

## What is the Ethical thing to do?

Students will get into small groups and, based on sociological guidelines produced by the American Sociological Association, discuss the following ethical dilemmas. Focus your discussion on the following 3 questions:

1. What are the ethical issues that need to be considered to see if this study could be regarded as ethical?
2. What alternatives were there to the methodology used by the researcher?
3. Should this study have been done?

1) A researcher was conducting a study of police department behavior and officer interaction. He spent significant amount of time riding along and participating in extended interactions with officers and staff. At one point several arresting officers were accused of misconduct by a community member. It was discovered that the researcher had on numerous occasions been present when the alleged misconduct had occurred. He also had extensive fieldnotes of some of the interactions that had occurred. The researcher was fully aware that the charges of misconduct were true. However, he claimed that he was ethically committed to protecting his research subjects from harm, as well as maintaining confidentiality, and thus could not provide his data to authorities.

2) A researcher was conducting an in depth study of the behavior of young adults in public spaces, in a specific community. During the course of her research she discovered that many of the adolescents and young adults in the community under observation were involved in what she termed "survival crime." The research observed the purchase, distribution, transportation and use of recreation drugs. As well as prostitution and theft in the form of pick pockets, mugging, breaking into cars and purse snatchers. The researcher never directly participated in such activities but knew of their existence and never reported them.

3) Head Start (free pre-school) is available for low income children in the US. Previously, children were admitted to pre-school based on need. Those with the lowest income and the highest degree of developmental delay were provided services. Now, the US Government uses Randomized control trials to assess the effectiveness of Head Start Programs in the US. Eligible children are randomly assigned either to an intervention group and are allowed to participate in Head Start Programs, or to a control group, and are denied services. Both groups are followed up over 3 years, and are tested based on academic success, emotional wellbeing and social skills.

4) A doctoral student in sociology is researching animal rights activism, one of his sources a research subject is accused of participating in a protest that resulted in property damage and the loss of laboratory animals from a major US animal research laboratory. The researcher was ordered by a US court to give up his fieldnotes and testify about conversations he may have conducted regarding the planning of the event, or face being jailed for contempt of court.

## Ethic Guidelines

The 3 fundamental ethical principles of human subject research

- **Respect** for persons: protecting the autonomy of all people and treating them with courtesy and respect and allowing for informed consent;
- **Beneficence**: maximizing benefits for the research project while minimizing risks to the research subjects; and
- **Justice**: ensuring reasonable, non-exploitative, and well-considered procedures are administered fairly (the fair distribution of costs and benefits).

Here are six basic guidelines:

1. Minimize the risks to the person on whom the research is being conducted.
2. Insure the risks that remain to the person are proportionate to the potential benefits the research may bring them.
3. Provide everyone with sufficient information about the research that they can make an informed decision about whether to participate.
4. Obtain their informed consent in writing prior to beginning the project.
5. Maintain their privacy.
6. Allow subjects to withdraw from the project at any time.

**Source:** United States Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. *The Belmont Report: Ethical Principles and Guidelines for the Protection of Human Subjects of Research*. April 18, 1979