Ethics in Psychology Research

Why are ethics important in research?
- Manipulations may subject participants to undesirable or even harmful experiences
- Some experiments involve withholding information from participants
- The variables we study are often private
- Intervention studies often include a control condition
- The experimenter/participant relationship contains a power differential

Recruitment

- Research participation must be voluntary
- Undue coercion by any means is unethical
- Persons in institutional settings may not understand that participation is voluntary
- Ethics should also influence who is recruited (i.e., consistent under-representation of people of color)
Informed Consent

- Participants have a right to decide whether to be part of a study based on knowledge of the protocol
- Providing informed consent involves:
  - Explaining the purpose, procedures, and duration of the research including any benefits and risks
  - Disclosing alternative procedures
  - Answering any questions about the study
  - Informing the individual that (s)he can withdraw at any time
  - A description of procedures and limits to confidentiality
  - Information regarding a contact for further information

Consent Issues in Clinical Psychology Research

- Competence: Ability to make a logical decision
  - Are institutionalized or very distressed persons competent to give consent?
  - Should guardians be able to choose for "non-competent" persons?
- Is consent adequate?
- Do institutionalized persons really have a choice?

Deception

- In deciding whether to it's OK to use deception, need to determine whether:
  - Research could be carried out without deception
  - Benefits, in terms of knowledge gained, outweigh the risk to the participants
  - Potential for harm to subjects as a result of deception is minimal
Deception

- To minimize the potential negative impact of deception:
  - Avoid outright lying
  - Never withhold information concerning possible risks
  - Inform participants they might be deceived (but not how)
  - Perform a careful, sensitive debriefing
  - Allow participants to withdraw their data upon debriefing

Debriefing

- After the experiment, the full purpose and any deception should be disclosed
- Goals of debriefing:
  - Probe for adverse reactions
  - Attempt to mollify the damage of deception
  - Explain the reason for the deception
  - Educate participant about research
  - Acknowledge the value of the participant’s help
- Sometimes full disclosure may be harmful

Confidentiality

- General rules for maintaining confidentiality:
  - Store consent forms separately from actual data
  - Data that could be matched to a particular person should be kept in a locked cabinet
  - When presenting findings, participants’ identity must be protected
  - Note limits to confidentiality at study outset
Obligation to Intervene

- Those who are not appropriately prepared or trained should not collect clinically sensitive data.
- Researchers have an obligation to screen clinically sensitive data for signs of distress.
- Researchers should plan ahead for how they will intervene when a clinical problem is revealed.
- Participants should be informed when data is completely anonymous so that intervention would not be possible.

Issues in Intervention Research

- Treatment description
  - Participants should be informed about the nature of the treatment and whether it has been shown to be effective.
  - Participants should be informed if about any and all treatments they may receive.
  - Participants should be informed about random assignment.

Control Groups

- Consider whether a delayed or no treatment group is necessary.
- Consider the extent to which individuals will be harmed if assigned to these groups.
- Alternate treatment designs are generally considered more ethical.
- When using tx that may have differential impact, consider whether harm will result with less effective tx.
- Consider harm due to participant's disillusionment with the mental health system.
Accuracy in Reporting Research

- Never fabricate or falsify data
- Document alterations to data
- Double check all of your results!
- Report analyses even if they do not support conclusions
- Identify the source of research funding, if any
- Include any information that might change the interpretation of the results
  - Selection bias
  - Participation rates
  - Psychometrics of measures

Accuracy in Reporting Research

- Give credit for others’ ideas, contributions, or words (quotes, cites)
- Do not knowingly misrepresent others’ work (check yours’ and others’ cites)
- Self-plagiarism (consult copyright release)
  - Can reproduce small amounts of published material
  - Footnote longer paraphrased sections
  - Reprinted tables and figures requires copyright release
  - Inform publisher of second article or incorporate into new paper

Accuracy in Reporting Research

- Duplicate publication is unethical
- Piecemeal publication may be unethical
  - The number of publications should not necessarily be maximized
  - (A smaller number of integrative reports may be better)
  - Not ethical to avoid inconsistencies by publishing more than one report
Assigning Authorship

- Substantial contribution
  - Conceptualization
  - Design
  - Execution
  - Analyses
  - Interpretation
- Technical contributions do not warrant authorship
- Publication credits should reflect relative effort, not status

Sharing Materials and Data

- Psychology researchers are obligated to share materials that would allow replication of their work
- Many large data-bases are publicly available
- Participants should be informed of anticipated sharing or further use of data
- Data sharing should be initiated with confidentiality in mind