

# *Guidelines*

## FOR ETHICAL RESEARCH ON SEXUAL EXPLOITATION INVOLVING CHILDREN

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## INTRODUCTION

Doing research involving children in the context of sexual exploitation raises a range of ethical questions and dilemmas. Some of these are similar for any research with human participants or vulnerable groups; but others are very specific to children affected by sexual exploitation (see [‘Ethics of Research on Sexual Exploitation Involving Children’](#) for a review of the literature). This document provides guidance for negotiating these ethical questions for a range of people engaged in field research (from lead researchers to data collectors).

These guidelines emphasise being simple and practical.<sup>1</sup> Research can be on a continuum from ‘not ethical’ to ‘good practice’. The guidelines will help you make improvements to move you towards that positive end of the continuum - the ‘best practice’ end.

These guidelines help you to reflect about your research project as you design it. Step 1 of the guidelines is a stop/go decision about whether children should be part of your research at all. It guides you to find a balance between children’s right to meaningfully participate in potential research and your responsibility to avoid circumstances where they might be harmed by taking part. Children may take part in research in a wide range of different ways – for example, they could be simply participants, or could even be co-researchers. Sometimes you can do the research about sexual exploitation of children without directly involving children at all.

If completing step 1 of the guidelines leads you to proceed with the proposed research, step 2 includes seven ethics topics that you need to think about for the design, implementation and analysis stages of your research project.

<b>Step 1:</b>	<b><i>Should children be involved in your research?</i></b>
<b>Step 2:</b>	<b><i>Ethics topics</i></b>
<b>Step 3:</b>	<b><i>Harms and benefits analysis</i></b>
<b>Step 4:</b>	<b><i>Third party review</i></b>

Step 3 of the guidelines is an analysis of the possible harms and benefits of your project based on the ethical tasks you have completed in the seven topics. Once that is filled in, you will have a simple guide about things you need to do to make sure your research is ethical, and to help you monitor the ethical elements of your research project as you progress with the project.

Finally, step 4 is an important due-diligence step and ensures a third party review or vetting process. Sharing your research project with relevant external experts can ensure that others agree with your assessment of predictable harms and anticipated benefits and perhaps strengthen your strategies to enhance benefits and offset harms.

The guidelines are not a checklist to complete once and forget, you should refer to them regularly in the implementation and analysis stages of your research project to make sure you are remaining on track and staying true to the ethical decisions that you made.

<sup>1</sup> These guidelines do not replace any national regulations of ethical committees in academic research. They do offer practical guidance to research in the context of sexual exploitation. They are also not intended to definitively ‘answer’ questions, but to help you to find answers yourself for your own unique research.

## GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) has four leading principles that guide how we honour children’s rights. These can be used to guide how we design and implement research that involves sexual exploitation of children.

### NON-DISCRIMINATION

Children should not be discriminated against (UNCRC, article 2). “[E]very child has the right to freely express his or her views and to have those views duly taken into account without discrimination on grounds of race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status.”<sup>2</sup>

### BEST INTERESTS OF THE CHILD

What has the most positive effect on the child’s life should be a primary consideration (UNCRC, article 3).

### LIFE, SURVIVAL AND DEVELOPMENT

State parties must ensure to the maximum extent possible the survival and healthy development of children (UNCRC, article 6).

### PARTICIPATION

Every child who is capable of forming his or her own views has the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting them and the views of the child must be given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child (UNCRC, article 12).

Furthermore, there are two further principles that should guide all research involving people and therefore apply to children too:

### Minimise harm

The principle of non-maleficence (in other words, ‘do no harm’) requires that researchers avoid harm or injury to children, both through acts of commission or omission. If significant harm is likely, it should not proceed. It is acknowledged that with research in areas like this, that guaranteeing zero harm will occur is not possible. However, potential harm must be pre-determined and strategies put in place so that benefit outweighs harm. This principle also refers to a researcher’s obligation to strive for their research to improve the status, rights and wellbeing of children.<sup>3</sup>

### Respect

This principle requires recognition that children’s decisions exist within broader personal, relational, social, cultural, legal and environmental contexts. It refers to respecting the dignity of participants and their capacity, when fully informed, to make decisions whether or not to consent to research. In relation to children, it requires an understanding that the decision to participate or otherwise is shaped by power dynamics and their cognitive capacities and development.

<sup>2</sup> Committee of the Rights of the Child, (2009). *General comment 12: The right of the child to be heard*. Parag 70.

<sup>3</sup> Graham, A., Powell, M., Taylor, N., Anderson, D. & Fitzgerald, R. (2013). *Ethical Research Involving Children*. Florence: UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti; UNICEF (2015) *Procedure for Ethical Standards in Research, Evaluation and Data Collection and Analysis*. Florence: UNICEF Innocenti Office of Research; Council for International Organizations of Medical Sciences (CIOMS) & World Health Organization (WHO). (2016). *International Ethical Guidelines for Biomedical Research Involving Humans*, Geneva: CIOMS.; United States. (1979). *The Belmont Report: Ethical Principles and Guidelines for the Protection of Human Subjects of Research*. Bethesda: The Commission, Academy of Social Sciences.

## STEP 1:

### SHOULD CHILDREN BE INVOLVED IN YOUR RESEARCH?

The first step is to assess whether children should directly take part in your research project. The need is to balance a child's right to be heard, and the important positive value of contributing to the knowledge in the area of child sexual exploitation, with the potential for harm.

#### ANSWER THESE QUESTIONS:

YES NO  
✓ ✕

A

After exploring the literature and context, you are sure that no data that already exists can answer the research question.

☐

B

After assessment, you are sure that there is no other way to collect the data besides asking/involving children (e.g. using second-hand accounts, case file notes or interviewing experiential youth 18 years or above).

☐

C

After careful assessment, you are confident that children will not be burdened with responsibility, or work (e.g. miss school, complete excessive paperwork).

☐

D

After careful assessment and consultation with experts, you are confident that there will not be any risk of physical harm to children if they participate.

☐

E

After consultation with thematic specialists, survivors, you are confident that children will not experience unreasonable psychological harm or distress.

☐

F

There are appropriate trauma-informed and child-centred support services available as part of the project to offer support to participants.

☐

If you answered NO to any of these questions, children should not be involved in the research in the current design. Amend the design to address the issues identified before reassessing.

If you answered YES to all these questions, move to **step 2.**

## STEP 2:

### ETHICS TOPICS

The following pages include seven ethics topics which include a brief description followed by a series of 'ethics tasks' that you should complete.

Read through the seven topics and complete the tasks. Where necessary, refine your research design to respond to the tasks as needed.

## 1. MEANINGFUL CHILD PARTICIPATION

Children's involvement in research on sexual exploitation can play a critical role in their own and others' protection. Children may consider it in their best interests to be asked questions about their attitudes and experiences and to engage with an interested adult on sensitive subjects that may be viewed as taboo or stigmatising within the cultures and contexts in which they live.

Research involving children in these contexts can realise the right to participation by providing a way to amplify children's voices and challenge the culture of silence in which abuse thrives – if it is done carefully to ensure children don't experience harm.

There are different ways to involve children: they can be merely respondents to questions asked by researchers, or they can be co-researchers who influence the research design and take part in data gathering and/or analysis. The Committee on the Rights of the Child recommends five practical elements to ensure meaningful participation of children: provide adequate information; give opportunity to participate; take the child seriously, inform the child about the outcomes; offer the possibility to respond and complain when the child feels their opinion is not well represented.<sup>4</sup>

The ethical tasks in this topic involve finding a balance between the guiding principles of 'best interests', 'participation' and 'minimise harm'. Some harms might be accepted if balanced by the right to participate. However, researchers must provide children and their caregivers with all the information that they need to make that decision themselves.

## Ethics Tasks

1.1

Ensure that the child receives adequate and age appropriate information about the content of the research, the role and expectations of the child and possible consequences of the research for the child, in order to take an informed decision about taking part in the research. Ensure that the information is adjusted to specific child needs (e.g.: children who are illiterate, child who is deaf, a four-year-old vs a sixteen- year-old, etc.)

1.2

The cultural context of the child has been considered to account for norms and expectations that could influence the design or that the project itself may be in conflict with (e.g. researching ideas that are taboo or conflict with traditions). If this risk is accepted, then it should be explained to participants.

1.3

Ensure that the parent or caregiver of the child receives adequate information about the content of the research, the way findings will be used, the role and expectations of the child and possible consequences of the research for the child, in order to take an informed decision about taking part in the research.

1.4

Consider the way that children can participate. For example, only as respondents to questions, or is it safe and appropriate that they are engaged more deeply to design, or even to conduct the research? (e.g. youth with childhood experiences of abuse, and strong support networks may be good data collectors).

1.5

Ensure the circumstances for participation (i.e. the environment, location, invitation to participate, time and hour) are accessible and child-appropriate.

1.6

Ensure that the child is taken seriously. This includes seeking feedback from children about how they want to participate and on what terms during design. If possible/ desirable, seek feedback from children about the research design or create it with children.

1.7

Ensure that the child is informed about the outcomes of the research.

1.8

Ensure adequate physical and psychological protection of children in the context of sexual exploitation (see following sections).

<sup>4</sup> Committee of the Rights of the Child, (2009). *General comment 12: The right of the child to be heard*. Parag 21 and Lansdown G.I., (2005). *The evolving capacities of the child*. Innocenti Research Centre, UNICEF/Save the Children, Florence.



## 2. METHODOLOGY CONSIDERATIONS

This section focuses on the ethical tasks you need to consider in designing and conducting the methods you will use to interact with children for research specific to the context of sexual exploitation.

There are numerous potential harms that could be caused by the research methodology itself. These should be assessed and planned for during the design of your research project. Issues could include using words which could be judgemental or offensive; different gender or big age differences between data collectors and participants making children uncomfortable to talk; having assumptions and biases towards groups of children; unbalanced power relationships between adults and children that may have been abused; or establishing expectations that the research team will 'fix' issues that are raised.

### Ethics Tasks

2.1

The language you use for data collection is inclusive, non-judgemental and fits the way your target population describe the issues (age, gender, culture).

2.2

The language you use won't make children feel like victims, that they feel they have behaved badly or that may alienate them.

2.3

The research team has the expertise required (e.g. child development, sensitive to sexual exploitation and trauma-informed practice, communicating with children, legal provisions in context).

2.4

You have considered the gender of participants and data collectors.

2.5

You have found ways to reduce the influence of power relationships (e.g. socio-economic background, ethnicity) over participants through careful methods, and environment for data collection (child-friendly, child-controlled settings).

2.6

You will engage support from a psychologist or relevant person trained in trauma and exploitation (outside the research team if necessary) to support participants in case of trauma or disclosures.

2.7

You will train data collectors on reading age specific body language of children, non-verbal cues as well as possible harms that could occur because of your methodology.

2.8

You have assessed data collectors through training and observing them in role-plays to identify possible biases or inappropriate language and techniques for engaging children who may be survivors.

2.9

You have followed your child safeguarding policy and procedures in identifying data collectors.

2.10

The method for gathering data (individual or group) puts children at ease and won't introduce biases or pressures to share.

2.11

A suitable space and location for the research is agreed upon with the child/children participating.

2.12

Decide upon who will be present in the room. While private, the location must meet safeguarding policy requirements (be visible to others, not involve adults alone with children). Avoid being alone as an adult with a child and ensure that the room is not closed off and out of sight.

2.13

Budget for and organize possible travel reimbursements for child participants.

2.14

The method for gathering data is flexible enough to suit individual participant preferences and is suitable for the age and competency of the participants.

2.15

Take into account relevant laws and regulations, if any, about obligations to report child abuse to authorities. If mandatory reporting applies to your research, you must make participants aware of this before seeking their consent or assent and should explain how reports will be made and how the child can/cannot be part of these processes. Consider whether reporting also has safety implications for the child.

2.16

The informed consent process clearly explains the limits of the research team's engagement and clearly explains when privacy and confidentiality will and won't be maintained (for example when mandatory reporting may influence your research).

2.17

The final research report will include a methodology section which fully explains the design of the study, the tools used, the limitations of the study and the ethical considerations.

2.18

Identify a process for giving feedback about the research findings to the participants (for example a child-friendly version of the report is made available to participants).

### 3. INFORMED CONSENT

‘Consent’ means getting formal permission to participate in your project. In some countries consent is required by law for research with anyone under 18. Research involving children usually requires consent from a parent or caregiver as children are not considered mature enough in the law to provide their own permission. With very vulnerable children (such as victims of sexual exploitation) often adults other than their parents might be caring for children. It is always ethical to get consent from an adult who has legal responsibility for the child (though there can be exceptions for some very specific circumstances<sup>5</sup> and in potential cases when the guardian may be a perpetrator).

In some cases, where a child is living independently (e.g. working, has migrated away from home, living on the streets) and is considered sufficiently mature, then parental/guardian consent may not be needed. But making this decision requires very careful consideration and should involve expert consultation.

Even though not always *legally* required, with research involving children, it is also *ethically* appropriate to also obtain ‘assent’ from child participants. Obtaining ‘assent’ means to formally get permission from the child that they want to participate (not to just assume they do because a parent/caregiver gave consent). Children have the right to participate, but they also have the right to choose whether to express or not express those views<sup>6</sup> This “means that the child must not be manipulated or subjected to undue influence or pressure.”<sup>7</sup>

In order to obtain consent and assent, you must make sure the parent/caregiver and child are fully ‘informed’ about the research. For children, you should explain in words that they can understand based on their age and understanding of the world (keep in mind their maturity, language skills, possible disabilities, trauma and stage within the recovery process). It should always be explained that not providing consent, or withdrawing it later will have no impact on the child or any future interactions. Consent can be given verbally (through a statement read aloud or clear discussion) or written (on a prepared form).

## Ethics Tasks

- 3.1 Checked on any legal requirement for getting informed consent from parents/caregivers/children in your country.
- 3.2 Included a sound legal process to get informed consent from parent/caregivers (considering they may not be literate) without any possibility of coercion or pressure.
- 3.3 Addressed in your design what to do about obtaining consent in the circumstances that a parent/caregiver is a potential perpetrator.
- 3.4 Considered possible influences like gender norms, cultural differences and age which could influence how free a child feels to consent and mitigated for these.
- 3.5 Included a process to get informed assent from child participants that is age-appropriate, child friendly and without any possibility of coercion or pressure.
- 3.6 Have clear guidelines what to do if child wants to participate but parents don’t and vice versa.
- 3.7 The project will keep a record (written or recorded) of consent and assent for each participant (preferably kept separate from data to protect confidentiality).
- 3.8 Clear information is given both in writing and verbally (purpose of the research, duration, privacy, details of any compensation, how findings will be used, how to withdraw or complain) to parents/caregivers when seeking consent.
- 3.9 Clear, age-appropriate information (purpose of the research, duration, privacy, details of any compensation, how findings will be used, how to withdraw or complain) is given in writing and verbally to children when seeking assent.

- 3.10 The information you give is tested to make sure it is appropriate and understandable by your target group.
- 3.11 The information you give does not unrealistically raise expectations of the benefits of participating in the research or the access to services that are available.
- 3.12 Research staff will be trained in how to seek informed consent/assent.
- 3.13 Assessed risks that could arise from participation in the research through consultation with relevant stakeholders (such as local child focussed NGOs, relevant child service providers and possibly children themselves) and explained these to parents/caregivers, and children.
- 3.14 Explained that participation is voluntary and responses/data can be withdrawn up to an identified point during the project with no negative impacts on the participants.
- 3.15 Provided contact details to allow for questions or further information to be requested from the researchers or so that they can withdraw later.
- 3.16 Took steps to make sure participants weren’t pressured to say yes.
- 3.17 Established a way to inform about the project and then give the adults and children time to think or consult with others before deciding to participate.
- 3.18 Informed consent processes describe possible distress that might arise and how support can be accessed.

<sup>5</sup> For example, the WHO indicates that unless legal provisions exist, for sexual health research, adolescents that are mature enough to understand the purpose of some sexual health studies may be considered mature enough to provide their own consent. WHO (2019), *Conducting research on reproduction health involving adolescents*.

<sup>6</sup> Article 12 UN CRC and Committee of the Rights of the Child, (2009). *General comment 12: The right of the child to be heard*. Paragraph 22.

<sup>7</sup> Committee of the Rights of the Child, (2009). *General comment 12: The right of the child to be heard*. Paragraph 22.

## 4. PRIVACY AND CONFIDENTIALITY

All research participants have the human right to privacy. With research on sexual exploitation involving children, greater care than usual should be paid to privacy and confidentiality as there are many negative impacts of such information being shared. Also avoid collecting personal information or data that is not essential for the specific research objectives (for example, concentrate on the participant's recovery rather than asking for details of their abuse).

Risks associated with privacy and confidentiality may occur and need to be considered throughout the research process. This would include recruitment, initial collection of data, analysis of information, sharing and dissemination of findings, storage of data, transmission of data and disposal of records or devices on which information is stored.

Researchers should always aim to maintain confidentiality. But when a child may be in danger, this creates an ethical dilemma as there may be circumstances where confidentiality should be breached for the sake of safety. This must be transparently explained to child participants. National legal requirements may exist for 'mandatory reporting' of child-related crimes and illegal activities which need to be considered.

## Ethics Tasks

4.1

The research is designed for confidential participation of children, unless there are strong reasons to divert from this rule.

4.2

The method for data collection protects children's privacy, particularly if they might disclose personal information (e.g. group settings may not be appropriate and if used, steps should be taken to further protect privacy). Children are consulted about the methods.

4.3

The location for research should ensure that children will not be overhead or written responses seen by others.

4.4

While private, the location must meet safeguarding principles (be visible to others, not involve adults alone with children) and your policy requirements.

4.5

For young children, the option for a trusted adult to be present during data collection is provided.

4.6

The location for research does not put children in danger of incidentally being connected with sexual exploitation.

4.7

The informed consent information clearly explains the *extent and limits* of confidentiality.

4.8

Any legal requirements related to privacy and confidentiality (and its limits, such as mandatory reporting) are explained to data collectors during training.

4.9

Any information identifying participants is kept separate from data, transcripts (using ID numbers linking names to data with a list stored separately and securely).

4.10

Data will be electronically stored in restricted folders with password access limited to researchers only.

4.11

Hard copies of data will be safely secured in locked storage.

4.12

Data will not be shared via unsecure pathways like email or cloud storage.

4.13

Data will be retained and routinely destroyed after a pre-determined period (one to five years from publication).

4.14

Fake names or participant codes will be used to refer to individual participants in the write-up of the research to ensure that nobody is identifiable.

4.15

The final research documents do not either directly or indirectly identify participants (e.g. participants are not described with identifying features like their location or ethnicity that gives them away). Final drafts should be reviewed and edited to ensure participants are not identifiable.



## 5. SUSPICIONS AND DISCLOSURES OF ABUSE AND EXPLOITATION

A key risk that may arise when conducting research on sexual exploitation involving children is that children may disclose past or current harm or their responses may suggest they have been harmed. You must have considered what you will do in this situation.

When following the principle of the 'best interests of the child,' (see guiding principles) reporting to authorities needs to be considered. Consider that the principle of the 'best interests of the child' may arise when the need for reporting is a purely bureaucratic process with poor 'human' and social outcomes for the victim. You must consider the potential harm to the child that could arise from reporting to authorities in the absence of a limited or poor support response or in the case where authorities may be complicit with abuse and may do more harm than good.

In some settings, reporting is legally required (mandatory reporting). In these circumstances your research must consider this in the design. For example, if you must report, but children may be exposed to further violence with limited or no supports, consider whether participation in your research possibly results in more harm than good. If there is really no possibility of removing the child from a dangerous context, then your research may need to account for this. For example, methods may instead ask indirect questions focused on attitudes and perceptions of social norms rather than direct questions pertaining to experiences, while also making it clear to the child and their parent/caregiver what the potential risks of their disclosure may be so they can decide whether to they still want to disclose directly.

It remains that even with an indirect approach, your research project should still ensure support is available to participants from appropriate services, even if they don't directly disclose. All research projects on sexual exploitation involving children need clear procedures for both informal responses and formal reporting where required.

## Ethics Tasks

5.1

A clear system is established for referring children to support services which have the capacity to respond.

5.2

Data collection staff are trained to recognise risks and indicators of abuse, and they have skills to appropriately respond to disclosures using trauma-informed, child-centred approaches, and know how to immediately refer to support services.

5.3

Established process to debrief all participants and allow them to raise any issues that they have.

5.4

Established process to debrief all data collectors.

5.5

The informed consent information clearly explains to children and parents/caregivers what the procedure will be if a disclosure is made.

5.6

The informed consent information includes details of any legally required formal reporting procedures that will be followed in the event of a disclosure.

5.7

When national contexts have legal requirements for mandatory reporting, all research staff are aware of their requirements.

5.8

A 'red flag' alert system is in place that identifies child participants who might be at risk of harm.

5.9

Research teams, including all data collectors are aware of child development and trauma-informed practice and can identify stress reactions, including non-verbal behaviours, to identify when to stop research activities to prevent causing trauma.

5.10

If the decision is taken to not report disclosures of exploitation or abuse without participants' permission, then official exemption permission from any legal requirements of mandatory reporting is obtained.

5.11

Referral details are provided to participants even if a disclosure is not directly made (so children are not forced to specifically request information). This information should be provided amongst other information so the child is not in danger if found with this information on their person.

5.12

If the research is designed to allow for anonymous participation, procedures are in place to deal with disclosures that require urgent attention.

## 6. PAYMENT AND COMPENSATION

Remuneration, whether financial or in-kind, must be carefully considered when doing research with children. Research participants should be appropriately reimbursed for any expenses such as transport. Food and drinks may also be provided for the comfort of the participants. Payments to research participants for their time is not usually encouraged as it may be perceived as a payment for research data and therefore a conflict of interest. In some cases, small inexpensive gifts (such as toiletries) are given as a form of appreciation.

Your research project should budget for costs that can be associated with involving children such as transport, accommodation, food, interpreters, appropriate child-friendly spaces, materials for appropriately communicating with children (e.g. play therapy kits), staff time and hiring external specialists.

In relation to payment for participation, consultation with local experts should be done to ensure appropriateness. Compensation considerations include ensuring payment will not cause violence or conflict between participants and those excluded, that it mediates for any loss of income, and to ensure it does not motivate participants to participate, or even to provide false data.

## Ethics Tasks

6.1

Consider whether it is appropriate to offer compensation to participants.

6.2

Avoid the use of 'incentive payments' unless there is good reason.\*

6.3

Take the social and cultural context into account when deciding, and adequately consult relevant experts/survivors about intended compensation.

6.4

Determine the form of any payment (for example gift cards, food, a gift, educational materials) and who will receive it – the child, parents, guardian(s) class, community.

6.5

Think about when and how information on payment will be disclosed (in the consent process, after children have agreed to participate or at the end of the research?)

6.6

Payments will not unnecessarily influence the decision to participate.

6.7

Participation in the research will not mean loss of income or will not result in the child missing important daily activities such as education etc.

6.8

Costs of involving children have been considered (e.g. transport, accommodation, food, interpreters, space, materials for communication with children, etc.)

\* Incentive payments are designed to encourage the participation of children in research. These may be cash payments or alternatives such as vouchers. The use of persuasion to take part in the research is contentious. See Graham, A., Powell, M., Taylor, N., Anderson, D. & Fitzgerald, R. (2013). *Ethical Research Involving Children*. Florence: UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti; p.89.

## 7. CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

When undertaking any research there are always potential conflicts of interests which may influence or even misrepresent the research findings. The most familiar conflict of interests are financial. This could be things like planning research *only* because of particular donor requests or because of possible donor support to follow up on findings with funded programmes.

Conflicts can also come from many other competing interests such as career advancement, commitment to colleagues or friends or from the 'positionality' of a researcher. (Positionality refers to the social or political influences that might push us personally to interpret findings in a particular way). Researchers must always be conscious of positionality or power relationships. Consult other experts to ensure that you are aware of these in yourself and to mitigate from their influence on distorting the voices of the participants.

## Ethics Tasks

## 7.1

Any potential conflicts of interest have been identified and stated in your research design and there is an agreed process for managing them.

## 7.2

Researchers have no personal beliefs that may cause discrimination or are in direct contradiction with the issue being studied.

### 7.3

Whilst donors may have provided input into research design, they are not involved in data analysis.

## 7.4

A process for third party review is in place to guard against any potential conflicts of interest.

7.5

All research findings will be reported accurately and honestly (no plagiarism, inventing findings, adjusting results, bias).

**STEP 3:****HARMS AND BENEFITS ANALYSIS**

Now that you have considered the ethics tasks, go through the following formal process of identifying and assessing all of the possible positive and negative effects of your research. This includes brainstorming all the benefits that you can think of, and all the possible harms. Then tally up the total benefits compared to the cost of the harms.

- a) Using the table, list all the potential harms and benefits of your research
- b) Include strategies to enhance the benefits and offset the harms
- c) Rate the likelihood that the strategies will completely address the harms (completely, partially, in a limited way)
- d) Tally up the table:
  - If you have a positive score, and the harms that you list are insignificant/minor, proceed.
  - If you have a negative score and moderate/major harms, consider if you can make changes or do not proceed with the research.

**STEP 4:****THIRD PARTY REVIEW**

Despite our best efforts to follow ethical guidelines, in the end, they are still value based, personal judgements and open to different interpretations. The guiding principle of the Best Interest of the Child can also be challenging to assess and apply.

This is where review by other people (third party review) can assist. In some countries you may already be required by law to submit your research design for approval to an Institutional Review Board (either academic or government). If you are not legally required, you can still seek review by other people – even by setting up a committee or group of external experts who can give supportive and constructive feedback (sometimes called a Research Advisory Committee).

These committees can support one or multiple research projects. The committee should include some experts, child protection practitioners, people with research skills and academics. They could work remotely or meet in person to review your research plans and risk benefits analysis table and give feedback.



Annex: Harms and Benefits Table

Put number in Consequence box

1 = insignificant    3 = moderate  
2 = minor            4 = major

BENEFITS

Social

Ethical strategies to enhance benefits :

CONSEQUENCE

Economic

Ethical strategies to enhance benefits :

CONSEQUENCE

Psychological

Ethical strategies to enhance benefits :

CONSEQUENCE

Legal

Ethical strategies to enhance benefits :

CONSEQUENCE

Political

Ethical strategies to enhance benefits :

CONSEQUENCE

Others

Ethical strategies to enhance benefits :

CONSEQUENCE

Total

HARMS

Social

Ethical strategies to enhance harms :

CONSEQUENCE

Economic

Ethical strategies to enhance harms :

CONSEQUENCE

Psychological

Ethical strategies to enhance harms :

CONSEQUENCE

Legal

Ethical strategies to enhance harms :

CONSEQUENCE

Political

Ethical strategies to enhance harms :

CONSEQUENCE

Others

Ethical strategies to enhance harms :

CONSEQUENCE

Total

BENEFITS MINUS HARMS:

—

=



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