

Psychology and Ethics

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Psychologists must study living participants; they must obey ethical rules as well as scientific rules. Great care is needed in the treatment of human participants because we can hurt people in very subtle ways. Rules that govern psychologists'™ conduct during experiments have been set by governments, institutions or professional societies and all psychologists engaged in research must abide by them.

Consent

An important part of any procedure designed to ensure the proper treatment of participants is informed consent. When possible, psychologists should always inform the participant of the nature of the experiment and, having been told the details of experiment the participant can decide whether or not they wish to further be a part of the research. Of course, it is not always possible to secure informed consent because divulging all aspects of the experiment will influence the decisions, thoughts feelings and behaviours of the participant.

In most cases, the participant will be presented with a written statement, which they will read and confirm to agreeing by signing the end it " like a contract. This will confirm that the participant has given the experimenter consent for him/her to be included in the experiment, as an official participant.

In other cases, normally in experiments involving children, the experimenter is expected to seek consent from either the adult or a guardian of the child. The consent will be issued in the same way.

If a researcher is undertaking observational research then the privacy and psychological well-being of the participant must be accounted for. Unless consent to being observed is obtained, participants should normally be observed only under conditions where they would expect to be observed by strangers.

Deception

Psychologists are advised never to withhold information or mislead participants if an individual is likely to be uneasy when eventually told the purpose of the experiment. Sometimes, however, withholding information or using misleading information is necessary for good scientific reasons. When this occurs, it must be undertaken after obtained the sound advice and approval of an ethics committee and colleagues.

Debriefing

When participants take part in an experiment, the experimenter is obliged to disclose to the participant the real and actual nature of the experiment and to answer any questions the participant may have. This occurs after the experiment is completed.

Withdrawal

If a participant feels that they have been unfairly misled or improperly treated, the participant has the right to withdraw from the experiment. In fact, it should be made clear at the beginning of the experiment that they have the right to withdraw at any stage, and have any results collected destroyed.

Confidentiality

Laws of the land notwithstanding, information and data provided by the participant in research are confidential. If the data is published, then those individuals should not be identifiable, unless consent is obtained.

Protection of participants

Tied to the recommendations concerning consent and deception are those governing the protection of participants, which are very similar. Psychologists have a primary responsibility to their participants to avoid harm (physical and mental) and if harm is identified, to remove it.