Research-ethical assessment template, risk and relations

For instructions, show comments.

Task/premises:

Date:

Assessed by:

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Activity** | **Hazard** | **Who might be harmed or violated, and how?** | **Present measures to manage risk** | **Risk rating** | **Result** |
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*Table 1: Risk assessment*

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| **Activity** | **Corruptive aspect and involved parties** | **What may be disrupted and how?** | **Measures to manage the relation** | **Relational strength** | **Result** |
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*Table 2: Assessment of relations*

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| **Further action required** | **Action by whom** | **Action by when** | **Done** |
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*Table 3: Action plan*

# Identify risks and relations

When assessing your project, include risks with low probability as long as you believe them to be realistic. Include relations that may only be perceived as problematic if the mere perception may have problematic consequences. Applications are not denied simply because there are ethical issues involved, but failure to identify risks or problematic relations may lead to denials or delays because of requests for supplemental information.

Plan how to handle risks to a realistic extent. Readiness for flexibility in an actual situation is as important as having a plan. Be ready to alter the methodology but keep the integrity of the academic purpose.

The following thematized questions may or may not be relevant to your research. There may or may not be further questions you need to pose to your project to complete a research-ethical assessment. You may also simply need to take a break and think about it.

## Direct harm, violation, or discomfort

* Is there an increased risk that participants get harmed or violated in any way due to their participation?
* May the research invoke pain, traumatic memories, or other kinds of significant discomfort?
* Will the participants be exposed to substances, surgical methods, or other potentially harmful items or procedures?
* Will the participants interact with something heavy, mobile, electrical, toxic, or that may harm them for other reasons?
* Will the participants be involved in using items that do not fulfill conformity standards or use items in ways not intended by the manufacturer?
* Does the methodological approach include differences in the treatment of groups of participants that may mean differences in the risk of harm to the groups, respectively?
* Does the chosen methodological approach promote unpredictable events and, therefore, unpredictable risks?
* Do involved researchers have appropriate training and inclination to safely perform their tasks and handle participants respectfully?
* May data that is sensitive according to the GDPR leak?
* May data sensitive to the integrity or privacy of the participants leak?

## Indirect harm, violation, or discomfort

* May participants or people associated with them be politically or socially persecuted or otherwise repressed due to their participation in the research?
* Does the geographical place or political context create risks that may affect the participants or people associated with them?
* May there be risks for significant and unsolicited media attention against the participants or people associated with them due to their participation?

## Voluntariness

* Is there any relation of dependency between any researcher and participant?
* Is there information provided to the participants that, by wording, visual presentation, or otherwise, exaggerate the benefits of participating or of potential project results?
* Does the information to the participants address them in an overly personal or friendly way?
* Is there information provided to the participants that play down the significance of the risks involved?
* Is there information known to the researchers that may affect the participants or their consent but that cannot be shared with them?

## Vulnerable groups

* Will parts of the research be conducted in areas with less ethics requirements because there are less ethics requirements?
* Will participants receive benefits that otherwise would be considered guaranteed by their fundamental rights only by participating?
* Are inclusion criteria targeting groups that differ from the majority concerning a particular functionality, health status, social status, or other property in ways that tend to raise vulnerabilities?
* Are children recruited as participants?

# Manage risks and relations, examples

Some approaches may be more reasonable or harmonious with specific methodologies.

## Direct harm, violation, or discomfort

* Protect sensitive data (as defined by GDPR or not) during collection, storage, analysis, and dissemination.
* Perform research at a place familiar and safe to the participant.
* Control the flow of people, including staff, during participation.
* Prepare a place for debriefing or rest.
* Set up a debriefing routine.
* Provide contact information to a counsellor.
* Appoint a specific person on site to handle potential worries or discomfort.
* Appoint medical staff to attend or be on alert nearby.
* Recruit one or several ethics advisors not otherwise associated with the project. Task the board to continuosly assess the project.
* Train staff to handle people in grief or provide other relevant training.
* Reimburse participants in proportion to expected suffering.

## Indirect harm, violation, or discomfort

* Associate specialists to the project that advise concerning a specific region, political developments, or other complicated circumstances. Task the persons to continuously assess the project activities.
* Consider alternative regions, study populations, or contexts that may not raise similar risks.
* Work offline only until dissemination.

## Voluntariness

* Inform participants about the planned activities, including risks and benefits, and ask for consent. Use clear and straightforward language, making descriptive statements. Use several modes of communication (at least verbal and written).
* Keep a professional tone and behavior towards participants.
* Include participants in the planning of the research.
* Restrict reimbursement.

## Vulnerable groups

* Adapt information, language, and mode of communication to any special needs.
* If the participants have guardians or custodians, then inform and establish consent with them present to improve communication.
* Divide the participation into steps. Repeat relevant information and ensure consent before each step.
* Use the planned research to alleviate the vulnerability, for example by mitigating marginalisation, relieving physical handicaps, empowering the group identity, or providing a broader set of (enjoyable) experiences than is usually possible.
* Include participants in the planning, analysis, or dissemination of the research.
* Make a more detailed plan to handle risks and relations, for example, using [this tool](https://childethics.com/reflexive-tool/)