



Ethics in Psychology Research



Why are ethics important in research?

- ❖ Manipulations may subject participants to undesirable or even harmful experiences
- ❖ Some experiments involve withholding information from participants
- ❖ The variables we study are often private
- ❖ Intervention studies often include a control condition
- ❖ The experimenter/participant relationship contains a power differential



Recruitment

- ❖ Research participation must be voluntary
- ❖ Undue coercion by any means is unethical
- ❖ Persons in institutional settings may not understand that participation is voluntary
- ❖ Ethics should also influence who is recruited (i.e., consistent under-representation of people of color)



Informed Consent

- ❖ Participants have a right to decide whether to be part of a study based on knowledge of the protocol
- ❖ Providing informed consent involves:
 - ❖ Explaining the purpose, procedures, and duration of the research including any benefits and risks
 - ❖ Disclosing alternative procedures
 - ❖ Answering any questions about the study
 - ❖ Informing the individual that (s)he can withdraw at any time
 - ❖ A description of procedures and limits to confidentiality
 - ❖ Information regarding a contact for further information



Consent Issues in Clinical Psychology Research

- ❖ Competence: Ability to make a logical decision
 - ❖ Are institutionalized or very distressed persons competent to give consent?
 - ❖ Should guardians be able to choose for "non-competent" persons?
- ❖ Is consent adequate?
- ❖ Do institutionalized persons really have a choice?



Deception

- ❖ In deciding whether it's OK to use deception, need to determine whether:
 - ❖ Research could be carried out without deception
 - ❖ Benefits, in terms of knowledge gained, outweigh the risk to the participants
 - ❖ Potential for harm to subjects as a result of deception is minimal



Deception

- ❖ To minimize the potential negative impact of deception:
 - ❖ Avoid outright lying
 - ❖ Never withhold information concerning possible risks
 - ❖ Inform participants they might be deceived (but not how)
 - ❖ Perform a careful, sensitive debriefing
 - ❖ Allow participants to withdraw their data upon debriefing



Debriefing

- ❖ After the experiment, the full purpose and any deception should be disclosed
- ❖ Goals of debriefing:
 - ❖ Probe for adverse reactions
 - ❖ Attempt to mollify the damage of deception
 - ❖ Explain the reason for the deception
 - ❖ Educate participant about research
 - ❖ Acknowledge the value of the participant's help
- ❖ Sometimes full disclosure may be harmful



Confidentiality

- ❖ General rules for maintaining confidentiality:
 - ❖ Store consent forms separately from actual data
 - ❖ Data that could be matched to a particular person should be kept in a locked cabinet
 - ❖ When presenting findings, participants' identity must be protected
- ❖ Note limits to confidentiality at study outset



Obligation to Intervene

- ❖ Those who are not appropriately prepared or trained should not collect clinically sensitive data
- ❖ Researchers have an obligation to screen clinically sensitive data for signs of distress
- ❖ Researchers should plan ahead for how they will intervene when a clinical problem is revealed
- ❖ Participants should be informed when data is completely anonymous so that intervention would not be possible



Issues in Intervention Research

- ❖ Treatment description
 - ❖ Participants should be informed about the nature of the treatment and whether it has been shown to be effective
 - ❖ Participants should be informed if about any and all treatments they may receive
 - ❖ Participants should be informed about random assignment



Control Groups

- ❖ Consider whether a delayed or no treatment group is necessary
- ❖ Consider the extent to which individuals will be harmed if assigned to these groups
- ❖ Alternate treatment designs are generally considered more ethical
- ❖ When using tx that may have differential impact, consider whether harm will result with less effective tx
- ❖ Consider harm due to participant's disillusionment with the mental health system



Accuracy in Reporting Research

- ❖ Never fabricate or falsify data
- ❖ Document alterations to data
- ❖ Double check all of your results!
- ❖ Report analyses even if they do not support conclusions
- ❖ Identify the source of research funding, if any
- ❖ Include any information that might change the interpretation of the results
 - ❖ Selection bias
 - ❖ Participation rates
 - ❖ Psychometrics of measures



Accuracy in Reporting Research

- ❖ Give credit for others' ideas, contributions, or words (quotes, cites)
- ❖ Do not knowingly misrepresent others' work (check yours' and others' cites)
- ❖ Self-plagiarism (consult copyright release)
 - ❖ Can reproduce small amounts of published material
 - ❖ Footnote longer paraphrased sections
 - ❖ Reprinted tables and figures requires copyright release
 - ❖ Inform publisher of second article or incorporate into new paper



Accuracy in Reporting Research

- ❖ Duplicate publication is unethical
- ❖ Piecemeal publication may be unethical
 - ❖ The number of publications should not necessarily be maximized
 - ❖ (A smaller number of integrative reports may be better)
- ❖ Not ethical to avoid inconsistencies by publishing more than one report



Assigning Authorship

- ❖ Substantial contribution
 - ❖ Conceptualization
 - ❖ Design
 - ❖ Execution
 - ❖ Analyses
 - ❖ Interpretation
- ❖ Technical contributions do not warrant authorship
- ❖ Publication credits should reflect relative effort, not status



Sharing Materials and Data

- ❖ Psychology researchers are obligated to share materials that would allow replication of their work
- ❖ Many large data-bases are publicly available
- ❖ Participants should be informed of anticipated sharing or further use of data
- ❖ Data sharing should be initiated with confidentiality in mind
