

Oxford Policy Institute Research ethics procedures

General

OPI's ethics procedures are designed to preserve the integrity, dignity and privacy of individuals who provide information in the course of OPI's research.

All OPI research involving living human subjects is potentially subject to review by the OPI Ethics Review Committee whether carried out by OPI staff or by individuals or organizations subcontracted by OPI to undertake research on its behalf.

Ethics review is generally required if the research involves the collection of primary survey data.

The Ethics Review Committee is generally not involved in the following circumstances:

- For research involving public policy issues
- For research involving the assessment of the performance of an organization provided the management of the organization is fully informed about the nature of the research gives permission for the research to be carried out
- For research based on written work in the public domain

Research which may have potentially harmful effects on public figures in politics, business, labour, the arts or other walks of life, or on organizations, will be permitted even if it results in negative findings. The safeguard for those in the public arena is through public debate and, in the final analysis, through action in the courts for libel.

It is assumed that OPI's research will not involve pharmaceutical or other therapeutic trials or research on embryonic, other living or dead human material. If this becomes the case, these procedures will be reviewed and modified by the OPI Board.

Responsibilities for maintaining ethical standards

Every OPI project will have a designated research director or principal investigator. The primary responsibility for maintaining ethical standards rests with this individual. He or she will be made aware of OPI's ethics procedures and agree to uphold them. The OPI research director or principal investigator is also responsible for ensuring that project staff and organizations subcontracted by OPI to undertake research on its behalf are aware of its ethics procedures, agree to, and indeed, uphold them. The OPI Director has overall responsibility for ensuring that OPI's research conforms to its ethical standards.

Research design

The design of OPI's research will be such as makes enquiries of human subjects commensurate with the objectives of the research and no more invasive than is required by those objectives.

Research applications

OPI's research applications should refer to its ethics procedures and incorporate such elements of them as appropriate.

An OPI research director (or principal investigator) or the OPI Director may refer a research application to the OPI Ethics Committee in case of difficulty or doubt. However, approval of research applications by the OPI Ethics Committee before submission is not generally required. The OPI director will ensure that the OPI Ethics Committee is kept informed of the progress of research applications. These will be open to scrutiny by the OPI Ethics Committee at any time and to challenge. In the case that the OPI Ethics Committee is not satisfied, the application will be delayed or aborted.

Conduct of research

The following principles will be followed in the conduct of OPI's research:

- Participation in surveys, interviews or other data gathering exercises will be entirely voluntary and not subject to coercion or reward (except in the case of modest interview fees if required by local custom)
- The objectives, purpose and nature of the research and their role in it will be explained to the research subjects
- Interviews will be conducted in a professional manner and confined to questions relevant to the objectives of the research
- Survey interviews will be free from coercion or harassment of any kind

Progress of the research will be open to scrutiny by the OPI Ethics Committee at any time and to challenge. In the case that the OPI Ethics Committee is not satisfied, the research will be modified or, in the last resort, aborted.

Data storage and use

OPI is regulated in the use of data by the UK Data Protection Act 1998. Unless permission to the contrary is obtained from the survey subjects, data containing personal information will be held securely, will not be passed to third parties and will be destroyed as soon as possible after completion of the research. The only data that is held for longer, archived or transferred to recognized research data bases will be rendered anonymous. Data collected by OPI in the course of its research cannot be used for any purposes other than those defined above.

Complaints

Research subjects will be informed that OPI has a complaints procedure which they can see and invoke if they believe that OPI staff or its subcontractors have behaved improperly.

Roger Hay
Director
14 July 2007