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Research Methodology

Ethical Issues



UNIVERSITY
OF WOLLONGONG
AUSTRALIA

Research Ethics

- Projects might require the information of other people.
- Many people are willing to disclose personal information during our research so we need to make sure that we treat both the participants and the information they provide with honesty and respect. This is called **research ethics**.
- Many different aspects.



Treating Participants with Respect

- The research process intrudes on people's lives?
- Some of the people who take part in your research may be vulnerable because of their age, social status or position of powerlessness.
- If participants are young, you need to make sure a parent or guardian is present.
- If participants are ill or reaching old age you might need to use a proxy and care should be taken to make sure that you do not affect the relationship between the proxy and the participant.



Treating Participants with Respect

- You must try to minimise the disruption to people's lives and if someone has found it an upsetting experience you should find out why and try to ensure that the same situation does not occur again.
- You must do your best to ensure anonymity and confidentiality.



Code of Ethics

- Once you have been open and honest about what you are doing and people have agreed to take part in the research, it is useful to provide them with a Code of Ethics.
- The best time to do this is just before they take part in a focus group or interview, or just before they fill in your questionnaire.
 - The Code of Ethics supplies them with details about what you intend to do with the information they give and it shows that you intend to treat both them and the information with respect and honesty. It covers the following issues:



Code of Ethics - Anonymity

- Ensure that what participants have said cannot be traced back to them when the final report is produced.
- How are you going to categorise and store the information?
- How are you going to make sure it is not easily accessible to anyone with unscrupulous intentions?
- Do you intend to change the names of people, towns and organisations? If not, how will you ensure that what someone says cannot be used against them in the future? However, you must be careful not to make promises that you cannot keep.



Anonymity

I guarantee that I will not use any names and addresses in the final report, or store or categorise information using names and addresses. This will help to ensure that what you have said during the discussion will not be traced back to you by third parties.



Code of Ethics - Confidentiality

- You need to show that information supplied to you in confidence will not be disclosed directly to third parties.
- If the information is supplied in a group setting, issues of confidentiality should be relevant to the whole group who should also agree not to disclose information directly to third parties.
- You need to think about how you're going to categorise and store the information so that it cannot fall into other people's hands. Again, you need to make sure that you do not make promises which you can't keep.



Confidentiality

I guarantee that I will not disclose directly any information provided in this group to third parties, unless permission has been granted to do so. As some of the comments made in this group may be of a personal or private nature, other participants should respect the confidentiality of individuals and also not disclose information directly to third parties.



Code of Ethics - The final report

- It is useful for participants to know what is going to happen with the results.
 - Who will receive a free copy of the report?
 - Will it be on public display?
 - If the final report is very long you can produce a shorter, more succinct report which can be sent to interested participants.



The final report

This research is funded by [name of organisation or funding body]. A copy of the final report will be sent to this organisation, to the University library and to anyone who has taken part in the research who has requested a copy.

Data Protection

The researcher will comply with the Data Protection Act 1988



Code of Ethics - Data Protection

- Understand the Data Protection Act and intend to comply with its rules.
- The Australian Data Protection Act 1988 regulates how personal information is handled.

<https://www.oaic.gov.au/privacy-law/privacy-act/>

- The Privacy Act defines personal information as:

...information or an opinion, whether true or not, and whether recorded in a material form or not, about an identified individual, or an individual who is reasonably identifiable.

Common examples are an individual's name, signature, address, telephone number, date of birth, medical records, bank account details and commentary or opinion about a person.

Codes of Ethics and Guidelines

- The Australian Research Council has produced a Codes of Ethics and Guidelines
<http://www.arc.gov.au/codes-and-guidelines>
- This statement covers issues such as professional integrity; relations with, and responsibilities towards research participants; relations with, and responsibilities towards sponsors and/or funders.
- It is a very detailed list and will help you to think about all the ethical issues which may arise during your research.

Ethical issues

- All academic institutions are particular about any ethical issues that research may have.
- To deal with them, all institutions have some form of policy on ethics.
- Identify any ethical issues and describe how you propose to deal with them.
- You need to look at the ethical issues particularly from the viewpoint of your respondents,
 - in case of any potential ‘harm’, you need to detail the mechanism in place to deal with it.



UOW Ethics

- Policy
- <http://www.uow.edu.au/research/ethics/human/UOW009381.html>
- Approval
- <http://www.uow.edu.au/research/ethics/human/UOW009387.html>

