

Chapter 2

Ethical Issue in Research

CHAPTER SUMMARY

In this chapter major ethical issues that social workers face when they conduct research are examined. Past research has helped to produce current ethical standards that are designed as general guidelines to protect the physical and psychological well-being of human research participants. However, there are many situations where even highly ethical researchers and members of IRBs struggle with the specific meaning and application of these standards. Today's standards for the protection of the research participant, and some of the other major ethical responsibilities that researchers have toward the sponsors of research, other researchers, colleagues, and the general public are discussed. These standards are to ensure that, in the process of knowledge building, researchers respect the needs of others who may stand to benefit or lose from their activities.

CORE COMPETENCIES IN THIS CHAPTER

Competencies in bold are addressed significantly in this chapter.

Professional Identity	Ethical Practice	Critical Thinking	Diversity in Practice	Human Rights & Justice
Research Based Practice	Human Behavior	Policy Practice	Practice Contexts	Engage, Assess, Intervene, Evaluate

CHAPTER OBJECTIVES

After completing the chapter, students will be able to:

- Define the historical events that led to the creation of ethics in the social work field;
- Explain the major ethical issues involved in conducting social work research that involves human research participants;
- Describe the relationship between practice ethics and research ethics;
- Identify the ethical obligations that researchers have to the profession and the public;
- Identify dual-role relationships and understand the problems involved in these relationships.

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION PROMPTS

1. Do you think people should be allowed to try unproven experimental treatments? Why or why not. Be sure to think about 1) the right not be exploited as a result of their vulnerability and 2) the right to participate in research that might benefit them.
2. Do you feel it is justified to require social work students to conduct research with their clients during their field placement? Why or why not.
3. As a social worker, how do you feel about the fact that the Milgram experiment has been replicated several times since the original experiment? Do you feel that social workers can ethically be involved in this type of research? Why or why not.
4. Is there a time when deception is acceptable in research? If so, what would the researcher have to guard against?
5. Do today's standards for protection of research participants truly eliminate the need to be concerned about the kinds of abuses that occurred in the past? Why or why not?

SUGGESTED CHAPTER ACTIVITIES AND ASSIGNMENTS

1. Ask students to locate a research study from a social work journal in which there is some question as to whether research participants were treated ethically. Discuss whether participants were in fact treated unethically according to the principles outlined in the text.
For the same study, identify what protection measures (if any) were used by the researchers. Discuss how the researcher might have modified the research design to assure more ethical treatment of the research participants.
2. List five questions the researcher might ask to help ensure that the research participants are truly voluntary? For each of the questions list how it would ensure that participants were voluntary. Also discuss cases when you believe that it would be appropriate for the participant not be voluntary.
3. Read the Case Study: Crisis and Kinship in Foster Care in MySocialWorkLab. We talk about voluntary informed consent a great deal in social work. What are some adjustments that need to be made when we are working with involuntary clients? Talk about the success the social worker might have with involuntary clients. Discuss the issues that you believe that you will have when working with involuntary clients.

4. Watch the Connecting Core Competencies Videos: Research-Based Practice: Contracting with the Client to Select an Evidence-Based Therapy in MySocialWorkLab. Construct an informed consent form that you might present to this client at the next session. Be sure to review the chapter for a review of informed consent. What do you believe was the most important part of the informed consent?
5. From 1932-1972, the U.S. Public Health Service conducted a study of the effects of untreated syphilis in Black men in Macon County, Alabama. Read the US Public Health Service Syphilis Study at Tuskegee-Research Implications: How Tuskegee Changed Research Practices at <http://www.cdc.gov/tuskegee/after.htm>. How do you believe that this study went so wrong? Do you believe that current ethics in research will prevent something like this again? Why or why not.

SUGGESTED TEACHING TIPS

A discussion of research ethics can provide an excellent opportunity for you to assure students that the welfare of research participants and others is a primary concern of the competent researcher. It can allay fears that research is an insensitive activity, or one that runs counter to social work values and ethics. Students may have little awareness of ethical issues relating to others, for example, ethical responsibilities to one's peers or co-researchers. The issue of dual relationships and when they are permissible in research can provide for some interesting discussion, especially since many students are likely to have been "voluntary" participants in some former instructor's research, perhaps as a course requirement. Issues related to when deception should or should not be permissible in research also can be controversial, and can make for worthwhile discussions.

ASSESSMENT FOR IN-CLASS USE

The following assessment has been created for in-class use. This assessment may be available through Pearson's MyTest website—allowing for easy access for creating your own tests. This assessment may also be offered in a Blackboard/Angel/D2L/WebCT package. *Please contact your local Pearson sales representative to learn about the options available. Visit, <http://www.pearsonhighered.com/relocator>.*

Multiple Choice Questions

Difficulty: 1 = Easy; 2 = Medium; 3 = Challenging

Choose the BEST possible answer for each of the following.

1. Which group of people may not be truly “voluntary participants” in research studies, even if they sign an informed consent form?
 - A. students for whom participation is a course requirement
 - B. students who sign up in the Student Center
 - C. patients who sign up in a medical clinic
 - D. women who are pregnant

Answer: A

Difficulty: 2

Competency: Ethical Practice

2. What factor sometimes influences an Institutional Review Board to approve a research study that requires the use of deception?
 - A. The findings of the research would be likely to be beneficial to society.
 - B. The knowledge sought can be acquired in some other way.
 - C. The research participants may be harmed by the deception.
 - D. The IRB is really interested in the topic.

Answer: A

Difficulty: 2

Competency: Ethical Practice

3. The Tuskegee Public Health Service studies considered a violation of research ethics primarily because:
- A. the research participants' confidentiality was not respected.
 - B. the researchers offered nothing in return for participants' participation.
 - C. the participants suffered unnecessarily after a cure for syphilis was discovered.
 - D. the researchers deliberately exposed participants to the disease.

*Answer: C
Difficulty: 2
Competency: Policy Practice*

4. Milgram's study that led participants to believe that they were administering shocks is considered unethical primarily because:
- A. participants did not agree to participate in the research.
 - B. confidentiality of participants was violated.
 - C. deception was used.
 - D. participants were left less emotionally healthy following the research.

*Answer: D
Difficulty: 2
Competency: Ethical Practice*

5. Critics of the Humphrey's study of behavior in public places have been most concerned with the violation of the research participants' right to:
- A. voluntary informed consent.
 - B. confidentiality.
 - C. debriefing and restoration.
 - D. no unnecessary pain and suffering.

*Answer: A
Difficulty: 2
Competency: Ethical Practice*

6. What is a question that is really NOT central to research ethics?
- A. Who will benefit or suffer from the actions of the researcher?
 - B. Whose rights should take priority over the rights of others?
 - C. Does the end (knowledge) justify the means (potential discomfort or harm to participants)?
 - D. Will it produce an article for the researcher?

*Answer: D
Difficulty: 2
Competency: Ethical Practice*

7. When potential human research participants appear to lack understanding of what the research will entail and to sign a statement of voluntary informed consent, this should be handled by:
- A. having witnesses present when data are collected from them.
 - B. using an advocate to decide whether or not it is in their best interest to become research participants.
 - C. providing them with written assurances of anonymity.
 - D. allowing them to agree verbally to participate as research participants.

Answer: B

Difficulty: 2

Competency: Ethical Practice

8. The term "assent" in research ethics refers to the issue of:
- A. whether some people should be forced to take part in a research study.
 - B. the degree to which older children should be allowed to be involved in the decision as to whether they will participate in research.
 - C. whether research studies that involve dual relationships should ever be permitted.
 - D. whether a researcher should be allowed to know who participated in research and who refused to participate.

Answer: B

Difficulty: 2

Competency: Ethical Practice

9. The primary function of "Institutional Review Boards" and other similar groups is to:
- A. train research interviewers.
 - B. provide advice on designing research.
 - C. decide whether to approve or disapprove research studies involving the use of human participants.
 - D. interview potential research participants.

Answer: C

Difficulty: 2

Competency: Policy Practice

10. A social work researcher has an ethical obligation to:
- A. protect his or her research participants.
 - B. ensure politicians that the research is good.
 - C. ensure if a university is involved that they get credit.
 - D. pay the participants

Answer: A

Difficulty: 2

Competency: Ethical Practice

11. A study is considering the effectiveness of a curriculum in reducing violence. The author of the curriculum is currently marketing it to afterschool programs. The other researchers on the team are concerned. What is the ethical concern of the research team?
- A. informed consent
 - B. confidentiality
 - C. potential harm of participants
 - D. Conflicts of interest

Answer: A

Difficulty: 2

Competency: Ethical Practice

12. The Tuskegee Study is an unfortunate example of unethical research. One ethical problem of the research is the psychological damage it inflicted, however, what is the most glaring ethical issue with the Tuskegee Study?
- A. Lack of empirical evidence
 - B. Problems with anonymity
 - C. Misrepresentation of findings
 - D. Physical harm

Answer: D

Difficulty: 2

Competency: Ethical Practice

13. The researcher assures the research participants that their participation will be confidential. What is the researcher promising?
- A. The researcher is promising that no one will know who they are.
 - B. Only the data entry person will know who they are
 - C. Only the researcher will know who they are.
 - D. The researcher cannot make this promise

Answer: C

Difficulty: 2

Competency: Ethical Practice

14. Informed consent is a safeguard to help protect research participants from harm. What does this mean to the research participant?
- A. It is simply a part of the form
 - B. It means the researcher can change the procedures if necessary.
 - C. That after the consent is given the researcher will explain the study.
 - D. The participant must be informed about the study before giving consent.

Answer: D

Difficulty: 3

Competency: Ethical Practice

15. The Tuskegee study led to the development of what ethical principle?
- A. No unnecessary pain and suffering
 - B. Confidentiality
 - C. Dual-role relationships
 - D. Anonymity

Answer: A
Difficulty: 2
Competency: Policy Practice

16. All of the following ethical questions were raised by the Laud Humphreys studies of homosexual behavior except one:
- A. Had the researcher validated the clients' right to privacy?
 - B. Had participation in the study been voluntary?
 - C. Could the researchers have obtained this data without the use of deception?
 - D. Was this research necessary since so much was already known about this population?

Answer: D
Difficulty: 3
Competency: Ethical Practice

17. All of the following are possible examples of voluntary clients not really being voluntary, except one:
- A. Business owners will share information about their companies in order to improve service delivery.
 - B. Poor single mothers will get free child care for participating.
 - C. Students will get extra credit for volunteering.
 - D. Drug addicts will receive monetary payment for participating

Answer: A
Difficulty: 3
Competency: Critical Thinking

18. Deception may be considered ethical if:
- A. the information acquired in the end is known to be very valuable.
 - B. the researcher can be reasonably confident that the participants will not suffer long-term damage.
 - C. the deception is deemed relatively harmless and there is no alternative non-deception method that can be used.
 - D. the clients never know they are being deceived.

Answer: C
Difficulty: 3
Competency: Ethical Practice

19. The first ethical principle cited by the influential Belmont Report is autonomy, which can be defined as:
- A. a thorough risk/benefit calculation must be performed
 - B. demands equitable selection of participants
 - C. obligation on the part of the researcher to respect each participant as a person capable of making an informed decision
 - D. equality in distribution of benefits and burdens among the population group(s) likely to benefit from the research.

Answer: C

Difficulty: 2

Competency: Human Rights and Justice

20. Consequences for engaging in research misconduct are varied but may include:
- A. ineligibility for future grants
 - B. only effects the researcher not the university
 - C. is very embarrassing but does not include monetary penalties
 - D. usually happens to all novice researchers.

Answer: A

Difficulty: 2

Competency: Ethical Practice

21. A peer review committee of five or more volunteers who review research proposals and monitor ongoing research to ensure human subjects are adequately protected are:
- A. NASW
 - B. Institutional Review Board
 - C. Human Subjects Board
 - D. CSWE

Answer: B

Difficulty: 1

Competency: Ethical Practice

22. The three principles outlined in the Belmont report that should outline ethical practice in research are:
- A. Strong focus on community, adaptability of family roles, and a strong religious belief system.
 - B. Anonymity, confidentiality, and ethics
 - C. Reliability, validity, and replication
 - D. Respect for the individual, beneficence, and justice

Answer: D

Difficulty: 1

Competency: Ethical Practice

23. Anonymity is best defined as:
- A. Not collecting any identifying information on the subjects participating in your research study.
 - B. Assuring the human subjects of your research that all information about them, and all answers they provide, will remain in the hands of the investigator and that no person outside the research process will have access to their information.
 - C. Asking human subjects to sign a form before participating in a study that provides full information about the features of the study that might affect their decision about whether to participate, particularly regarding its procedures and potential harm.
 - D. Insuring that human subjects are aware that they are participating in a study and are informed of all the consequences of the study and consent to participate in the study.

Answer: A

Difficulty: 2

Competency: Ethical Practice

24. David is a researcher who has been studying the effects of a 12-step program in addictions treatment. He is a strong advocate for a 12-step program. When the results are revealed, those in a 12-step program appeared to do no better than those in group therapy. He believes that something is wrong with the data, and decides to keep the results to himself. What ethical breach did he violate?
- A. Conflict of Interest
 - B. Research Misconduct
 - C. Human Subjects Violation
 - D. It is not an ethical breach because he knows the 12 step program is more effective.

Answer: b

Difficulty: 1

Competence: Ethical Practice

25. A way to give special care when obtaining consent from minority or immigrant populations include all of the following except?
- A. consent forms should be provided in the research respondent's native language.
 - B. may require using bilingual or native-speaking research assistants.
 - C. be sensitive to culturally determined patterns of deference to authority.
 - D. make sure you offer the respondents food from their native county

Answer: D

Difficulty: 1

Competency: Human Rights and Justice

Essay Questions

1. Review the attached website which advertises for participants for the Milgram study. What are some of the ethical issues that you can identify from the advertisement?
http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/3/34/Milgram_Experiment_advertising.png
2. How do the ethical dilemmas in the in the Stanford Prison experiments compare with the ethical issues raised by Stanley Milgram's obedience experiments? Would it be better if these studies had never been done?
3. Identify and describe three safeguards for ensuring ethical research.
4. Describe how social and economic justice issues can be addressed in research.
5. Review the Council of Social Work Educational policy that deals with research, list and describe three mandates from that policy that effect social work research.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Books

- American Association of University Professors. (2001). *Protecting human beings: Institutional review boards and social science research*. Washington, DC: American Association of University Professors
- Bowman, P. J. (2004). Ethical issues related to research with communities of color, *Jane Addams College of Social Work Pre-Doctoral and Doctoral Program Conference*. University of Illinois at Chicago: Bowman, Phillip J.
- Council on Social Work Education (CSWE). (2008). Educational policy and accreditation standards. Alexandria, VA: CSWE
- National Association of Social Workers (NASW). (1999). Code of ethics of the National Association of Social Workers. (Approved by the 1996 NASW Delegate Assembly and revised by the 1999 NASW Delegate Assembly.) Washington, DC: NASW

Journals

- Carlson, E. B., Newman, E., Daniels, J. W., Armstrong, J., Roth, D., & Loewenstein, R. (2003). Distress in response to and perceived usefulness of trauma research interviews. *Journal of Trauma & Dissociation, 4*(2), 131-142.
- Churchill, L. R., Nelson, D. K., Henderson, G. E., King, N. M., Davis, A. M., Leahey, E., et al. (2003). Assessing benefits in clinical research: Why diversity in benefit assessment can be risky. *IRB: Ethics & Human Research, 25*(3), 1-8.
- Fontes, L. A. (2004). Ethics in violence against women research: The sensitive, the dangerous, and the overlooked. *Ethics & Behavior, 14*(2), 141-174.
- Labott, S. M., & Johnson, T. P. (2004). Psychological and social risks of behavioral research. *IRB: Ethics & Human Research, 26*(3), 11-15.

Websites

- ABC News, The Science of Evil: How can ordinary people perform unthinkable acts?
[<http://abcnews.go.com/Video/playerIndex?id=2769000>]
- PrimeTime Live - repeat of Milgram's experiment.
- Stanford University, The Stanford Prisoner Experiment Website.
[<http://www.prisonexp.org/psychology/1>]

- The Stanford Prison Experiment web site, which features an extensive slide show and information about this classic psychology experiment that was conducted in the summer of 1971.

Phoenix Health Systems. (2003). *What is HIPAA?* (Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996). [www.hipaadvisory.com]

The Office of Health, Safety and Security, DOE Openness: Human radiation experiments. [http://www.hss.energy.gov/healthsafety/ohre/]

- The Office of Human Radiation Experiments, established in March 1994, leads the Department of Energy's efforts to tell the agency's Cold War story of radiation research using human subjects.