

How Can SSR Issues Be Minimised?

These activities will help you to:

- Consider precautions that researchers can take to avoid SSR issues in their research
- Discuss the effectiveness of these precautions
- Discuss a range of ethical stances on SSR issues

Activity 1

Sieber & Stanley (1988) write extensively on the issues arising from SSR. Amongst other things, they identify the following specific issues that researchers might have to address:

Issue	Explanation
Privacy and confidentiality	Because of the sensitive nature of the information PPs may give, researchers must be careful about issues relating to invading their privacy and keeping any information confidential
Sound and valid methodology	If results might have an impact on people in society, researchers must be extremely confident that their research methodology is sound and the conclusions they draw are valid
Informed consent	Because they could be affected directly by the research, researchers need to be sure that pps clearly understand the nature and purposes of the research
Dissemination of findings	Research findings could be misinterpreted when they enter the public domain. Researchers must be sure that their findings are clearly explained to the public so that they are not misinterpreted or distorted

Have another look at the SSR examples we discussed. Which of the research examples do you think relates most to each of these issues? What should the researcher have done to ensure that their ethical obligations were met? What might have happened if they didn't?

Discuss your ideas in small groups, and then write a short paragraph about each of the above issues. We will then compare responses as a group.

Activity 2

Drawing on your own ideas, what you have learned about the issues arising from SSR and other sources of information (e.g. your text), write a short response to each of the following statements, explaining whether you agree or disagree, and why. You should support your ideas with research if possible.

- "Science doesn't take sides, it deals only with the truth. That's all I'm concerned with. It's not my responsibility if people abuse the science I do, it's theirs."
- "To refuse to publish research because of its social implications is just intellectual cowardice. Our first responsibility is to the integrity of scientific knowledge. Publish and be damned."
- "In the majority of cases, the social benefits of SSR far outweigh the potential negative consequences."
- "I admit that my research is controversial but when I put it in the public domain it opens up debate, which is far better than pretending that these issues don't exist."
- "As long as there is any risk at all to participants or the group they represent, SSR is simply unacceptable."