

Managing Ethics in Research within the Department of Applied Psychology

Departmental Briefing on Ethics for Researchers

Since the PSI code of ethics is the operative code in our country, we should follow it as closely as is possible. This page is based on the results of my content analysis of the PSI Code of Ethics as it applies to research.

The current version was produced on the basis of the PSI code in April 2007, and amended in November 2008.

There are four basic principles which run through every code of ethics (from Hippocrates on) for dealing with humans:

1. Nobody may be harmed as a direct result of your activity. *Therefore it is extremely important that the risks to participants be enumerated and a strategy for avoiding and managing those risks is formulated.*
2. You should not use information given you for any purpose other than your stated purpose when you asked for it. *Therefore aims, data handling, and the fate of data must be scrupulously declared.*
3. Nobody may be coerced into your activities. *Therefore it is extremely important to declare how informed consent will be handled.*
4. You should behave morally. *This is why examination of adherence to a Code of Ethics is important.*

Reference is made to the Code of Professional Ethics of the Psychological Society of Ireland (2003) to which all psychologists in Ireland subscribe as our moral professional standard.

There are nine areas under which the Code may be classified. The initial classification is given below, and a first attempt has been made to outline the summary questions.

The format of this page is as follows:

- The classification area is given
- Summary questions are given in italics
- Clauses from the PSI code are given with the relevant clause number at the start of the line in purple colour

1. Process of ethical consideration

1.1 Use an independent and adequate review to ensure that the research conforms to the Code of Professional Ethics.

These clauses are superfluous for a research proposal review, although they should form part of our teaching.

4.3.6 Seek an independent and adequate ethical review of the risks to public or individual trust and of safeguards to protect such trust for any research which uses deception or techniques which might be interpreted as deception, before making a decision to proceed.

3.6.1 Use a systematic procedure for investigating ethical issues and resolving ethical dilemmas. A recommended procedure is presented in Appendix A, and a categorisation of affected/interested parties (stakeholders) in Appendix B.

3.3.14 Seek an independent and adequate ethical review of the balance of risks and potential benefits of all research which involves procedures of unknown consequence, or where pain, discomfort, or harm are possible, before making a decision to proceed.

3.2.3 Protect the reputation of the profession and discipline by ensuring that all professional activities carried out conform to the provisions of this Code of Professional Ethics.

3.1.5 Help develop, promote, and participate in accountability processes and procedures related to their work.

2.1.1 Accept the obligation to study and understand the provisions of this Code of Professional Ethics.

1.3.13 Seek an independent and adequate ethical review of human rights issues and protections for any research involving vulnerable groups and/or persons of diminished capacity to give informed consent, before making a decision to proceed.

2. Aims of the study

2.1 Is there a risk that the psychological integrity of any subjects may be impaired?

2.2 Is there a risk that the interests of any subject may be damaged?

2.3 If you are intending to study persons who have diminished capacity to give informed consent, could this research be carried out with persons who have a fuller capacity to give informed consent?

3.3.8 Not contribute to nor engage in research or any other activity which promotes or is intended for use in deliberate impairment of the individual's psychological integrity (for example, torture), the development of prohibited weapons, destruction of the environment, or any other act which contravenes relevant international law.

3.3.1 Behave in professional activities in such a way as not to damage clients' interests.

3.1.3 Are sensitive to the needs, current issues, and problems of society when determining research questions to be asked, services to be developed, information to be collected, or the interpretation of results findings.

2.3.5 Not carry out any scientific or professional activity unless the probable benefit is proportionately greater than the risk involved.

2.3.2 Direct their interventions towards clear objectives, and do not persist with those interventions after the objectives have been met or if it has become apparent that the objectives cannot be met.

1.3.12 Do not use persons of diminished capacity to give informed consent in research studies, if the research involved might equally well be carried out with persons who have a fuller capacity to give informed consent.

3. Target population

3.1 Is there a risk that this research will cause serious physical or psychological harm to the participants?

3.2 If you are intending to use animals in this research, what is the justification for this?

3.3.17 Use animals in research only where there is a reasonable expectation that the research will increase understanding of the structures and processes underlying behaviour, or increase understanding of the particular animal species used in the study, or result eventually in benefits to the health and welfare of humans or other animals.

3.3.16 Refuse to help individuals, families, groups, or communities to carry out or submit to activities which, according to current knowledge and/or legal and professional guidelines, would cause serious physical or psychological harm to themselves or others.

4. Methodology, measures and methods

4.1 Does this research use deception or techniques which might be interpreted as deception?

4.2 Are you or your assistants qualified to use all the measures involved in this research?

4.3 If you are going to cause pain or stress to animals, how do you justify this?

4.4 Do any of your methods risk serious physical or psychological harm to the participants?

4.5 If there are participants in control condition(s) who are denied beneficial effects of the study how will they be given access to these effects?

4.6 Is there a risk that the legal, civil or moral rights of participants will be disrespected?

4.7 Is there a risk you may not understand your participants - moral or cultural values?

4.3.4 Avoid using deception (or techniques which might be interpreted as deception) in research or service activities if there are alternative procedures available or if negative effects cannot be predicted or offset.

3.4.1 Make themselves aware of the knowledge and skills of other disciplines (for example, law, medicine) and advise the use of such knowledge and skills, where relevant to the benefit of others.

3.3.6 Take all reasonable steps to ensure that tests and assessment methods are only used by those qualified and trained to do so.

3.3.18 Use procedures subjecting animals to pain, stress, or deprivation only if alternative procedures are unavailable and the goal is justified by prospective scientific, educational, or applied gains.

3.3.16 Refuse to help individuals, families, groups, or communities to carry out or submit to activities which, according to current knowledge and/or legal and professional guidelines, would cause serious physical or psychological harm to themselves or others.

3.3.12 Not disadvantage participants (individuals, groups, families or communities) by offering them no service over an unreasonable period of time in order to fulfil a control condition in a research study; where a study reveals beneficial effects, and resources allow, psychologists subsequently offer the beneficial service to participants in the control condition.

2.3.4 Carry out pilot studies to determine the effects of all new procedures and techniques which might carry some risks, before considering their use on a broader scale.

2.3.2 Direct their interventions towards clear objectives, and do not persist with those interventions after the objectives have been met or if it has become apparent that the objectives cannot be met.

2.2.3 Offer or carry out (without supervision) only those professional activities for which they have established their competence to practise to the benefit of others.

2.2.2 Recognize the boundaries of their competence, and do not exceed these.

1.1.5 Avoid or refuse to participate in practices which are disrespectful of the legal, civil, or moral rights of others.

1.1.3 Convey respect for and abide by prevailing community mores, social customs, and cultural expectations in their scientific and professional activities.

1.1.1 Have sensible regard for individual clients' moral and cultural values.

5. Sampling

5.1 How will you establish informed consent?

5.2 Will your participants be compensated for their time and effort?

5.3 Is there a risk that some participants may volunteer who are likely to be harmed by the research?

5.4 Will you communicate the purpose of the research to participants in advance?

4.4.1 Not exploit any professional relationship to further their own personal, political or business interests. Examples include: soliciting for private practice clients of one's employing agency; taking advantage of trust or dependency to frighten clients into receiving services; appropriating student's ideas, research or work; using the resources of one's employing institution for purposes not agreed to; securing or accepting significant financial or material benefit for professional activities which are already rewarded by salary; prejudicing others against a colleague for reasons of personal gain.

4.3.2 Be clear and straightforward about all information needed to establish informed consent or any other valid written or unwritten agreement (for example: fees; concerns; mutual responsibilities; ethical responsibilities of psychologists; purpose and nature of the relationship; alternatives; likely experiences; possible conflicts; possible outcomes; and, expectations for processing, using, and sharing any information generated).

4.2.8 Compensate others justly for the use of their time, energy, and intelligence, unless such compensation is refused in advance.

4.2.12 Be clear, when entering into contracts with third parties, about obligations under this Code of Professional Ethics, and ensure that all parties concerned are aware of their rights and responsibilities.

3.3.3 Assess the individuals, families, groups, and communities involved in their professional activities adequately enough to discern what will benefit and not harm those persons.

3.3.2 Be sufficiently sensitive to and knowledgeable about individual differences and vulnerabilities to discern what will benefit and not harm persons involved in their professional activities.

3.3.13 Not offer rewards to motivate individuals or group to participate in activity that has possible or known risks for them or others.

3.3.10 Screen research participants and select those not likely to be harmed, if risk or harm to some research participants is possible.

1.3.9 Obtain informed consent for all research activities which involve obtrusive measures, invasion into the private lives of research participants, risks to the participant, or any attempt to change the behaviour of research participants.

1.3.7 Take all reasonable steps to ensure that consent to receive service or participate in research is not given under conditions of coercion or undue pressure.

1.3.3 Obtain informed consent from all independent and partially dependent persons for any psychological services provided to them.

1.3.19 Clarify the nature of any multiple relationships to all concerned parties before obtaining consent, if services or research are at the behest of third parties (which may include schools, courts, government agencies, insurance companies, police, and special funding bodies). The clarification includes, but is not limited to, the following information: the purpose of the service or research; the use that will be made of information collected; and the limits on confidentiality.

1.3.10 Seek willing and adequately informed participation from any person of diminished capacity to give informed consent, and proceed without this consent only if the service or research activity is considered to be of direct benefit to that person.

1.3.1 View informed consent not just as the signing of a consent form, but as the outcome of a process of agreeing to work collaboratively. However, they recognise that certain investigations and interventions may be compulsory under the law.

1.1.1 Have sensible regard for individual clients' moral and cultural values.

6. Procedure

6.1 Will you explain the purpose of the experiment to your participants, and debrief them, especially if some level of deception was involved?

6.2 Will you protect the well-being of your participants, and avoid harming them, physically, mentally, or socially, or infringing on their personal space?

6.3 Will you always establish informed consent beforehand?

6.4 Will you be sensitive to cultural and moral values in your subject population, and use respectful language?

6.4 If you are going to use assistants, will you ensure that they have the necessary skills and knowledge to carry out the procedures correctly and ethically?

6.2 Is there a risk that you may not be able to honour commitments made to some participants?

4.3.5 Provide a debriefing for research participants following studies in which deception (or the use of techniques which could be interpreted as deception) has occurred. Psychologists shall clarify the real nature of and rationale for the study, and seek to remove any misconceptions and re-establish trust.

4.3.3 Fully explain reasons for their actions to persons who have been affected by their actions, if appropriate and/or if asked.

4.2.4 Ensure that families, and other interested parties, are aware that the psychologist's primary responsibilities are generally to the individual.

4.2.11 Honour all promises and commitments included in any written or verbal agreement unless serious and unexpected circumstances (for example, illness) intervene. If such

circumstances occur, then the psychologist shall make a full and honest explanation to other parties involved.

3.3.9 Act to minimise the impact of their research activities on research participants' personality or their mental or physical integrity.

3.3.4 Do everything reasonably possible to stop or offset the consequences of actions by others when these actions are likely to cause serious physical harm or death. Action may include reporting to appropriate authorities (for example, the police) or an intended victim, and may be carried out even when a confidential relationship is involved.

3.3.19 Make every effort to minimize discomfort, illness and pain in animals. Such effort includes performing surgical procedures only under appropriate anaesthesia, using techniques to avoid infection and minimise pain during and after surgery, and disposing of experimental animals only in a humane way.

3.3.11 Debrief research participants in such a way that any harm caused can be discerned, and act to correct any resultant harm.

3.3.1 Behave in professional activities in such a way as not to damage clients' interests.

3.1.4 Protect the dignity and wellbeing of research participants at all times.

2.3.3 Terminate an activity when it is clear that the activity is more harmful than beneficial, or when the activity is no longer needed.

2.2.5 Avoid delegating professional activities to persons not competent to carry them out to the benefit of others.

2.2.1 Be aware of how their own experiences, attitudes, culture, beliefs and values influence their interactions with others, and integrate this awareness into all efforts to benefit and not harm others.

1.4.3 Respect the right of individuals to discontinue participation or service at any time, and are responsive to non-verbal indications of a desire to discontinue if individuals have difficulty in verbally communicating such a desire.

1.4.2 Respect the right of recipients of service, research participants, employees, supervisees, students, and others, to safeguard their own dignity.

1.3.5 Ensure, in the process of obtaining informed consent, that at least the following points are understood: purpose and nature of the activity; mutual responsibilities; likely benefits and risks; alternatives; the likely consequences of non-action; the option to refuse or withdraw at any time, without prejudice; over what period of time the consent applies; and, how to rescind consent if desired.

1.3.4 Provide, in obtaining informed consent, as much information as a reasonable or prudent person, family, group, or community would want to know before making a decision or consenting to an activity. The psychologist relays this information in language which the

persons understand and shall take whatever reasonable steps are necessary to ensure that the information is, in fact, understood.

1.3.20 Obtain clients' consent to the attendance of trainees and other third parties not directly involved in the provision of professional services.

1.3.17 Make audio, video or photographic records of clients or research participants only where these persons have given prior agreement to the making of the record and the conditions of subsequent access. This clause does not apply to recording of public behaviour or research situations where other ethical safeguards have been implemented.

1.3.11 Carry out informed consent processes with those persons who are legally responsible or appointed to give informed consent on behalf of individuals who are not competent to give consent on their own behalf.

1.2.2 Take care not to infringe, in research or service activities, on the personally or culturally defined private space of individuals or groups unless clear and appropriate permission is granted to do so.

1.1.4 Use language that conveys respect for the dignity of others (for example, gender-neutral terms) in all written or verbal communication.

1.1.3 Convey respect for and abide by prevailing community mores, social customs, and cultural expectations in their scientific and professional activities.

1.1.1 Have sensible regard for individual clients' moral and cultural values.

7. Data handling

7.1 Is the data relevant to the aims of the study?

7.2 How will data be stored and for how long?

7.3 How anonymous will it be?

7.4 Who will have access to it?

7.5 When will it be destroyed?

4.2.14 Clarify ownership of documentation, data, and rights of publication with those who commission research.

1.4.2 Respect the right of recipients of service, research participants, employees, supervisees, students, and others, to safeguard their own dignity.

1.3.16 Publish information about clients, in oral or written form, only with their consent, or where their identity is adequately disguised.

1.3.15 Discuss psychological or evaluative data on individuals only for professional purposes, and only with those who are clearly entitled to know or be consulted.

1.3.14 Ensure that information is revealed only with the client's consent, except when subject to the requirements of law or where concealment would result in danger to the client or others.

1.2.9 Inform those to whom they offer services about legal limits on confidentiality where it is appropriate to do so.

1.2.8 Be acutely aware of the need for discretion in the recording and communication of information, so as to prevent it from being interpreted or used to the detriment of others. Appropriate action includes, but is not limited to: not recording information which could lead to misinterpretation and misuse; avoiding conjecture; clearly labelling opinion; and, communicating information in language that can be understood clearly by the particular recipient of the information.

1.2.7 Take all reasonable steps to ensure that records over which they have control remain personally identifiable only as long as is necessary in the interests of those to whom the records refer and/or to the research project for which they were collected, or as required by law, and render anonymous or destroy any records under their control that no longer need to be personally identifiable.

1.2.6 Store, handle, transfer and dispose of all records, both written and unwritten (for example, computer files, video tapes), in a way that attends to the needs for privacy and security. They also make adequate plans for records in circumstances of their own serious illness or death.

1.2.5 Share confidential information with others only with the informed consent (see Section 1.3) of those involved, or in a manner that the individuals involved cannot be identified, except as required or justified by law, or in circumstances of actual or possible serious physical harm or death.

1.2.4 Take care not to relay, except as required or justified by law, confidential information about others (for example, colleagues, colleagues' clients, students, or members of organisations) to which they have become privy in the course of their professional activities.

1.2.10 Clarify what measures will be taken to protect confidentiality, and what responsibilities family, group, and community members have for the protection of each other's confidentiality, when engaged in services to or research with individuals, families, groups or communities.

1.2.1 Explore and collect only that information which is germane to the purposes of a given investigation or intervention, or which is required by law.

8. Reporting

8.1 Where will the data be reported?

8.2 Will any individuals be recognised by others or by themselves in the reports?

8.3 Will you report the data and authors' details accurately and clearly, not claiming for yourself work which is not your own?

4.4.1 Not exploit any professional relationship to further their own personal, political or business interests. Examples include: soliciting for private practice clients of one's employing agency; taking advantage of trust or dependency to frighten clients into receiving services; appropriating student's ideas, research or work; using the resources of one's employing institution for purposes not agreed to; securing or accepting significant financial or material benefit for professional activities which are already rewarded by salary; prejudicing others against a colleague for reasons of personal gain.

4.3.1 Respect the right of clients and research participants to receive an appropriate explanation of the nature, purpose and results of investigations, assessments and research findings, in language that these persons can understand.

4.2.6 Not suppress discontinuing evidence of their findings and views, and acknowledge alternative hypotheses and explanations.

4.2.5 Take care in communicating their knowledge, findings and views to clearly differentiate facts, opinions, theories, hypotheses, and ideas.

4.2.3 Make clear whether they are acting as private citizens, as members of specific organisations or groups, or as representatives of the discipline of psychology, when making statements or when involved in public activities.

4.2.2 Avoid misrepresentation, exaggeration or distortion by themselves or others of psychological findings or the effectiveness of the services which they offer, and act quickly to correct any such misrepresentation, exaggeration or distortion.

4.2.15 Give publication credit to others (including students) in proportion to the professional contribution that they have made. Publication includes all forms of media. Professional contributions include but are not limited to: ideas generated, execution of research, analysis of results, and writing.

4.2.1 Ensure that they and others accurately represent their education, training and experience, and the effectiveness of the services which they offer, in all spoken, written or printed communications. Relevant communications include but are not limited to: advertisements of services, course and workshop descriptions, academic grading requirements, and research reports. Where misrepresentation has occurred, they act quickly to correct it.

3.5.3 Guard against misuse or misinterpretation by others of psychological data.

3.3.7 Refuse to advise, train, or supply information to anyone who, in their judgement, will use the knowledge or skills to harm others or infringe human rights.

3.3.5 Make every reasonable effort to ensure that psychological knowledge is not misused, intentionally or unintentionally, to harm others or infringe human rights.

3.3.15 Exercise particular care when reporting results on vulnerable groups to counter misinterpretation or misuse in the development of social policy, attitudes, or practices (for example, manipulation of vulnerable persons or discrimination against specific populations).

3.2.2 Ensure that they maintain the highest standards of scientific integrity in their research.

3.1.7 Make every reasonable effort to ensure that psychological knowledge is not misused, intentionally or unintentionally, to infringe on human rights.

3.1.6 Help to establish and abide by fair procedures in their activities as employers, evaluators, adjudicators, editors, and peer reviewers.

3.1.2 Monitor and evaluate the effect of their professional activities, record their findings and, if appropriate, communicate new knowledge to others in the field.

3.1.1 Contribute to the discipline of psychology and to society's understanding of itself and human beings generally, through a free pursuit and sharing of knowledge.

2.4.2 Participate in and contribute to continuing education and their own and colleagues' professional and scientific growth.

2.3.6 Provide thorough discussion of the limits of their data, if their work touches on social policy and structure.

2.3.1 Be mindful, when they make decisions based on psychological data and the use of psychological techniques, of the limitations of such data and techniques.

1.4.1 Seek as full and active participation as possible from others in decisions which affect them.

1.3.2 Respect and integrate as much as possible the opinions and wishes of others regarding decisions which affect them.

1.3.16 Publish information about clients, in oral or written form, only with their consent, or where their identity is adequately disguised.

1.2.8 Be acutely aware of the need for discretion in the recording and communication of information, so as to prevent it from being interpreted or used to the detriment of others. Appropriate action includes, but is not limited to: not recording information which could lead to misinterpretation and misuse; avoiding conjecture; clearly labelling opinion; and, communicating information in language that can be understood clearly by the particular recipient of the information.

9. Conduct

9.1 How will the researcher represent themselves to the subjects, peers, and the rest of the world?

9.2 Does the researcher have any motivation other than the aims of the study for doing the research?

9.3 Will the researcher involve others in the sampling, procedure, or data handling?

4.5.1 Act to stop or offset the consequences of professional activities of a colleague or a member of another discipline which are clearly harmful or apparently unethical. Depending on the nature of the harmful activities, action may include talking informally with the professional involved, and obtaining an assurance that any harm will discontinue and be corrected. However, if the harm is serious and/or the activities persist, the psychologist shall report the situation to the Society's Board of Professional Conduct, or other appropriate regulatory body. Where such activities come to psychologists' attention in the course of a confidential client relationship with the professional, they use their professional judgment on whether to break confidentiality.

4.4.3 Be acutely aware of the problematic nature of dual relationships (with, for example, students, employees or clients), and recognise that it is not always possible to avoid them (for example, when offering services in a small community, or engaging in person-centred teaching or training). Where it is possible, psychologists shall avoid such relationships; where it is not, they take active steps to safeguard the students', employees' or clients' interests.

4.4.2 Not exploit clients for gratification of sexual desires, either during the professional relationship or after its termination.

4.2.9 Not accept or attempt to secure fees or benefits over and above those agreed contractually in advance. They shall not accept significant gifts where such acceptance would undermine their impartiality.

4.2.7 Conduct research in a way that is consistent with a commitment to honest, open inquiry, and to clear communication of any research aims, sponsorship, social context, personal values, or financial interests that may affect or appear to affect their research.

4.2.13 Ensure that those who commission research are aware of the rights and responsibilities of all interested parties.

4.2.10 Not participate in, condone, or allow themselves to be associated with dishonesty or fraud.

4.1.2 Seek emotional support and/or supervision from colleagues when feeling stressed or vulnerable due to professional dilemmas.

4.1.1 Engage in self-care activities which help to avoid conditions (for example, burnout, addictions) which could result in impaired judgement and interfere with their ability to benefit and not harm others.

3.6.3 Consult with colleagues and/or appropriate groups and committees if faced with a difficult situation or apparent conflict between compliance with the law and following an ethical principle. They seek consensus on the most ethical course of action and the most responsible, knowledgeable, effective, and respectful way to carry it out. In an emergency, where there is no time to consult, they make their own best professional judgment.

3.6.2 Inform all parties, if a real or potential conflict of interest arises, of the need to resolve the situation in a manner that is consistent with this Code of Professional Ethics, and take all reasonable steps so to resolve it.

3.2.4 Behave in professional activities in such a way as not to undermine public confidence in the profession.

3.2.1 Uphold the discipline's responsibility to society by promoting and maintaining the highest standards of the discipline.

3.1.8 Speak out if the policies, practices or regulations of the organisation within which they work seriously ignore or oppose any of the principles of this Code of Professional Ethics.

2.5.1 Refrain from practice when their professional judgment or ability to benefit and not harm others is seriously impaired by a physical or psychological condition. When they become aware of problems that may affect their competence, they seek competent professional assistance to determine whether they should limit, suspend or terminate their professional activity.

2.4.3 Keep themselves up to date with relevant knowledge, research methods, and techniques, through the reading of relevant literature, peer consultation, and continuing education activities, in order that their service or research activities and conclusions shall benefit and not harm others.

2.4.1 Maintain and develop their professional competence.

2.1.2 Avoid entering into agreements or contracts which might oblige them to contravene provisions of this Code of Professional Ethics.

1.3.6 Act in emergencies (for example, where a client threatens suicide) on the basis of their professional judgment, if necessary without consent, but if possible obtain fully informed consent at a later stage.

1.3.18 Clarify to all concerned the nature of their loyalties in cases of conflict of interest (between, for example, the interests of the client and the psychologist's employing institution).