Research Ethics

Synchronous workshop slides

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Slides adapted from a SIPPS 2021 workshop by Cat Bianco, and from courses How To's of Research and Research Methods: Thinking and Decision-Making

Ethical Principles

Ethical principles fall into three major categories:

- Ethical scientific inquiry
- Ethical conduct and behaviors of researchers
- Ethical treatment of research participants

(Weinbaum et al., 2022)

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THE BELMONT REPORT

Ethical Principles and Guidelines for the Protection of Human Subjects of Research

Beneficence
Research should confer benefits, with minimal risks, as determined by a risk-benefit analysis

Autonomy
(respect for persons)
Participants are treated as autonomous and can exercise informed consent.

Justice
Benefits and risks of research should be allocated fairly when selecting research subjects.

Scenario 1: Applicable Belmont Principle?

A researcher would like to conduct a study on heart disease. It will involve collecting baseline measures, monitoring physical activity and numerous follow-ups. Specifically, participants will be randomly assigned to two treatment groups and their risk of developing heart disease monitored. Women and African Americans are more likely to develop heart disease, so the researcher recruits more women and African Americans than Whites or men.

Justice

Provides equal opportunity for benefits, and does not unfairly disadvantage any one group

Scenario 2: Applicable Belmont Principle?

A researcher has proposed to study the effects of alcohol on flirting. He intends to observe consenting adults drinking alcohol (he will record the number of drinks they consume) and then observe the number of flirting behaviors performed by both sexes.

Beneficence

No real social, psychological, or physical risk present (as long as data are anonymized)

Scenario 3: Applicable Belmont Principle?

A researcher is interested in conducting a conformity study. She has enough students in her classes to obtain a reasonable sample size for her study if she simply recruits them. Another possibility is for her to recruit volunteers for her study via the psychology subject pool volunteer website. She decides to recruit students from her classes and give them $2 rather than recruiting volunteers from the subject pool.

Autonomy (respect for persons)

The study is an example of coercion and does not conform to the principle.

Informed Consent

Potential participants in a research project should be provided with information that might influence their active decision to participate

<u>information, comprehension, voluntariness:</u>

- Ps know what tasks they are agreeing to do.
  - including anticipated risks & benefits
- Ps know their rights.
  - given sufficient time, help to understand
- Ps are not coerced.
  - can decline to participate without penalty
  - can stop participating at any time without penalty
  - compensation is fair but not so high as to be coercive

Mock IRB Activity

Institutional Review Boards (IRBs)

The IRB reviews every detail of your study, including:

- The theoretical framework & hypotheses
- Everything your Ps will see (all scales, measures)
- Training of all of your personnel
- Methods of recruiting Ps
- Weighing risks (to Ps) against benefits (to society)
- Ensuring your consent form is appropriate
- Ensuring your debriefing process is sufficient

Not always a quick process: could take weeks or months with multiple rounds of revision/reviews before approval

Your group is the University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). You are provided with a research proposal. The goal is to determine whether the proposed study meets the ethical guidelines of the IRB and may be conducted at your university.

Carefully review the proposal (Application Under Review). Use the prompts (IRB Response Sheet) to identify potential problems in each section, and make suggestions for revision. You can refer to this sample of an approved proposal to make your recommendations (Approved application for reference).

Final Decisions

Do the potential benefits exceed the potential costs of participating in this research?

Decision about the application under review:

[ ] **Not Approved** [ ] **Approved**