Research Methods for the Social Sciences: Ethics

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Overview

I. General principles

II. Scenarios designed to help understand how ethical issues arise daily in the field of statistics
General principles

- The American Evaluation Association’s *Guiding Principles for Evaluators*

1. Systematic inquiry
2. Competence
3. Integrity/honesty
4. Respect for people
5. Responsibilities for the general and public welfare
Systematic inquiry

• Conduct systematic, data-based inquiries about whatever is being evaluated
  – Use the highest appropriate technical standards to increase the accuracy and credibility of the information you produce
  – Explore shortcomings and strengths of various approaches
Systematic inquiry

–When presenting work:
  • Communicate methods and approaches accurately and in sufficient detail
  • Make clear the limitations
Competence

• Provide competent performance to stakeholders
  – Possess the education, ability, skills and experience appropriate to undertake proposed tasks
  – Practice within the limits of professional training and competence
  – Seek to maintain and improve competence
Integrity/honesty

• Ensure the honesty and integrity of the entire evaluation process
  – Negotiate (or budget) honestly about
    • Costs
    • Tasks to be undertaken
    • Limitations in the methodology
    • Scope of the results
    • Uses of the data
Integrity/honesty (cont.)

– Record all changes in the negotiated plan and reasons they were changed

– Seek to determine and be explicit about your own, the clients’/funders’, and/or other stakeholders’ interest concerning study outcomes

– Disclose conflicts of interest
Integrity/honesty (cont.)

– Properly represent procedures, data and findings

– Communicate concerns about potentially misleading information or conclusions

– Disclose sources of financial support and the source of the request for the study
Respect for people

• Respect the security, dignity and self-worth of the respondents, program participants, clients and other stakeholders with whom they interact

  – Abide by current professional ethical standards regarding:

    • Risks, harms and burdens to participants
    • **Informed consent** for participation
    • Informing participants about the scopes and limits of confidentiality
Respect for people: Informed consent

• What is it?

• What does it include?
Respect for people: Informed consent

• According to the National Institutes of Health, in seeking informed consent, the following information shall be provided to each subject:

1) A statement that the study involves research, an explanation of the purposes of the research and the expected duration of the subject's participation, a description of the procedures to be followed, and identification of any procedures which are experimental

2) A description of any reasonably foreseeable risks or discomforts to the subject
Respect for people: Informed consent

3) A description of any benefits to the subject or to others which may reasonably be expected from the research

4) A disclosure of appropriate alternative procedures or courses of treatment, if any, that might be advantageous to the subject

5) A statement describing the extent, if any, to which confidentiality of records identifying the subject will be maintained
Respect for people: Informed consent

6) For research involving more than minimal risk, an explanation as to whether any compensation and any medical treatments are available if injury occurs and, if so, what they consist of or where further information may be obtained.

7) An explanation of whom to contact for answers to pertinent questions about the research and research subjects' rights, and whom to contact in the event of a research-related injury to the subject.
Respect for people: Informed consent

8) A statement that participation is voluntary, refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which the subject is otherwise entitled, and the subject may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which the subject is otherwise entitled.
Respect for people: Human subjects training

- Human subjects training: http://www.hrsa.gov/humansubjects/
  - Historical background for behavioral and biomedical research
  - Ethical principles for human subject research
  - Case studies
  - Information on the role of an Institutional Review Board
Respect for people: Institutional review board

- Institutional review board (IRB):
  - A committee that has been formally designated to approve, monitor, and review biomedical and behavioral research involving humans with the aim to protect the rights and welfare of the research subjects
Responsibilities for general and public welfare

• Articulate and take into account the diversity of interests and values that may be related to the general and public welfare
  – Disseminate findings
  – Allow access to information
Scenarios

  – http://cnx.org/content/m15555/1.1/.
  – Based on Cruz-Cruz, J. & Frey, W. Building an Ethics Module for Business, Science, and Engineering Students.