



Prifysgol Cymru
Y Drindod Dewi Sant
University of Wales
Trinity Saint David

Yr Athrofa
Institute of Education
Addysg i Gymru Education for Wales

www.athrofa.cymru

‘Ethics Creep’ in the Social Sciences and Education: Ensuring Ethical Practice

Dr Caroline Lohmann-Hancock



Prifysgol Cymru
Y Drindod Dewi Sant
University of Wales
Trinity Saint David

Yr Athrofa
Institute of Education
Addysg i Gymru Education for Wales

www.athrofa.cymru

The Nuremburg Code (1947)

- After WWII
 - Linked to medical context
 - After WWII – when experimentation by Nazi doctors was identified as ‘abuse’
 - 10 key principles in the code
- Central to this were
 - Consent
 - Avoidance of risk

(Weindling, 2001)



Prifysgol Cymru
Y Drindod Dewi Sant
University of Wales
Trinity Saint David

Yr Athrofa
Institute of Education
Addysg i Gymru Education for Wales

www.athrofa.cymru

Towards an Ethical Code: A Bio-Medical Foundation

- The World Health Organisation's Declaration of Helsinki (1964)
 - Further developed the Nuremburg Code (1947) (Weindling, 2001)
 - The Declaration of Helsinki (1964) has undergone a number of revisions until the present day (WMA, 1964; WMA, 2013)
- This code now underpins current legislation and Ethical Code of Conduct in the modern world (Israel & Hay, 2006).



Ethics Creep: Reflecting Bio-Medical Ethics

- Many HEIs are grappling with ‘Ethics Creep’, which is defined as
 - ‘a dual process whereby the regulatory system is expanding . . . to incorporate Ethics in research’
- For example
 - ‘the scope of ethics protocols’
 - concept of ‘harm’
 - issues of ‘informed consent’
 - and finally ‘presumption of anonymity’ for all (Valentine *et al*, 2001; Heath *et al*, 2007)



Comparative Differences between Social and Biomedical Research

(Iphofen, 2017)

Social Research	Bio-Medical Research
Stresses interdependence of individuals	Highlights autonomy of the individual
Interested in cultural, social patterns	Mainly focused on the individual
Critiques status quo	Does not critique status quo
Sees worth of research in numerous ways	Values worth of research in terms of social good
Confidentiality is not absolute	Confidentiality is absolute
Admits to multiple interpretations and perspectives	Celebrates one perspective as part of objective reality
Has developed sense of ethics on the ground	Takes ethics cue from template(s) before research starts
Continues ethical reflections through to publication of research	Is less prone to wrestle about ethics in publications

The Purpose of Ethics in the Social Sciences

- ‘Ethical behaviour helps protect individuals, communities and environments
 - and offers the potential to increase the sum of good in the world’
- As a social scientist trying to
 - ‘make the world a better place’
 - we should avoid (or at least minimize) doing long-term, systematic harm to those individuals, communities and environments (Diener & Crandall, 1978; Mitchell & Draper, 1982; Peach, 1995).



Creeping Ethical Regulations

- The impact of the subtle infiltration of Bio-Medical Research Ethics into the Social Sciences
 - ‘universities’ are only ‘relatively independent of both government and commerce, and organized on a collegial basis’ . . .
 - universities are . . . ‘increasingly run in a managerial fashion that apes the private-for-profit sector’ (Hammersley, 2010, p. 1.7)
 - Research Funding is also underpinned by such economic and managerial perspectives

Challenging Ethical Creep in HE

- Be assured this is **NOT** the dumbing down of Ethics in Research
- We must . . .
 - ensure that all research is ethical
- Whilst . . .
 - resisting the reductionist approach to a single perspective on ethical issues
 - by embracing the complexity of multidimensional of research and research ethics



Social Sciences and the Fear of 'Getting it Wrong'

- The impact of such 'medicalisation' and 'centralisation' of ethics through a highly regulatory system has had an unexpected outcome:
 - Some have considered that this will feed into the development of an uniform approach
 - where 'ethical issues' such as anonymity and consent will require researchers to avoid **ANY** element of risk (Wiles, 2013).



Challenges for Research in the Social Sciences

- ‘There is a threat to the future of good quality social research and posing particular difficulties for researchers using’ the tools of the Social Sciences e.g.
 - Ethnographic approaches (Murphy and Dingwall, 2007)
 - Online (Orton-Johnson, 2010)
 - Visual and creative methods (Prosser and Loxley, 2008)
- Their very essence challenges objectivity



Participants and Communities

- Research in the Social Sciences
 - involves children, young people and vulnerable adults
- Some participants are considered
 - 'higher risk' groups
- This is especially pertinent when research engages with
 - 'human participants' who are under 16 (18)
 - or considered 'vulnerable'
- Vulnerable participants often require methodologies and approaches that are less conventional or straightforward (Aldridge, 2014)



Who are Vulnerable?

ESRC Ethical Code Suggests . . .

- Potentially vulnerable people include:
 - children and young people,
 - those with a learning disability or cognitive impairment,
 - or potentially vulnerable individuals in a dependent or unequal relationship
 - People who:
 - lack capacity to make decisions
 - or who during the research project come to lack capacity
 - ‘may’ fail under the Mental Capacity Act 2005
- (ESRC, 2015)



Vulnerability: Context Dependant

- Larkin (2009: 1) recognises that a precise definition of vulnerability
 - ‘remains elusive’ and also that
 - ‘its meaning also varies according to the context in which it is used’
- Conceptually, vulnerability is context dependent;
 - in health and social care discourses, for example, it is mainly used to denote susceptibility to harm or risk, or as an indicator of enhanced need (Aldridge, 2012: 113)



What is Risk?

- Potential physical or psychological harm
- Discomfort
- Stress or reputational risk to human participants (and participating groups, organisations and funders) that a research project might generate (ESRC, 2015: 27)



Risk Can also Include . . .

- Risk to a Participant's:
 - personal social standing
 - Privacy
 - personal values and beliefs
 - their links to family and the wider community and their position within occupational settings
 - as well as the adverse effects of revealing information that relates to illegal, sexual or deviant behaviour (ESRC, 2015: 27)



All Research has Ethical Risk

- Researchers understanding that
 - ‘all research’ carries risk
 - the role of the researcher is to acknowledge and ‘mitigate’ such risks
- University Reviewers of Research Ethics need to
 - Understand that there is more than one way to mitigate risk
 - That risk is changeable and context/individual research project specific
 - That one size does **NOT** fit all (Iphofen & Tolich, 2018)



Can Risk be Avoided?

- Not all risks can, or in some cases should, be avoided
- Researchers should endeavour to determine possible risks and their management not least through
 - the methodological strategy
 - and instruments they adopt
 - prior to the start of a project
 - which may then require more formal ethics review (ESRC, 2015)

Ethics in the Social Sciences: Pre, Post, End and at Publication

- Social Sciences also consider such ethical issues
 - not just at the start of the research
 - but throughout the research process
 - and into publication
- Completing an Ethics Form at the start of research is not enough
 - Ethics should be considered, reconsidered
 - Ethics is a 'continuous' process



Let's Mitigate that Risk

- We can mitigate risks
 - Not a 'risk assessment'
 - Rather an adequate mitigation of 'ethical risks'
- Consider the following:
 - Understand what is a risk
 - How that risk impacts upon the individual/community
 - Who is potentially effected?
 - Where the research is to be conducted?
 - Power relationships between researcher and participant



Six Key Ethical Principles: Finally Research should be . . .

- **Voluntarily**, free from any coercion or undue influence, and their rights, dignity and (when possible) autonomy should be respected and appropriately **protected**.
- Researchers should aim to maximise the benefit of the research and **minimise potential risk of harm** to participants and researchers
- Research staff and participants should be given **appropriate information** about
 - the purpose,
 - methods
 - and intended uses of the research,
 - what their participation in the research entails
 - and what risks and benefits, if any, are involved
- **Anonymity** should be respected
- **Confidentiality** and personal data should be respected
- The **independence** of research should be clear, and any **conflicts of interest or partiality should be explicit** (ESRC, 2015)



Reference List

- Aldridge J (2014) 'Working with vulnerable groups in social research: dilemmas by default and design', *Qualitative Research*, Vol 14, No 1, pp.112–130
- Diener E & Crandall R (1978) *Ethics in Social and Behavioural Research*, Chicago: Chicago University Press.
- ESRC (2015) ESRC Framework for research ethics Updated January 2015, Swindon: ESRC.
- HMSO (2005) Mental Capacity Act (2005), London: HMSO.
- Iphofen R (2017) *Finding Common Ground: Consensus in Research Ethics Across the Social Sciences*, Bingley: Emerald Publishing Ltd.
- Iphofen R & Tolich M (2018) *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Ethics*, London: Sage.
- Israel M & Hay I (2006) *Research Ethics for Social Scientists: Between Ethical Conduct and Regulatory Compliance*, London: Sage.
- Larkin M (2009) *Vulnerable Groups in Health and Social Care*. London: Sage.
- Mitchell B & Draper D (1982) *Relevance and Ethics in Geography*, New York: Longman.
- Murphy E & Dingwell M (2007) 'Informed consent, anticipatory regulation and ethnographic practice', *Social Science and Medicine*, Vol. 65, pp. 2223-2234.



Reference List

- Orton-Johnson K (2010) 'Ethics in online research: Evaluating the ESRC framework for research ethics categorisation of risk', *Sociological Research Online*, Vo. 15. No. 4 p.13.
- Peach L (1995) *An Introduction to Ethical theory' in Research Ethics: Cases and Materials*, Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.
- Prosser, J & Loxley, A (2008) 'Introducing Visual Methods', NCRM Methodological Review. Review. <http://eprints.Ncrm.ac.uk/420/>
- Weindling, Paul. "The origins of informed consent: The international scientific commission on medical war crimes, and the Nuremberg code". *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 75.1 (2001): 37–71.
- Wiles, R (2013) *What are Qualitative Research Ethics?* London: Bloomsbury Academic.
- WMA (1964) *Declaration of Helsinki*, Helsinki: World Medical Association.
- WMA (2013). "Declaration of Helsinki: Ethical Principles for Medical Research Involving Human Subjects". *JAMA*. **310**(20): 2191–2194. [doi:10.1001/jama.2013.281053](https://doi.org/10.1001/jama.2013.281053). [PMID 24141714](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/24141714/).





Prifysgol Cymru
Y Drindod Dewi Sant
University of Wales
Trinity Saint David

Yr Athrofa
Institute of Education
Addysg i Gymru Education for Wales

www.athrofa.cymru