

# Ethics and the Conduct of Surveys

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# Overview

- American Association for Public Opinion Research Code of Ethics
- Ethics in Epidemiology
- Case Studies



# Ethical Practice

- Two broad aspects
  - standards for the conduct of research
  - researcher's obligations toward others (respondents, clients, and the public)



# American Association for Public Opinion Research

- represents most survey researchers
- membership obligates members to adhere to code of ethics
  - Members will “exercise due care” in conducting research to assure validity and reliability of results.



# Best Practices

- Best practices outlined by AAPOR include:
  - scientific methods for sampling
  - follow-up of those selected to achieve adequate response rate
  - careful development and pretesting of questionnaire
  - adequate training and supervision of interviewers
- Research practices must yield valid conclusions.



# Unacceptable Practices

- Unacceptable practices described by AAPOR:
  - fundraising, selling or canvassing under the “guise” of research
  - representing poll results of self-selected respondents as if you sampled respondents
  - “push polls”



# Scientific Misconduct

- Plagiarism: theft or misappropriation of intellectual property
- Falsification: manipulating research materials, equipment, or processes, or changing or omitting results
- Fabrication: making up data or results and recording or reporting them



# Interviewer Falsification

- The *intentional* departure from the guidelines, unreported by the interviewer, that could result in “contamination” of the data.
  - fabrication
  - deliberately misreporting disposition codes
  - deliberately miscoding the answer to a question
  - deliberately interviewing a nonsampled person to reduce effort to complete interviews



# Dealing with Clients

- undertake that which can be accomplished
- maintaining confidentiality
- serious distortions of research findings must be corrected
  - a corrective statement is sometimes made to a legislative body, regulatory agency, the media, or other group (eg, Bud Roper example)



# Dealing with the Public

- The AAPOR Code of Ethics mandates the release of minimal information about a survey to the public.
  - Coverage error (TP and sampling frame)
  - Sampling error (sample design and size)
  - Nonresponse error (completion rate)
  - Measurement error (method of data collection and wording of questions)



# Elements of Minimal Disclosure

(AAPOR Code)

- Who sponsored the survey and who conducted it
- Exact wording of questions asked including instructions and/or explanation that could affect response
- A definition of the population under study and a description of the sampling frame
- A description of the sample selection procedure
- Size of sample and, if applicable, completion rates and information on eligibility criteria and screening procedures
- The precision of findings including sampling error and a description of any weighting or estimating procedure used
- Which results, if any, are based on parts of the sample rather than the entire sample
- Method, location, and dates of data collection



# Dealing with Respondents: Legal Obligations

- In the US, the National Research Act of 1974 led to the development of Regulations for the Protection of Human Subjects of Research.
- Any institution receiving federal funds must establish a Institutional Review Board to safeguard the rights of research volunteers.



# Dealing with Respondents: Ethical Obligations

- Three basic principles for the conduct of all research involving human subjects:
  - beneficence
  - justice
  - respect for persons



# Beneficence

- Requires researchers to minimize possible harms and maximize possible benefits.
  - guard against threats to confidentiality of responses
  - legal demands for identified data
  - statistical disclosure



# Justice

- The principle of “justice” aims to achieve some fair balance between those who bear the burdens of research and those who benefit from it.



# Respect for Others

- The principle of “respect for others” gives rise to the requirement of informed consent.
  - “knowing consent of an individual or his legally authorized representative...without undue inducement or any element of force, fraud, deceit, duress, or any other form of constraint or coercion” (US Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, 1974, p. 18917).



# Essential Elements of Informed Consent

- A statement that the study involves research with the purposes, procedures, and expected duration of participation
- A description of risks or discomfort
- A description of benefits
- A disclosure of appropriate alternative procedures or courses of treatment
- A statement about how confidentiality will be maintained
- An explanation of whether and what kind of compensation or treatment are available if injury occurs
- An explanation of whom to contact with further questions about the research
- A statement that participation is voluntary and a subject may discontinue at any time without penalty or loss of benefits



# Ethics in Epidemiology

- ACE have developed ethical guidelines
- Four Parts
  - Core values, duties, and virtues
  - Ethics guidelines
  - Discussion and clarification of guidelines
  - Summary and conclusions



# “Unethical” or “Bad Science”?



# Summary

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