

Family Science Five: Episode 1, Research Ethics

Soundcloud Link: <https://soundcloud.com/user-467955474/research-ethics-podcast>

Hello there! I'm Jenn Greiving from the Human Development and Family Relations program at University of Colorado Denver, with the Family Science Five - a series of podcasts that deliver content about family science and human development in 5 minutes or less. Today's topic is research ethics.

When you work with families and communities to do research, it's important that you protect the people you are researching – this can be especially important for helping professionals because we often work with populations who, historically, may have been marginalized, underserved, or mis-represented.

In the past, several famous research experiments were carried out *without* properly thinking about the impacts on the people who were being studied – such as the Milgram experiments, the Stanford prison experiment, the Tearoom Trade study, and the Tuskegee Syphilis Study. You may have heard about or studied some of these, but I've included some links on the podcast transcript page in case you'd like more information.

The ethical concerns over these studies, as well as others, led to the passage of the National Research Act into law in 1974 –as a result, today we have institutional research boards, or IRBs, established to protect the rights and welfare of human research subjects. We also have a document called the Belmont Report, which serves as a guide regarding research ethics. The Belmont Report states that there are three ethical principles when conducting human subject research – First - Respect for Persons, Second - Beneficence (ben-EFF-eh-sense), and Finally - Justice.

First, Respect for Persons means that we protect the autonomy of people, or freedom to make their own decisions. We do this by offering participants information about what they will be doing in the research, and also giving them the right to leave the study at any time. In the Stanford Prison Experiments, students were denied the chance to stop participating, even when they were uncomfortable and scared, and they asked to leave.

After Respect for Persons, our second ethical principle is Beneficence. Beneficence means the act of doing good. This means that we develop our research using the principle “First, do no harm.” We try to maximize the benefits of the research while minimizing the risks to our participants – this includes protecting not only their physical and mental well-being, but also any personal details or information that might be used to harm them in their jobs or other areas of their daily lives. In the Tearoom Trade study about gay males, the researcher did not reveal he was gathering their personal information and conducting research about their sexual behavior (behavior which, at the time, was considered illegal). Later it was determined that the the information gained from the research did NOT outweigh the risks and harm to the people being studied.

Our third ethical principle is Justice – quoting from the Belmont report, An injustice occurs when some benefit to which a person is entitled is denied without good reason or when some burden is imposed unduly (end quote) – in the case of the Tuskegee Syphilis study, the researchers only studied Black males – even though they were not the only population affected by syphilis, and the researchers chose to withhold known treatment that could have helped these men. As a result, out of 399 participants, 128 died of syphilis or related complications, and over 50 family members were infected with a disease that could have easily been prevented. We must make sure our research distributes costs and benefits as fairly and equally as possible.

Today, if I want to conduct a human subjects research study, I am required to complete trainings in ethics and fill out paperwork detailing what I want to research and how I will protect my participants by minimizing their risk to participate. I must provide documentation that shows I am informing my participants about the research, detailing any risks to them, and reminding them of their ability to choose not to participate at all or to leave the study at any time. I submit these documents to the IRB, they review it, and then they decide whether I can start conducting my research, or if I need to submit additional information or revise my study.

In addition to institutional review boards, you may encounter specific codes of ethics in other professions such as social work or counseling – these are established by national associations. For example, you can check out the Certified Family Life Educator, or CFLE, Code of Ethics established by the National Council on Family Relations – this code provides ethical guidelines regarding work and relationships with individuals and families, with colleagues and the profession, and with communities and society. I've linked some of these codes of ethics in the podcast transcript page.

Thanks for listening to the Family Science Five – and if you have any questions or suggestions for future podcast topics, please email me! My email address is listed on the transcript page – available at jenngreiving.com/podcast – that's J E N N GREIV as in victor I N G! . com slash podcast

- The Milgram Experiments: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Milgram_experiment
- The Stanford Prison Experiment: <https://www.prisonexp.org/> (note – this website is maintained by the original researcher, and it is interesting to see how he talks about his work), see also <https://www.simplypsychology.org/zimbardo.html>
- The Tea Room Trade Study: <http://www.soc.ucsb.edu/sexinfo/article/tearoom-trade>
- The Tuskegee Syphilis Study: <https://www.cdc.gov/tuskegee/timeline.htm>
- The National Council on Family Relations Certified Family Life Educator (CFLE) Code of Ethics: <https://www.ncfr.org/cfle-certification/cfle-code-ethics>
- National Association of Social Workers Code of Ethics: <https://www.socialworkers.org/About/Ethics/Code-of-Ethics/Code-of-Ethics-English>
- American Counseling Association Ethical and Professional Standards: <https://www.counseling.org/knowledge-center/ethics>