

# STAT1301 Ethics Assignment

## Spiritual intervention for depression in Canada

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Between 2009 and 2012, a clinical pilot trial was conducted in Calgary, Alberta, Canada, to assess the effectiveness of an online spiritually informed e-mental health intervention (Ricki, 2015, p. 1). In this essay I will argue that this study was in total ethical, by considering the issues of safety and consent during recruitment, and how the study respected their participant's privacy, with the assumption knowing these salient issues is enough to generalize to the study as whole.

To begin, the recruitment process for volunteers wishing to participate was very strict, leaving only 63 participants out of the initial pool of 400 (Ricki, 2015, p. 6). The criteria included items such as, "Currently under the care of a health care professional," and "Agreeable to having the study team contact the health professional prior to enrollment, ..." and if additional support was necessary (Ricki, 2015, Table 2). I take it as a premise that people's health and wellbeing are more important than an uncertain utilitarian promise for a benefit to future generations, especially for those already diagnosed with clinical depression. Since there is little objective benefit or difference to data collected from a participant whose trusted health professional has or has not been contacted, this criterion demonstrates a distinct Immanuel Kant-like respect and ethical treatment of volunteers as the end-goal (in general and for studies like these) rather than just means for data.

Additionally, all volunteers (or their legal guardians if under age) were required to give informed consent before participating according to Canadian law (Health Canada, 2022) (Ricki, 2015, p. 4). Part of the definition of consent under Canadian law is its ongoing nature, i.e., consent can be revoked, which I additionally take as a premise (Health Canada, 2022). One participant in this study dropped out for no stated reason, demonstrating not only that this study practically used an ethical (and lawful) definition of consent, but also that the privacy of the participant was respected enough to not forcefully elicit a reason for leaving.

Expounding upon privacy, I define unethical privacy to be collecting or sharing more information than originally stated, especially in a way to uniquely identify a person and link other datums to them uniquely for profit. This is so that a person can maintain anonymity if they so choose under the law (a cypherpunk ideal), and prevent advanced tracking schemes that are abused for political and economic reasons (Dodd, 2022). More than one dropout, three individuals didn't provide a datapoint, and critically the reason for this was not recorded (Ricki, 2015, p. 6). Note that this sort of information isn't relevant to the objective measures that the participants consented to have anonymously collected about them. Hence, to state the reason would have been sharing information not originally consented to being shared, implying the researchers handled this potential privacy problem with ethical grace.

In conclusion, all three salient issues of recruitment, consent and privacy were ethical. Therefore, from the introduction's assumption, the study was in total ethical.

## References

Dodd, Vikram. "UK Police Use of Live Facial Recognition Unlawful and Unethical, Report Finds." The Guardian, 27 Oct. 2022, [www.theguardian.com/technology/2022/oct/27/live-facial-recognition-police-study-uk](https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2022/oct/27/live-facial-recognition-police-study-uk).

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