



Justice in Human Research Ethics: A Conceptual and Practical Guide

A Series on the Four Principles of the Australian National Statement on Ethics Conduct in Human Research

In this issues of the Research Ethics Monthly, Ian Pieper and Colin Thomson continue their series of short summaries of each of their four co-authored articles on the principles that underpin the Australian National Statement, namely, research merit and integrity, justice, beneficence and respect.

The articles were originally published in the Monash Bioethics Review and remain available to subscription holders to that journal. The publisher, Springer, has generously agreed to place each of the

four articles on Free Access for one month after the corresponding short summary is published in the Research Ethics Monthly. Last month they revisited the paper on Contextualising Merit and Integrity within Human Research. This month they revisit the paper on the principle of justice as it applies to human research. The full paper can be found [here](#).

Researchers are required under the National Statement to demonstrate to ethics review bodies that their proposed human research projects are just. Members of ethics review bodies are responsible for determining whether or not proposals for human research demonstrate the principle of justice. This paper explores the historical development of the concept of justice within human research ethics and how it came to be one of the four basic values on which the National Statement is based.

Justice is now accepted as one of the core values to be applied in a review of the ethics of human research. However, justice is a multi-faceted concept and not easily defined. Justice means different things to different people depending on the context and circumstances. In paragraphs 1.4 and 1.5 the National Statement describes justice using examples such as; fairness in relation to the distribution of burdens and benefits, and guarding against the exploitation of participants. Throughout the document, the National Statement revisits the concept of justice to provide guidance on how it might be demonstrated in particular contexts

The inclusion of justice as a requirement in the ethical review of human research largely stems from the Belmont Report. It was there that particular cohorts of participants first began to be identified as being exploited by researchers. Its utility as a principle was highlighted during the debates arising from the conduct of international biomedical research in the late 1990s, especially in their collection of research data from lower or middle income countries and use for the benefit of the populations of higher income countries. Given its relatively recent addition to the human research ethics discussion, what constitutes just research is still an evolving concept.

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Undue Influence in Research Between High-Income and Lower-Income Countries

Red Thaddeus D. Miguel

According to the [Belmont Report](#) (1979), respect for persons incorporates two ethical convictions: individuals are to be treated as autonomous agents, and those with diminished autonomy are entitled to protection.

It is because of these guiding principles that we, researchers and health practitioners, are extremely careful in planning and designing our research on populations who are more likely to have diminished autonomy. We endeavour to protect vulnerable groups in our

studies because their circumstances make them more susceptible to being taken advantage of. To do otherwise, according to [Gillet](#) (2008), would simply be selfish and would be acting in bad faith. In fulfilment of their mandate, ethics review boards likewise have clear guidelines in the protection of vulnerable populations. Unlike protocols for the protection of minors, pregnant women, prisoners, terminally ill, intellectually challenged, and militarized to name some of the most common guidelines for vulnerable populations, guidelines for impoverished population may be more difficult to construct. As laid out by the *Guidelines for Good Clinical Practice* (1996, p.8), impoverished persons may have the propensity to be unduly influenced by the expectations of benefits associated with participation. But how does one judge whether a token for participation is enough to influence the decision of a person? For children, for example, being below a certain age is understandably a reason to protect the child's interest and warrants the use of assent forms. However, for the economically disadvantaged drawing the line is more difficult to assess.

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Just a reminder these online discussions are free, but you will need to RSVP. Details below. Recordings of the sessions will be available from our subscribers are (<https://www.patreon.com/ahrecs>).

Australian Code (2018) – **8 November 2018**

<https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/guidelines-publications/r41>

To RSVP:

Yes.AC_081118@ahrecs.com

National Statement (Updated 2018) – **22 November 2018**

https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/_files_nhmrc/file/publications/national-statement-2018.pdf

To RSVP:

Yes.NS_221118@ahrecs.com

Full item includes time by capital city and profiles of panel members.

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- (iv) [Activity sheet about research merit and research ethics review](#);
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3. [The perils of fieldwork in authoritarian states](#) – University World News

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5. [Guest Post: What a new Publons Report on Peer Review Says About Diversity, and More](#) – Scholarly Kitchen.

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Australasian Human Research Ethics Consultancy Services (AHRECS) · 14 Sovereign Way · Samford Valley, Qld 4520 · Australia

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