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## Research Ethics Primer

**Ethics:** Before we approach people for any kind of information for any work associated with a Canadian university, we need to have a **Research Ethics Certificate**. In this case, you are covered under my continuing Ethics certificates. Today, we'll deal with some basic requirements. In addition, I will inform you of ethically sound data collection practices and data safeguards when we handle the data.

**Why Ethics and Ethics Clearance?** The recognition that research, no matter how well intentioned, can cause unanticipated harm to participants, has spurred universities around the world to set ethical standards.

### The Three Principles of Ethical Research:

**1) Respect for Persons:** The principle of Respect for Persons recognizes the intrinsic value of human beings and the respect and consideration that they are due. The essence of this principle is that it is **unacceptable to treat individuals solely as means (mere objects or things) to an end (a research goal)**. The **welfare and integrity of the participant must take priority** over all else in human research.

**2) Concern for Welfare:** The Principle of Concern for Welfare recognizes that research participation can affect the welfare of an individual or group in many ways. Respecting this principle means doing your best **to ensure that participants are not exposed to unnecessary risks**.

**3) Justice:** The Principle of Justice refers to the **obligation to treat all people fairly and equitably**. Fairness is treating all people with equal respect and concern for their welfare – it does not necessarily mean treating everyone the same. Equity involves the distribution of the benefits and burdens of research participation. No segment of the population should be unfairly burdened with the harms of research. Nor should any individuals or groups be neglected or discriminated against in the opportunity to benefit from knowledge generated by research.

An important threat to Justice is the **imbalance of power** that may exist in the relationship between researcher and participant. Participants will generally not understand the research in the same way and in the same depth as does the researcher. Historically, there have been instances in which this power imbalance has been abused, with resulting harm to participants.

## Informed Consent

**The decision to participate must be made by the respondent.** Every respondent must be able to make this choice freely, without feeling pressures to partake. **We must inform the potential respondent (what is this about, what is it used for?) in order for the respondent to give their “Informed Consent” or Not-Consent.** Often, this is done by signing a form. **Our study is anonymous – we do not ask for names, addresses etc. so we do not let respondents sign. But they will give their “Informed Consent”.**

**What are the benefits of the anonymous approach?**

**What are disadvantages of this approach?**

## Case study Social Sciences:

You are an international student in Canada and you have secured a much-needed part-time job in a research lab. Your supervisor is doing a study on culture shock and announces he is having trouble finding enough participants. You and your co-workers, who are also international students, are asked to participate in the study and told that this is valuable research experience. You fear that refusing to participate in the study will cause you to lose your job or affect your chances for future employment.

**The participant perspective:** It is important for researchers to carefully consider the circumstances of the people they will be approaching to become participants. Here are some examples of questions that should be asked when designing a study:

- Is there a power relationship between the researcher and the participants (e.g. doctor/patient, teacher/student, supervisor/assistant)?
- Are there any cultural norms or practices that need to be factored into the recruitment, consent, or debriefing process?
- What are the economic circumstances of the prospective participants?
- Could there be any social repercussions of participation in this project?
- How can the privacy and confidentiality of participants be protected?