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Research Methods

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1. Dr. Bruce Mosely conducted an experiment to study placebo effects. He did surgery on three different groups, one had the full knee surgery, one had their knee cleaned on the inside, and the other group was put to sleep and only had the incision done to their knee. The placebo group had the same results as the group that had the full surgery. Their knee pain was eliminated. Doctors were surveyed and asked if they had ever knowingly prescribed placebos and two thirds of doctors said yes. Placebos have been effective in treating depression, pain, and even skin conditions. There is a patient that gets prescribed an antidepressant, but she did not know that she was given a placebo. Pictures of her brain showed that her brain had more activity after taking the placebo. There are also concerns for placebo. A cancer patient was believed to be dying from cancer and when they did die, they were found to have little cancer and certainly not enough cancer to be fatal. With the doctor believing the patient was sicker than he was, the patient could have possibly been convinced he was going to die and that is what could have killed him. The film states that placebos could possibly go beyond medicine. People of faith visit saint Bernadette with the hope of being cured of disease, and miracles have happened 66 times according to the film. Placebo effects can happen based on what is the expected result. The film ends with the researchers questioning if placebos will work when the patient knows they are receiving them, and one doctor suggests that it could certainly happen.
2. Placebo effects relate to social research because in a certain social experiment, if an outcome is expected by subjects, that outcome could be more likely to happen. Researchers must be aware of placebo effects for that reason, the research may not be accurate if subjects are affected by placebos. The implications of placebos on research ethics could be concerning because patients and subjects could be deceived. Patients and subjects have a right to be fully informed on the treatment or test they are a part of. Furthermore, as the film showed an example of, placebo effects could harm people. If someone is convinced that they are being affected negatively, they may submit and convince their body and brain that they could not be helped.