Engaging Ethics

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Chair, Human Research Ethics Committee
Do I Need To Engage With Ethics?

• Do you plan to do research with people, or use their information, or use their tissue (e.g. body fluids, skin)?
  – If you answer “Yes”

• Then you must seek approval from the RMIT Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) or from the College Human Ethics Advisory Network (CHEAN) before you start any interaction with people
Engaging With Ethics

• When we perform research involving people:
  – We form a relationship between ourselves as researchers and our research participants (National Statement [2007], p.11)
  – The National Statement (2007) identifies the values around which research involving people should be conducted
  – These values shape the relationship between researcher and research participant
  – The relationship is one of trust
Values That Shape The Relationship Between Researcher and Participant

- Justice
- Beneficence
- Respect
Justice

• “…a regard for the human sameness that each person shares with every other.” (N.S., Section 1, p. 11)

• Justice has been described as “that which is lawful and that which is equal and fair” (Lindorff 2010)

• In the research context, Justice requires that:
  – No one individual or group bear the burden of research in terms of time, energy, discomfort, distress while others benefit
Justice – Research Context

• Justice also requires:
  – Researchers demonstrate fairness in selection of participants
  – Not exploit those who are vulnerable because of availability
  – That the research or its findings does not perpetuate social inequality
Justice – What Does This mean For The Researcher?

• Having a focus on the welfare of participants

• Research is unjust if it benefits the researcher or her organisation, yet the burden of research is borne by the research participant
Beneficence

• Actions are acceptable only if they minimise harm and maximise benefit

• The N.S. specifies that researchers are responsible for:
  – Designing research to minimise risk of harm or discomfort for research participants
  – Clarifying for participants the potential benefits and risk associated with the research
  – Being sensitive to the welfare and interests of research participants
Beneficence – What Does This mean For The Researcher?

• The researcher needs to reflect on and assess the magnitude and probability of benefits and harms to research participants

• In a non-biomedical context, researchers should anticipate harms such as embarrassment, stress, guilt, devaluation of worth, loss of promotion, career opportunity advancement through an academic program, damage to relationships, any legal risks
Respect For Persons

• The N.S. (2007) defines respect for human beings as “…a recognition of their intrinsic value”

• This requires having due regard for research participants’:
  – welfare
  – beliefs
  – perceptions
  – customs and cultural heritage (both individual and collective)
  – Privacy
  – The capacity of individuals to make their own decisions

(Lindorff 2010)
Respect For Persons – What Does This Mean For The Researcher?

• For the researcher:
  – Developing a research practice that is grounded in:
    – Research integrity (and that the research has merit)
    – Justice
    – Beneficence
So, you plan to do research with people
Is your research with or about people, their data or tissue?
  • No?
  • You don't need HREC approval

Go to RMIT HREC website “Apply” page and use the Ethics checklist to assess ethical issues and level of risk associated with your proposed research

Yes

No

You will be directed to the 'exempt from review' application form

Checklist assesses your proposed research as 'exempt from review'

The checklist will help you assess the level of risk and ethical issues associated with your research

Yes

No

Checklist assesses your research as negligible or low risk

You will be directed to the negligible and low risk application form

The checklist will direct you to the 'more than low risk' ethics application form
Checklist determines that your proposed research is low risk (or less)

You will be directed to the appropriate ethics application form for this risk category

Your ethics application form will be reviewed by the CHEAN

The result of review of your ethics application form will be forwarded to you by the CHEAN secretary

If your application requires amendment, an ethics advisor will work with you

You must not commence data collection until you receive a formal notification of approval from the CHEAN
The checklist assesses your research as more than low risk. You will be directed to the 'more than low risk' ethics application form. Your proposed research and ethics application will be reviewed by the RMIT University HREC. The decision of the HREC review will be sent to you via the Ethics Officer (Peter Burke). A member of the HREC will work with you to review your ethics application if required. You must not commence data collection until you receive formal notice of approval from the HREC.
Does your research involve ATSI people or topics that directly affect ATSI people?

Yes

Your research proposal / ethics application will be assessed by the ATSI network prior to review by HREC

The ATSI network is a group of ATSI people with knowledge and experience of Indigenous culture and norms

The ATSI network will advise you and the HREC on the suitability of your proposed research

Recommendations from the ATSI network are provided to the HREC to inform its review of your ethics application

You will be provided with feedback and recommendations from both the ATSI network and HREC

If required, a member of HREC (and possibly from the ATSI network) will assist you to amend your ethics application so that your proposed research may be approved

You must not commence data collection until you receive formal notification of approval from the HREC

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The College Human Ethics Advisory Network (CHEAN):-

- Ensures that all research conducted in the college that involves people, their data or tissue is reviewed by the appropriate HREC or non-HREC process.

- Provides local review and approval of human research ethics applications from members of the college for:
  - Research assessed as negligible risk
  - Research assessed as low risk
  - *The Chair of CHEAN reviews and approves applications assessed as ‘exempt from review’*
Who Are The Members of the CHEAN And What Is Their Role?

• A Chair appointed by the PVC (Academic)
• Members of CHEAN are appointed by the PVCA from representative areas of the college that conduct human research after a call of expression of interest to staff of the college
• The term of office for all members is 3 years
• Members of the Ethics Advisory Network are here to help you.
• If you need assistance, contact the CHEAN secretary
• The secretary will forward your request to the Chair / Ethics Advisor in your area
Meet Your HREC

Peter Burke - Ethics Officer for HREC
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Barbara Polus - Chair HREC
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Take Home Messages

• All research conducted with people must involve careful thought to the role that people may play in your research

• Recognition of the values that form the relationship between researcher and research participant informs the design and conduct of research involving people

• It is the responsibility of all of us to ensure that all research conducted with people is ethically acceptable
The National Health and Medical Research Council Human Research Ethics Home Page