

Tricks of the Trade
May 2009



Getting ethics approval

Dr Kirsten McLean
Sociology
School of Political and Social Inquiry

www.arts.monash.edu

Human ethics approval

- This is an important process for every researcher studying humans.
- Process helps you think through the issues related to recruitment, methods and data collection well before you come to do them.

Ethics process: benefits!

- Think of your ethics application as a *living document* outlining your research protocol.
- Re-use parts of it for:
 - MRGS/ARGS Annual Reports
 - Reports for department/school (i.e. Confirmation of Candidature)
 - Reports to other organisations (if involved in your research)

- The ethics process also allows you to set up contingency plans for:
 - unexpected methodological issues that may arise
 - any other problems/dramas that come up for participants and for you.

Applying for ethics approval

- Your supervisors are there to help you!
 - Supervisors are listed as Chief Investigators on all Monash ethics forms
- Therefore you should expect that your supervisor/s will be fully engaged in the process of applying for ethics approval.

Steps to ethics approval

1. Download the appropriate form from the Monash Human Ethics website.
 - Form 1 – covers all kinds of 'higher' risk research
 - LR form – for "Low Risk" research
2. Fill in the form with as much detail as possible.

3. Submit your ethics application *no less* than 6 weeks before you want to start collecting your data.
4. If you are collecting any personal information, including people's names and/or telephone numbers, your project must meet the Privacy Legislation and you will need to also fill in Form P (Section 4 of the form).

5. You will be contacted soon after the meeting date to notify you of any clarifications that are needed to your project, or if you have approval without amendments.
 - If you have submitted a Low Risk proposal (LR) you will be contacted as soon as it has been assessed, usually no more than 2 weeks after submission.

- If you or your supervisor need help with parts of the form:
 - contact the Human Ethics Office on 9905 5490
 - speak to another member of your department or school with expertise in filling out ethics applications.

Ethical considerations: some tips for gaining ethics approval

- Five things I want to cover:
 - Non-coercive recruitment and voluntary participation
 - Privacy
 - Confidentiality
 - Protection from harm
 - Researcher safety

Recruitment

- Participation must be **entirely voluntary**.
- Recruitment should be **non-coercive**.
- Each participant must be given **adequate information** and **adequate time** to make an informed decision to participate in the research.

- Don't recruit amongst family, close friends or other people close to you.
- Don't recruit students in your own classes or other people with whom you may have an unequal relationship.

Privacy

- Only record participants' personal information (names, phone numbers, email addresses) in one or two places.
- Use code numbers for interview transcripts, tapes, survey forms, and any documentation other than consent documents.

Snowball sampling

- Flow of information should go **out** from you, not come **in** from participants:
 - ✓ You give a participant your contact details to pass on to others, who will then contact you if interested in the research.
 - ✗ Participant gives you the name and contact details of a 3rd party (now problematic because of privacy laws).

Protecting privacy

- Pseudonyms should be used for all participants.
- Disguise/change other details that might make participants identifiable to others.
 - i.e. cultural background, job, workplace, etc.

Confidentiality

- Make sure all correspondence (interview recordings, transcripts, survey forms, e-mails, phone calls) is kept confidential.
- Respect the participant and don't tell others about the participants or what they have told you.

Protection from harm

- Don't assume that just because the research may not cause distress or discomfort for you, that it may not do this for others.
- Have good procedures in place to deal with participant distress both during and after the research.
 - (i.e.) counselling numbers, organisational support.

Researcher safety is also paramount

- Don't give out personal information about yourself to participants.
- Conduct research in a safe space (i.e.) cafés, public libraries, or by telephone.

- Don't conduct research in your own home, or in participant's homes (unless absolutely necessary).
- If you need to conduct research in a participant's home, take someone with you.

Resources

- SCERH website:
 - <http://www.monash.edu.au/research/ethics/human/index.html>
- Common mistakes made in ethics application forms:
 - <http://www.monash.edu.au/research/ethics/human/humanethics/common-mistakes.html>
- Additional documents - templates:
 - <http://www.monash.edu.au/research/ethics/human/humanethics/additional-docs.html>