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Recruitment Swinburne Research

Recruitment in Human Research

Defining research participant recruitment

In order to conduct research with human participants, they must first be recruited. Recruitment for the purpose of participation in a research study involves providing potential participants with a full explanation of what their participation in the research will involve, including an explanation of the overall research project.

Recruitment can include identifying individuals as potential participants; contact between the research team and potential participants; screening or exclusion of some individuals; and preparing to seek consent from potential participants.

Overview of recruitment issues

Questions to consider when designing recruitment strategies include the following:

- Who will be recruited? (see *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research 2018 (N.S.)* 3.1.12 & 3.1.14 – 15) a comprehensive pathway for uptake and application of research findings
- How will participants be identified and recruited? (see *N.S.* 3.1.12 – 14; 3.1.17 – 22)
- Will the potential participants be screened? (see *N.S.* 3.1.12) If they have been screened to the extent that they have been pre-recruited, then information regarding this must be included in the ethics application
- What is the impact of any relationship between researchers and potential participants on recruitment? (see *N.S.* 3.1.18 (d) & (e))
- How will the recruitment strategy facilitate obtaining the consent of participants? (see *N.S.* 3.1.21) Consider how best to obtain the desired number of participants, including using a recruitment method that corresponds with the participant group e.g. if recruiting from a local gym, consider recruiting via advertising the project on-site; if recruiting students from a specific unit, consider recruiting via advertising the project on Canvas. If snowball sampling/word of mouth is to be used, consider how to protect potential participants' confidentiality and privacy. If using a recruitment agency, consider how appropriate the reimbursement to be provided by the agency is and the agency's use of participant data. If recruiting via social media, consider how to allow participants to express their interest in



participating in a confidential manner and ensure that the permissions required from, for example, group moderators has been obtained

- How will the recruitment strategy ensure that participants can make an informed decision about participation? (see *N.S.* 3.1.21)
- Are there any risks associated with the recruitment strategy for potential participants or for the viability of the project? (see *N.S.* 3.1.18 (b) & 3.1.19)

Researchers must also bear in mind whether or not participants are vulnerable within the context of the research project:

- Is there an unequal/dependent relationship between the participants and researchers?
- Are participants considered vulnerable regardless of their relationship to the researchers and the nature of the research?

If a power disparity exists between participants and researchers, participants may feel obliged to participate. If participants are considered vulnerable, they may perceive coercion where none is intended.

Examples of unequal/dependent relationships include lecturer/student; researcher/family member or friend; employer/employee; service provider/client; doctor/patient.

Vulnerable participant groups include children and young people (chapter 4.2); people highly dependent on medical care who may be unable to give consent (chapter 4.4); and, people with a cognitive impairment, intellectual disability or a mental illness (chapter 4.5). *The National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research* also considers pregnant women and the human foetus (chapter 4.1), Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (chapter 4.7), and people who may be involved in illegal activities (chapter 4.6) vulnerable.

Recruitment issues unpacked

Unequal/dependent relationships

Research projects, including the recruitment strategy, should be designed in a manner that clearly facilitates voluntary participation (see *N.S.* 2.2.7 & 3.1.17). In the context of participants in an unequal/dependent relationship with researchers or whoever does the recruiting, this means ensuring that participants are not subject to coercion or pressure in deciding whether to participate (see *N.S.* 2.2.9). Researchers should also consider the potential impact of the recruitment strategy upon the consent process (e.g. the degree to which the recruitment strategy might undermine the voluntary nature of the consent of individual potential participants) (see *N.S.* 3.1.21).

Ways of addressing unequal/dependent relationships include the following:

- Having someone independent of the research team perform recruitment e.g. a colleague who isn't associated with the unit/s in which student participants are enrolled
- Having a member of the research team other than the person with the pre-existing relationship to the participant undertake recruitment e.g. the student's supervisor instead of the student for student projects involving the recruitment of family/friends
- Having someone other than the employer or representative of the employer undertake recruitment e.g. a member of the research team
- Having someone other than the client service provider undertake recruitment e.g. a member of the research team
- Advertising the project using a method which doesn't involve direct contact with potential participants e.g. by advertising online or placing flyers in appropriate locations
- Performing recruitment after, for example, students' grades have been released or after a client/patient receives the service or finishes their appointment

Vulnerable participant groups

Children and young people

The recruitment process for this participant group must consider the capacity of the specific cohort to comprehend what the research, and their participation, entails. This will vary according to participants' age and maturity. It may be appropriate to recruit and consent children and young people directly depending on both these factors and on the complexity of the research study itself. Therefore, as per *N.S. 4.2.2 (a)*, researchers should specify how they will judge the child's/young person's vulnerability and capacity to consent to participation in research. If it has been determined that they will be able to comprehend the research project and their involvement, researchers must also describe the form of proposed discussions with them about the research and its effects, at an appropriate level of comprehension (see *N.S. 4.2.2 (b)*). If it has been determined that parental consent is required, please note that the consent of both parents may be required, depending on the level of risk involved in the child's participation (see *N.S. 4.2.7*). Special consideration must be given to parental consent when devising recruitment strategies for projects involving online research, where parental consent is required. Consider, for example, how it will be ensured that the parental consent is genuine i.e. how will it be ensured that the real parent is providing consent, and not someone masquerading as them. As with all participants, the possibility of (perceived) coercion must be addressed and, for children and young people, this may be coercion by parents or peers as well as by researchers or others.

People highly dependent on medical care

This participant group can be found in research conducted in the following settings:

- neonatal intensive care;
- terminal care;
- emergency care;
- intensive care; and
- the care of unconscious people

The recruitment process must allow for the fact that it may not be possible for participants or their family to provide consent. Even if it is possible for participants to provide consent, their decision-making capability may be impaired and/or there may be insufficient time for the provision of informed consent. In addition, if family are able to provide consent, their ability to make a decision may be very much affected by the situation at hand.

Please note that any research that targets people highly dependent on medical care must be reviewed by SUHREC and take into account relevant jurisdictional laws.

People with a cognitive impairment, intellectual disability or a mental illness

Recruitment of this participant group should take into consideration that depending on the condition of the specific participant, their capacity to consent and participate may vary depending on, for example:

- the nature of the participant's condition;
- the participant's medication or treatment;
- the participant's discomfort or distress;
- the complexity of the research project;
- fluctuations in the participant's condition and/or ability to provide consent

Researchers must recognise that these conditions exist on a continuum and design the research project, including the recruitment process, accordingly. For example, participants with dyslexia are not vulnerable to the extent that participants with serious mental illnesses or profound intellectual disabilities are vulnerable. Please note that any research that targets people with a cognitive impairment, intellectual disability or a mental illness must be reviewed by SUHREC.

Pregnant women and the human foetus

In recruiting for research involving pregnant women and the human foetus, researchers must ensure that the wellbeing and care of this participant group receives priority (see *N.S.* 4.1.1). They must ensure that information about the research is provided separately from information on routine clinical care (see *N.S.* 4.1.6). The risks and benefits to both the participants and their foetuses must be given careful consideration and must be discussed with the participants, possibly including providing access to counselling (see *N.S.* 4.1.3). In addition, researchers should ask participants if they wish to involve people who may be affected by the research in their decision to participate (see *N.S.* 4.1.5). Please note that any research that targets pregnant women as participants must be reviewed by SUHREC.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples

Researchers must obtain the agreement of relevant Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities or groups regarding recruitment techniques and research information that is to be communicated to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants (see *N.S.* 4.7.3). Researchers conducting the following types of research must ensure that they attempt to recruit Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants (see *N.S.* 4.7.6):

- Research occurring in an area where it is likely that the population includes a significant amount of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and/or
- Research that is concerned with a topic or disease/health burden specific to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the targeted population has a significant proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples



This includes considering communicating research information using the first language of the community or group in question (see the NHMRC's recently updated guidelines: *Ethical conduct in research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and communities: Guidelines for researchers and stakeholders (2018)* and *Keeping research on track II (2018)*). This also includes observing appropriate community values, norms, and protocols (see the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS)' *Guidelines for Ethical Research in Australian Indigenous Studies (GERAIS)*, which is currently under review).

Please note that any research that targets Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as participants must be reviewed by SUHREC.

People who may be involved in illegal activities

Although some research studies may be designed to uncover illegal activities, other research may uncover illegal activity inadvertently. Projects which fall into the first category must be reviewed by SUHREC, whereas projects that fall into the second category can be reviewed at SHESC-level or via negligible risk review. Recruitment procedures for projects falling into the second category should ensure that potential participants are made aware of the likelihood of illegal activity being discovered and highlight any legal obligations investigators may have, including the extent to which researchers will be able to keep such discoveries confidential (see *N.S.* 4.6.6). This includes considering that certain professional groups have mandatory reporting requirements that might impact this confidentiality.

English as a Second Language or Non-English Speaking Participants

In recruiting participants whose primary language is a language other than English, researchers must ensure that they take this into account with the research information presented in a suitable manner (see *N.S.* 2.2.3 & 5.2.17). In addition to communicating information to participants translated into their primary language (see *N.S.* 5.2.17 (b)), researchers should also consider addressing this by communicating this information orally (see *N.S.* 5.2.17 (a)).

Participants located in other countries

Researchers must demonstrate that the recruitment processes involved respect the cultural context in which they occur when recruiting people in other countries (see *N.S.* 4.8.21). This includes taking into account local beliefs and practices regarding recruitment (see *N.S.* 4.8.20). See the Australian Council for International Development's [resources](#) for more information. If the other countries in which research activities take place have their own formal HRE processes, these must be followed. Please note that these guidelines relate to projects involving data collection in other countries; not to projects taking place in Australia involving people from other countries.



FOR MORE INFORMATION

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