

# Participants and Research Ethics (4hrs)

3.1 Participants

3.2 The law and Research

3.3 Rights of People Directly Involved

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# The 6Ps of Research

- So far we've looked at the purpose of research (the reasons people do research) and the products of research (outcomes from research projects).
- In this chapter we'll start to look at another of the 6Ps of research — the **participants**.

1. Purpose,
2. Products,
3. Process,
4. Participants,
5. Paradigm and
6. Presentation

# The 6Ps of Research: Participants

- Participants (Who?)
- The people involved—researchers, test subjects, or data sources.
- Ethical treatment of participants is critical.
- Directly involvement: by interviewing them or observing them
- Indirectly involvement: editors to whom you submit a research paper

## Example: In medical research

- Participants: 100 patients testing a new diabetes drug.
- Ethics: They must give informed consent and can quit anytime.

## Example: In AI Research

- Participants: 1,000 online users whose data trains a chatbot.
- Ethics: Data must be anonymous to protect privacy.

# The Law and Research

- Your research and behavior throughout the project, from an initial literature review and thinking about possible research topics through to the final outcomes, must be legal.
- It is impossible in this course to cover the relevant national legislation for each reader.
- You must therefore find out about the law in your country concerning such things as:
  - the specified data **protection rights** of individuals, and the duties of organizations and researchers who hold personal data on individuals;
  - whether it is permissible to offer a **prize draw** to encourage people to participate in your research;
  - **intellectual property rights**, for example, who owns the right to an image you want to use in your research, and who has the copyright of your own thesis or other publications or any software you produce;
  - restrictions on the **kinds of technology** you are allowed to use and investigate, for example, whether your country allows unrestricted access to the Internet, if you are permitted to use encryption software, or whether you may share your technological innovations with colleagues based in other countries.
  - the **legal liability of software developers** for the systems they design and create.

# Rights of People Directly Involved

- Let's start by thinking about the rights of the people most obviously affected by your research: the people you interview or observe, or ask to complete a questionnaire or supply you with documents.
- The literature on the different strategies might refer to these people in different ways:
  - for experiments, they are often called the **research subjects**;
  - for surveys, they are often called the **research respondents**;
  - for case studies and ethnography, they are often called **research informants, members, or participants**;
  - for action research, they are often called the **research participants**.

# Rights of People Directly Involved

The rights of participants

- Right not to participate
- Right to withdraw
- Right to give informed consent
- Right to anonymity
- Right to confidentiality

# Rights of People Directly Involved

## Right not to participate

- If someone doesn't want to participate in your research, whether an individual or a company, they don't have to.
- You should accept their decision and not try to force them by wheedling or threats.
- Their non-participation may affect your ability to complete your research, but that's your problem, not theirs.

# Rights of People Directly Involved

## Right to withdraw

- Even if someone initially agrees to take part, they can change their minds at any time.
- Again, if this messes up your research, possibly even ruins it, that's your problem, not theirs.

# Rights of People Directly Involved

## Right to give informed consent

- Individuals, and collections of individuals, have the right to give informed consent.
- This means that if they agree to participate, their consent is given only when they have first been made fully aware of the nature of the research and their involvement.
- They should be informed about:
  - the purpose of the research,
  - who is undertaking the research (name, address, contact details) and which organization is sponsoring it
  - what will be involved (for example, interviews, completing a questionnaire and so on) and how long this is likely to take;
  - whether they will receive any expenses, payment or incentive (for example, individual feedback on performance
  - how their data will be used (for example, whether their details will be anonymized so no one can recognize them in the research report).

# Rights of People Directly Involved

## Right to anonymity

- Participants in your research have the right that their identity and location protected—by disguise where necessary.
- If you want use names for your participants in your research report, normally you would give them pseudonyms

# Rights of People Directly Involved

## Right to confidentiality

- Participants in your research have a right that the data you obtain from them is kept **confidential**.
- This means, for example, that you should not leave your data lying around on your desk where anyone can look at it; you should keep it safe and secure.
- Sometimes a participant may tell you something, '**in confidence**'. This means they do not want you to write about it in your research report, however tempting that might be.
- If you feel this is something significant for your research, you must ask them to release you from that request for confidentiality, which can sometimes be achieved if you **guarantee their anonymity**.

# Responsibilities of an Ethical Researcher

- An **ethical researcher** is one who conducts studies with integrity, honesty, and respect for all participants, stakeholders, and the broader community.
- It is the **duty** of an ethical researcher, both to the people directly involved and to the members of the academic community to which a researcher belongs, who are indirectly involved in the research.
- These **duties** are
  - No unnecessary intrusion
  - Behave with integrity
  - Follow appropriate professional codes of conduct
  - No plagiarism
  - Be an ethical reviewer

# Responsibilities of an Ethical Researcher

## No unnecessary intrusion

- Researchers should not intrude unnecessarily into the participants' activities.
- Before undertaking a piece of research, you must be satisfied that the knowledge you're looking for is not already available.
- Nor should you ask questions for which you don't really need the answers.

# Responsibilities of an Ethical Researcher

Behave with integrity

- An ethical researcher will record data accurately and fully.
- This means not keeping quiet about data that does not support your case or not manipulating data to present the picture you want.
- You should be open and honest about how you conducted your research and the results you obtained, without any falsification or fabrication.

Note: You should also keep the data secure and make sure no one else can access it. If paper-based, it should not be left on your desk. If on a computer, you should think about how lack of password security, insecure networks, power failures, poor backup procedures, hackers and viruses might compromise your data.

# Responsibilities of an Ethical Researcher

Follow appropriate professional codes of conduct

- Most professional bodies have produced codes of conduct. These codes capture the profession's commitments and responsibilities, to help members make ethical decisions.
- Even if you are not a paid-up member of any professional body, you can be guided by their codes.
- It's therefore worth looking up such codes on the Internet.
- Professional bodies relevant to IS and computing research include the ACM, AIS, BCS, IEEE and the Association of Internet Researchers.

# Responsibilities of an Ethical Researcher

## No plagiarism

- You should not pass off someone else's work as if it were your own.
- This is seen as akin to stealing.
- It also deceives anyone who reads your report and deprives the original author of recognition.
- You should give full credit to the original author, with enough information in the reference so that any subsequent reader can find the same material

# Responsibilities of an Ethical Researcher

## Be an ethical reviewer

- As you become established as a researcher you might be asked to review manuscripts submitted for conference presentation or journal publication. To do this in an ethical manner, you should:
  - Carry out reviews as promptly as possible. Many academic researchers complain about the long review process of journal publication and the delay from manuscript submission to decision.
  - Maintain the confidentiality of the content of the paper you are reviewing – both the ideas and the data. You are
  - Write the review in a professional way – not, for example, as almost illegible handwritten comments scrawled on a hard copy of the manuscript.
  - You should try to find at least one positive thing to say about the paper, even if your overall recommendation is to reject the manuscript. You can also often help the authors by suggesting one or two citations that they might find useful.