

METHODS WORKSHOP

Research With Vulnerable Populations: Strategies for Complex Issues of Human Participant Protections

Presenters

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Abstract

Social work researchers strive to improve the well-being of disadvantaged, marginalized populations, including people with disabilities, violence survivors, incarcerated people, refugees, and those who are impoverished. However, providing adequate protection to vulnerable research participants poses unique challenges for researchers who are working to make meaningful contributions to practice and policy.

This workshop is designed to help social work researchers develop their skills to address such unique challenges and will address the practical, methodological and ethical issues of conducting research with vulnerable populations, based on the presenters' experiences as researchers and as a member of a university Institutional Review Board. Particular attention is given to ensuring that research designs pass muster with Institutional Review Boards as well as grant reviewers.

At the conclusion of this workshop, participants will understand strategies for successfully developing human participants' protection plans, structuring research design features to minimize risk to vulnerable participants, and managing challenges that arise in the implementation of research.

Topics addressed in the workshop will include:

1. Demonstrating the meaningfulness of the project: why are the risks worth taking?
2. Characteristics of vulnerable populations (e.g., inability to provide informed consent, coercive monetary inducements, challenges in retaining participants in the research over time)
3. Balancing the feasibility and acceptability of research
4. Using community members, focus groups and advisory boards in the design of studies to improve feasibility
5. Understanding the vagaries and intentions of Institutional Review Boards
6. Strategies for successful Institutional Review Board and grant proposals
7. Recruiting vulnerable participants
8. Consenting vulnerable participants and their guardians
9. Preventing and preparing for adverse events (e.g., how to use community members and advisory boards to help anticipate unintended consequences that may lead to adverse events; developing a safety and referral plan for potential problems)
10. Handling participants' disclosure of challenging and dangerous experiences

11. Safety of the research team
12. Managing the ethical challenges of working with community partners

Career Level & Prerequisites

There are no prerequisites, but workshop participants should have some familiarity with the protection of human participants in research.

Methods

This workshop will utilize a combination of lecture, discussion and hands-on exercises to examine the particular issues related to conducting research with vulnerable populations.

Materials

Participants will receive a set of Powerpoint slides and copies of illustrative materials.

Presenter Bios

Rebecca J. Macy, PhD, MSW, is associate professor of social work at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and a licensed clinical social worker. Dr. Macy is the principal investigator of a study funded by The Duke Endowment to investigate a community-based intervention for legally-involved partner violence survivors and their children. She is a member of the local Institutional Review Board at the UNC School of Social Work. Her research focuses on the investigation of safety services and mental health interventions for violence survivors.

Susan L. Parish, PhD, MSW is associate professor of social work at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Dr. Parish is principal investigator of a federally-funded study to examine the effects of an intervention designed to improve cervical and breast cancer screening behavior in women with developmental disabilities. She is also a member of UNC's Behavioral Institutional Review Board. Her research mainly examines the effects of poverty policy on the health and well-being of low-income people with disabilities and their families.