Case 1

Mina is a young researcher conducting her first major study: a massive qualitative study about perceptions of the importance of second language acquisition among low-income households. One of Mina's acquaintances knew a family who lived in a low-income urban community which seemed ideal for data collection. Mina decided on interviewing that family first. Mina interviewed the mother, the father, and the grandmother in that household. Everything went well. Mina then decided to go from house-to-house, asking households if they were interested in 'answering a few questions'. Some houses said yes, while others said no.

Unbeknownst to Mina, some families informed their community leaders about what she was doing. The community leaders confronted Mina as she was walking down the street. They angrily asked if she was a journalist, to which she said 'no'. Mina explained that she was a researcher. The leaders did not believe her and accused her of lying. They even accused her of being a reporter for a sensationalist newspaper that wrote negative articles about the community! They told Mina to leave immediately.

(a) Problem Assessment: From a research integrity and ethics viewpoint, what went wrong in this situation?
(b) Risk Assessment: Was anybody or anything put at risk in this situation? What/who are they and why?
(c) Solutions: What solutions can be offered or how do we avoid this kind of situation?

Case 2

A research team submitted an ethics application for a study that aimed to capture the language environment of children living in an indigenous community. The team wanted to capture 'authentic' and 'spontaneous' language, so they proposed to install recording devices in communal areas in the community, hoping to capture conversations as they happened. They argued that since the conversations were in public areas, there was no need for consent forms. They also did not talk to the local community about their plan. They were confident that the innovative nature of their project would impress the ethics committee and that they could start collecting data next month. To their surprise and disappointment, their application got rejected.

(a) Problem Assessment: From a research integrity and ethics viewpoint, what went wrong in this situation?
(b) Risk Assessment: Was anybody or anything put at risk in this situation? What/who are they and why?
(c) Solutions: What solutions can be offered or how do we avoid this kind of situation?

Case 3

Fatima was a research assistant in charge of participant recruitment and communication for an online study. Parents and their children participated in the study. To keep track of recruitment, Fatima kept a list of participants in a spreadsheet on her laptop. One day, Fatima lost the laptop. Luckily, all data in the laptop, including the spreadsheet, were backed up. She didn't lose any information related to the study. Fatima bought a new laptop and thought nothing about what happened. A few weeks later, several parents called the research team in a state of distress. One of the mothers found out that all their names, their children's names, and their contact details from the spreadsheet were posted on the internet. Parents complained that their email addresses were spammed with malicious emails and some also reported attempts to hack into their online banking accounts. While investigating, the research team concluded that the leak came from Fatima's lost laptop. The parents were angry and threatened to complain about the research team to the local authorities. Local news outlets became aware of the complaints and sensationalized the incident, naming and shaming members of the research team and the universities they were affiliated with.

(a) Problem Assessment: From a research integrity and ethics viewpoint, what went wrong in this situation?
(b) Risk Assessment: Was anybody or anything put at risk in this situation? What/who are they and why?
(c) Solutions: What solutions can be offered or how do we avoid this kind of situation?

Case 4

Jai was an associate in a research group that studies literacy development among primary school students. He was in charge of visiting schools to collect data on literacy outcomes by asking students to complete a short exercise. All necessary ethics procedures were completed: 1) the ethics application was approved; 2) schools agreed to participate and submitted their consent forms; and, 3) parents received information about the study and submitted their consent forms. Only children whose parents consented were assessed. Jai also had assent forms ready for children to sign.

One day, a school principal sent him an e-mail asking for the data of specific students to help develop a remedial programme for students struggling in English language classes. At first, Jai was taken aback by this request. But after a few minutes, he sent the data and felt proud that their data can help the students. Once data collection at that school was completed, Jai's supervisor sent a customary 'thank you' email to the principal for their participation. The principal replied to express thanks for the data that Jai shared for the new remedial programme. Immediately, the supervisor phoned Jai. She sounded furious.

(a) Problem Assessment: From a research integrity and ethics viewpoint, what went wrong in this situation?
(b) Risk Assessment: Was anybody or anything put at risk in this situation? What/who are they and why?
(c) Solutions: What solutions can be offered or how do we avoid this kind of situation?