process];
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Confidentiality

Privacy

Risk

Ethics Review Process

Anonymity

- Participants must be guaranteed they will be anonymous at all times.
 - A participant's identity should **never** be revealed (to other people or when data are published)
 - The participant's name should **NOT** be associated with their data – instead the data is assigned a code
 - However, researchers must also consider whether other information could make it obvious who they are (even if they are not named).

Confidentiality

- Subject to requirements of legislation, including the Data Protection Act, information obtained from/about a participant is confidential unless otherwise agreed in advance
- Participants have a right to expect that information they provide will be treated confidentially and, if published, will not be identifiable as theirs.
- *Data will be stored so participants can ask for data to be removed/destroyed at any point after the study*

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.

Qualitative data must use pseudonyms or IDnumbers in place of real names

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

Right to Privacy

- Research procedures should not invade a participant's privacy without warning.
- Where a procedure involves aspects that are embarrassing, sensitive, or intimate, participants must be informed and clearly reminded of the right to withhold information/participation.

Risk

- Risk can be defined as:
 - The potential physical or psychological harm, discomfort or stress to human participants that a research project may generate.
- These include risks to the participant's:
 - personal social status,
 - privacy,
 - personal values and beliefs,
 - personal relationships,
 - as well as adverse effects of the disclosure of illegal, sexual or deviant behaviour.

Risk

- Research that carries no physical risk can nevertheless be disruptive and damaging to research participants
- It is important to acknowledge that it can be difficult to determine all potential risks at the outset of a piece of research.
- However, researchers should endeavour to identify and assess all possible risks and develop protocols for risk management as an integral part of the design of the project, and ensure that appropriate levels of ethics review are sought.

Risk

- Types and severities of risks associated with human research range widely
 - From innocuous, anonymised at source data gathering on non-sensitive topics,
 - To research carrying multiple high-level risks that demand very detailed ethics protocols and close attention to risk obviolation, minimisation and management, along with adequate liability cover

Ethical Review Process and obtaining Ethical Approval

- Prior to data collection commencing, a research study must obtain ethical approval from a relevant ethics committee.
 - 'Research Ethics Committee (REC)': a multidisciplinary, independent body responsible for reviewing research proposals involving human participants to ensure that their dignity, rights and welfare are protected.
- An ethics form will be completed by the researcher and submitted to the REC, where the panel will review and judge the suitability and safety of the research and decide whether it can be conducted.

Ethical Review Process and obtaining Ethical Approval

- A REC is normally responsible for:
 - Reviewing all research involving human participants conducted by individuals employed within or by that institution;
 - Ensuring that ethics review is independent, competent and timely;
 - Protecting the dignity, rights and welfare of research participants;
 - Considering the safety of the researcher(s);
 - Considering the legitimate interests of other stakeholders;
 - Making informed judgements of the scientific merit of proposals;
 - Making informed recommendations to the researcher if the proposal is found to be wanting in some respect.

Other considerations

■ Research with children

- *Must take care if using children under the age of 18 for research.*
- *Some children aged 16 and upwards may be judged competent to give consent themselves; others will need parental consent to take part*
- *Need to obtain ascent from children*

■ Potential for distress and anxiety

- *"I wasn't worried until I completed this questionnaire"*

■ Conducting research online:

- BPS Ethics Guidelines for Internet-Mediated Research
- Certain research designs may also involve consideration of their own specific ethical aspects
- Does the research require additional ethical approvals – e.g., NHS ethics, external organisation, government, etc.