

ETHICAL RISKS ASSOCIATED WITH THE STUDY POPULATION

Whether or not everyone is allowed and able to participate in your studies requires a reflection.

1. BRIEFLY DESCRIBE THE INTENDED STUDY POPULATION(S).

Here we ask you to provide information about the grand order of the study, the inclusion criteria and the recruitment process. In each of these aspects, we screen for potential ethical risks that we all overlook.

1. Order of the study population

The smaller and/or more specific the intended study population, the greater the chance of recognisability of participants. If you are going to do observational research in a small village or a niche group, there is a good chance that participants will remain recognizable to you, but also in results and reports about your study. Always reflect on the size and possible recognisability of participants. Please note that larger study populations do not always guarantee unrecognizability. For example:

- A study among 1000th students where 1 participant is very young (for example 12 years old – example from real case). Based on age, anyone who looks at this data or reads reports where age is mentioned can know who that exceptional young participant is.

2. Inclusion/exclusion criteria

Do you impose certain restrictions on who can participate? Explain what those restrictions are and why you're applying them.

Do these restrictions involve ethical aspects? For example, think about:

- You do research with 'students': do you target people between 18-25 or what with people who start a study at a later age: can/may they also participate?
- You only work with online questionnaires: does this exclude certain target groups?
- You do research into sex differences based on biological sex: do you exclude certain people?

3. Recruit

Research starts with the recruitment of participants. In this phase, we do not always think carefully about aspects of, for example, recognisability or inclusion/exclusion:

- If you send out an online questionnaire to specific email addresses: is the study still anonymous? Follow the GDPR legislation; Can you use all the contact details you have in your possession to promote your studies?
- For example, in studies where "anyone over the age of 18 can participate": does the way you recruit also allow this? Does "everyone over 18" get the same chances to participate? For example, if you only promote the study via social media, there is already a whole group of people "over 18" who are excluded if they are not active on social media.