



Ethical considerations in researching children

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Changing tradition

- Long tradition of research about children rather than involving them directly
- The reasons for not conducting research with children in the past have centred on:
 - the belief that data collected from children was unreliable (children viewed as too immature to understand their worlds)
 - lacked the necessary verbal & conceptual abilities to convey their experiences
 - children assumed to be incapable of distinguishing between fantasy & reality
 - ethical concerns over their vulnerability to exploitation by researchers & hence, the use of adults as proxies
- Children are now constructed as active agents rather than passive objects of research

Informed Consent

- Process of obtaining consent is more complex as it may be necessary for both adults & children to give consent
- Informed consent is based on 3 aspects:
 - potential participants gain knowledge through the provision of information they can understand
 - consent is voluntarily given
 - the potential participant has the capacity or competence to give their consent
- Role of incentives & consent

Confidentiality and disclosure

- Confidentiality is more complex :
 - adults may expect to be told about the private lives & thoughts of children under their care
 - obtaining space separate from the main family room can be a sensitive issue
 - some families may not see children as having a need for privacy
- If confidentiality is a challenge it may lead to:
 - children not disclosing information on sensitive issues such as abuse/exploitation & other risks

Power relations

- Take into account the role:
 - gender inequality
 - power imbalance in the ability of boys & girls to participate & the risks they face
- Child & adult interactions in particular setting

Considerations for especially vulnerable children

- Children in vulnerable situation require additional safeguards to protect their welfare
 - those without a parent/guardian
 - those not protected by an effective legal system because of displacement, refugee status or social marginalisation
- Approval from a child's parent/guardian is required whenever possible but many vulnerable children may not have a legally responsible adult to look after their interests

Issues for reflection

- Who has authority to grant permission for access to children as participants?
- To what extent does a child feel personally empowered to agree to participate in an activity?
 - parent consenting & child not assenting
 - role of incentives in the assent/consent process
- What will happen if the child reveals information indicating legal or illegal activities that could bring harm to the child, family, or community?

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