

ETHICS REVIEW COMMITTEE OF THE SOCIAL SCIENCES ETHICAL PROCEDURE AND QUESTIONS

The Ethics Review Committee of the Social Sciences has put in place a procedure for the ethical review of new research projects, and, if needed, grant permission to conduct them. It contains a background text that will help you to reflect on the ethical aspects of your proposed research. With this document we aim to foster reflection and care by posing questions rather than providing answers. The ideal ethics section is one in which you articulate and address the real, true and sometimes irreducible problems that your research might face. The following set of questions will help you to write an ethics section. Remember that there is never just one 'good' answer. Not all questions are necessarily relevant for your research project. Moreover, sometimes tension between certain ethical principles will occur (for instance, between anonymity and openness).

How to decide whether asking for ethical permission is required or might be wise.

1. The Ethics Review Committee makes an ethics assessment if:
 - a. Your research might have a direct impact on the lives of your research informants/participants/interlocutors (e.g., their life world is interfered with; it may be dangerous for them to work with you; their privacy is at stake).
 - b. Your research methods may pose a danger or serious practical problems for yourself, your colleagues or research assistants.
 - c. Your research is situated in fields of clashing interests (for example, between an institution and its clients, governing bodies and groups being governed, industry and activists, and so on) that deserve to be handled with care;
 - d. Your own interests may clash with those of others concerned.

When in doubt about whether to ask for ethical permission, read the section below or contact a member of the Ethics Review Committee. If your research has some difficult ethical aspects, the Ethics Review Committee will engage in a dialogue with you.

Some funding organizations want to have a written ethical permission before they will provide funds. Moreover, some journals might ask for written proof of ethical permission before they publish any study. The Ethics Review Committee is willing to work with you to meet these requirements, but is eager to avoid turning ethics into a bureaucratic (and potentially void) ritual. The idea behind seeking and granting ethical approval is to invest, time and again, the effort required to realise research that is fair, honest and respectful.

The Ethics Review Committee will read your explanations of how you hope to ensure the decency, fairness, honesty, respectfulness, etc. of your research. When necessary, we will ask you questions, make suggestions or point to possibilities that other researchers have explored.

When we read your research plan, we hope to learn what the research is about, what questions you will ask, in what settings your research will be carried out, and which methods you will use. What follows are a few issues to think through when using the review form.

Section C: General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)

Personal data refers to any information relating to an identified or identifiable natural person. For instance, the address, name, and birth date. Sensitive personal data refers to, among others, data regarding racial or ethnic origin; religious, political and philosophical beliefs; genetic and biometric data. Please consult the GDPR's definition. When collecting personal data, contact the Privacy Officer for approval of a Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA). More information about Privacy Policy and Procedures and the DPIA form you can find on the site [Privacy policy and procedures - Leiden University \(universiteitleiden.nl\)](https://www.universiteitleiden.nl/privacy) Please contact the Privacy Officer at datamanagement@fsw.leidenuniv.nl if you have any questions about the assessment. The Privacy Officer will inform the Ethics Review Committee about the outcome of the assessment.

Section D: Who and what

Social science research frequently involves working with informants/participants/interlocutors and their rights are to be respected. What population will you study, and how will you recruit people? Will you work through other institutions (e.g. healthcare; schools)? If so, how will you ensure your relative independence of these institutions? How will you ensure that these institutions will not put pressure on you to work in unethical ways, or treat those who participate in your research differently from those who do not? Are you considering providing reimbursement to the participants? If so, in which form (money or other goods)? Why do you choose a particular form of reimbursement? Does this have any particular negative consequences for you, the participants and non-participants? Which other issues of decency will arise at this point and how will you handle them?

If you work with publicly available data in your research; if you study built environments, infrastructures or practices (e.g. transportation practices); or if you do not directly depend on people and their willingness to talk with you: how will you incorporate in your questions respect for the interests and concerns of those whose lives your work may affect?

How do your research questions address, reflect on, critique or otherwise relate to the concerns of the various people to whom your research pertains?

Section E: Relating in research

Will your information gathering have the potential to harm people? If so, do you intend to protect your research subjects against the potential negative consequences of their participation? If so, how? If not, why not? This may become pressing in situations where your informants are 'undercover' (e.g. illegal) and/or where states or other organisations are at least as curious about them as you are. What kinds of risk reducing measures will you take? When completing the form, please keep in mind that we would like to see your evaluation of how a research goal merits risks.

How will you explain your research and its purposes to your informants/participants/interlocutors or maybe also others?

Will you ask people for their consent to be researched? If so, what exactly will you ask them to consent to? Will you tell them about your research procedure? Will you share your results with them? In what ways? What kind of consent will you ask (oral, written, or another form)? What kind of burden might this consent procedure present? Is this potential burden warranted? If you do want to work with forms, which shape do you give these? If paperwork is not opportune in the settings where you will be working, in which other way will you show you are respectful?

Will you guarantee anonymity alongside consent or instead of consent? By using pseudonyms in note making or in reports and/or by altering irrelevant details about people in your texts? Providing anonymity may come at the cost of a lack of openness about your sources. Is that relevant in your case? If so, how do you intend to handle this tension? What do you do when people want to have their names used? What do you do when they are public figures whose identity cannot be hidden?

Which extra activities will you engage in if your research subjects/informants are part of vulnerable groups? Vulnerable people are those that are unable to protect their own rights and welfare. For instance, children, mentally ill people, or captive populations.

Will you find yourself in a situation where your work is 'undercover' and not something to discuss in so many words during the process of research? If so, please explain why this is necessary. Discuss how this may affect the research and how you will attend to interests of informants/participants/interlocutors. If you will not directly talk with the people to whom your research pertains, how will you attend to their interests and concerns?

Your responsibility does not end with shifting decisions and choices to your research informants/participants/interlocutors. How will you avoid or reduce the risk that your research process will harm them? That is, what will you do to protect them against the potential negative consequences of their participation? What might such negative consequences be? How will you protect yourself and other researchers and research assistants involved against potential negative consequences of the research process?

Situations of studying illegality come to mind here. But the risks may also be social (e.g., being confronted with violence or risking rape) or mental/psychological. If this is relevant in your case, what kind of personal and emotional preparations and support will you organise for your researcher team.

Section F: After assembling

How will you deal with the materials you have assembled? Once you have data, there may be tensions between ensuring the privacy of informants/participants/interlocutors or sharing them with fellow researchers and/or other publics. How will you juggle keeping sensitive issues from inquisitive eyes with proving enough openness to assure others of the truthfulness of your results? In other words, how will you handle the potential tension between the ethics of data protection and the integrity of data sharing?

If you intend to publish your data, when will you do so – immediately, or after a certain embargo time? Will other researchers be able to use your collected information? Will you preserve your data for later use (e.g., after a few decades)? Or will it be better in your case to destroy your rough materials so that the original research subjects/informants are better protected, or for another reason (if so, which reason)? Here, the same tensions arise but as the time line is longer, specificities may change.

Section G: Publishing

How will you explain the methods that you use to collect, treat and analyse your data in publications? What, in your case, are the relevant ethical issues in this context?

Where, when and for whom will you publish? Where do you think your work should be circulated and in which language(s)? How does this relate to your concerns, to the concerns of your research informants/participants/interlocutors, and/or to what is relevant in the practices that you studied?

How will you ensure, overall, that your publications will be ethical? Are you sure that they will not harm those who have put their trust in you? Have you considered what might happen to your results, what others might do with them? Have you considered what role you might play in this?