

Social and Behavioral Research: Engagement and Post Research Responsibilities

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Presentation Outline

- Introduction - What is known? Social sciences and research
- The participant-researcher relationship - Why does it matter?
- Conceptualizing Harm - What is new in the social sciences?
- Responsible to whom? - Obligation to communities of research
- Conclusion - References

Introduction

The goal of (social behavioral) research:

- fill gaps in existing knowledge about our social world
- support critical and normative reflection (evidence-based decision making)

Research must be disseminated widely in order to fulfil these goals:

- no research is complete unless it results in dissemination
- i.e. responsibility to engage in activities that nurture an informed public

An informed society is better placed to reflect on matters of public concern

- Make informed decisions
- innovations to help respond to changes (crises)

Clinical Infectious Diseases

SUPPLEMENT ARTICLE



Infectious Diseases Society of America



hiv medicine association



A Qualitative Assessment of a Training and
Communication Intervention on Antibiotic Prescription
Practices Among Health Workers and Outpatients
at Public Health Facilities in Uganda

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History of harm to the research participant

Conceptualize the nature of harm – long history of abuse in biomedical

- Biomedical sciences (trials, physical pain, death)
- Some psychological kind (stress, upset) or;

Human stakes of social sciences lower than biomedical sciences:

- But not to be denigrated

Social forms of harm are real, and may be unavoidable

- E.g to explore (and oppose) social and economic injustices often impacts influential/powerful
- may have detrimental effects on reputation of individuals, corporations, institutions

Can we justify such social harm?

The participant - researcher relationship - I

Conceptualize the nature of relationship between

- The (social behavioral) researcher and;
- The research being undertaken and;
- The society they speak about and speak to

Normative principles 'borrowed' from biomedical sciences

- Point to a participant protection model:
- What are risks of participating in study,
- Protect the rights of the participant above all other parties in the study
- Researcher duties and obligations underpinning ethical regulation of social sciences

The participant - researcher relationship - II

The nature of relationship between social behavioral researcher and participant;

- Less asymmetrical power relations
- Often times the participant has more power (more knowledgeable, authority, prestige – hence the researcher is more vulnerable
- The aim of the research is to explore/expose inequality/seek to redress injustice in the society they speak about and speak to

If aim is to criticise the status quo or suggest better alternatives where even the participants are stakeholders, may not support the research aims;

- Research participants are not disinterested objects (as in natural sciences)
- Research participants are not vulnerable individuals seeking our help
- At times data not gathered willingly or freely offered through consent
- Deception, duplicitousness, recourse to legal and coercive means (Freedom of Information Act)

Justify social harm to the participant?

Conceptualize the nature of social harm in social research

- Social (behavioral) unlike biomedical sciences (less trials, physical pain, death)
- More likely psychological kind (stress, upset) or;
- potential harm to participant interests (reputation, finances, career);

Do we need to consider a different set of ethical considerations:

- Social science research harms private interests of individuals indirectly
- Social science research often has inescapable ramifications
- E.g. detrimental effects on reputation of individuals, corporations, institutions
- Is prioritising individual rights and avoidance of harm inappropriate?

Importance of Dissemination (Post research)

- Researchers generate plenty of information and knowledge which must be shared with:
 - Peers, colleagues and other scientists
 - Policy makers
 - General community (community engagement as iterative process)
- Withholding information and knowledge is a disservice and may be deemed unethical
- Dissemination includes: research reports, abstracts & presentations, scientific manuscripts, policy briefs, public engagement

Healthy debates in social sciences on ethics and politics of social research

- Is it appropriate to import/impose regulation from biomedical into the social sciences?
- Could the principles underpinning researcher-participant relationship (underpinning ethical regulation) hinder successful execution of social science researcher obligations?
- Is it necessarily unethical to pretend to be sympathetic to a form of political extremism to be able to interview members of a political group?
- Is information acquired through deception voluntary? Informing participants of study aims may radically alter results they give

Conclusion

- Realities of social science research may call for careful consideration of conceptualization of harm
- Principles underpinning researcher-participant relationship (underpinning ethical regulation) also pose obligations during and post research
- Principles of post research obligation to the individual and society are similar for the most part to those of biomedical research
- May need a framework which recognizes that some ethical considerations pertaining to social sciences are not always the same as those for biomedical sciences

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THANK YOU!

