

GUIDANCE ON RESEARCHING ON OWN CHILDREN OR VULNERABLE FAMILY MEMBERS

This guidance has been informed by the guidance from the University of State Oregon, Sheffield Hallam University, University of the Arts London and University College London.

Rationale for guidance

One of the aims of ethical research is to ensure that the relationships and roles between researcher and participant are as predictable and objective as possible and clearly distinguished from other roles and relationships. This is not the case with researchers enrolling their own children or vulnerable family members into their research and/or practice.

There are preceding relationships and emotional ties that will continue into the future. These relationships jeopardise objectivity and the predictability of the research relationships. The researcher needs to carefully consider these issues. Paramount should be the interests and welfare of the child or vulnerable family member - is it in their best interest to participate in the research and are they able to give informed consent?

In the case of children, they may regret giving their consent when they are older so the parent-researcher needs to consider this and what effect this will have in their long-term relationships and well-being.

The child/vulnerable family member would have two roles in relation to their parent/carer (as participant and relative). Informed consent is a major issue. **It is not appropriate for the researcher to sign the consent form.** The situation maybe further complicated if other family members or a second parent are not informed about the proposed participation or do not give their consent for the child or vulnerable family member to take part in the research.

The need to stop and reflect

Before any research is initiated the researcher needs to ask themselves the following questions:

1. Why do I want my child/vulnerable family member to participate in my study?
2. How will participation affect my relationship with my child/vulnerable family member in the present or future?
3. Is this a joint decision that both parents/other carers/other family members support?
4. Might my child/vulnerable family member feel pressure from me to participate?

5. How will I avoid my child's/family member's feeling that they have let me down if they decide not to participate or to withdraw before the research is over?
6. What procedural safeguards will I implement to ensure that the data related to my child/vulnerable family member is handled and analysed in the same way as data collected from other participants?
7. Is there anything that can identify the child/family member that could lead to future embarrassment, conflict, harassment or compromised family relationships?
8. Should I enrol my children/vulnerable family member in my own research - is it the right thing to do?

Researchers who want to research their own children/vulnerable family members should provide clear justification as to why they should be enrolled and should explain how they plan to protect their own families and the integrity of the research.

Possible strategies for minimising the pressure on the child or vulnerable family member and protecting data integrity include:

- Have another member of the study team obtain consent and collect data.
- The other parent/other carer/family members give consent, rather than the researcher.
- If the researcher-parent will give permission for their child to participate in the research, a third party who is not involved in the research should be present during the consent process.
- Have another study team member interact with the family member of the researcher or review data relating to the researcher's family member and their participation.

Questions for third party consent monitors to discuss with the child/vulnerable family member when obtaining assent and parental permission include:

1. Why do you want to be in this study?
2. Do you feel that you can say "no" if you do not want to be in this study?
3. Do you feel like you could choose to stop being in the study whenever you wanted to?
4. Your family might hear or see information gathered from you in this study. Is that okay with you?

5. Would you feel comfortable with me checking in with you again? (for studies with more than one visit.)

Those giving ethical approval need to be convinced that there is no coercion (this could be practical, physical, emotional and relational) and that the child/vulnerable family member is free to decline or withdraw without anyone being disappointed or angry. Due to the existing relationships it is of the utmost importance that the research is communicated clearly and comprehension is checked.

Any work with a researcher's own family and or children needs ethical approval from the University.