

Research methods: ethical issues

You are learning how to...	In the context of...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify ethical issues in research studies Suggests ways of dealing with ethical issues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unseen examples of research studies

1. Audience effects on helping

Researchers conducted a field experiment into the effect an audience might have on a person's willingness to help other people in distress. Prior research had suggested that the presence of other people makes helping less likely. They conducted their experiment in an isolated area of a university campus. When a passer-by entered the area, a confederate dressed in a tracksuit ran in from a different direction. In view of the passer-by, they would fall to the floor as if injured. This was done under two conditions: (1) with no other people present; and (2) with three other confederates positioned in view of the passer-by, apparently engaged in conversation. The researchers recorded whether the passer-by would help the 'injured' confederate and, if so, how long it took them to do so.

2. Teenagers' attitudes towards underage sex

Researchers conducted an interview survey investigating 14-15 year-old boys' and girls' attitudes towards underage sex. The respondents were interviewed in single-sex groups of four or five by a researcher who asked them about their sexual behaviour and their attitudes towards their peers' sexual behaviour. An audio recording was made of the interviews and then transcribed. The transcripts were then analysed by a group of researchers to identify common themes in the things the respondents said about sexual behaviour in their age group.

3. Gender differences in physical contact between conversational partners

Researchers conducted an observation study into gender differences in physical contact between conversational partners in public places. They conducted their observation in a coffee shop. When a pair of people came in and sat down opposite each other, the researchers observed them and recorded (1) the composition of the pair (MM, MF, FF) and (2) how often they made physical contact with each other and where (hand, arm, shoulder etc.) The observation of each pair ended when one or both left the coffee shop.

4. The effect of self talk on persistence

A researcher conducted an experiment in which she investigated the effect of positive self-talk on persistence in a task. She designed a test of motor skills that was impossible to complete. Participants were told that most people completed the task within about two minutes. They were divided into two groups. The first group were instructed to repeat the words 'I can do it' to themselves whilst attempting the task. The second group repeated a different phrase with no motivational content. The researcher timed how long each participant would spend attempting the task before giving up.

For each of these research studies:

- Which ethical issues are raised by the design of the study and how?
- What would the researchers need to do to deal with the ethical issues raised by their studies?
- Write a briefing script for study 4 that would be read to participants *before* they agreed to take part, in order to obtain informed consent.