

EASHW TIPS – SENSITIVITIES AND DISCOMFORT IN RESEARCH

Participation in research can raise questions and lead to discomfort; Reassure participants and refer them to help agencies if desired.

10. SENSITIVE: DOES THIS STUDY COVER HIGHLY SENSITIVE TOPICS?

11. DISCOMFORT: CAN PARTICIPANTS BE EXPOSED TO PHYSICAL OR PSYCHOLOGICAL DISCOMFORT DURING THE STUDY?

From an ethical point of view, participation in research is voluntary and free of disadvantages. It cannot be the intention that participants feel worse than before after participation and are left to their own devices. Questions 10 and 11 gauge the possible discomfort that may occur to participants due to the theme of the study or the use of certain (experimental) measurement methods. For both: **discomfort does not have to be avoided**, but **reassure participants as much as possible and refer them** to the necessary authorities if desired.

We list some organizations to which you can refer participants, but we mainly rely on your expertise as a researcher to select the most appropriate organizations for collaboration/referral.

- The Flemish Government gives an overview of various aid agencies such as TeleOnthaal or the Suicide Line, see overview: <https://www.zorgenvoormorgen.be/hulplijnen>
- The Onlinehulp-Apps website screens interesting apps that can be used for well-being and mental health: <https://www.onlinehulp-apps.be/>
- Focal point for combating poverty, insecurity and social exclusion <https://armoedebestrijding.be/>
- Centre for Equal Opportunities <https://steunpuntgelijkekansen.be/>
- Transgender infopunt <https://www.transgenderinfo.be/nl>
- ZORROLA informs about the harmful effects of negative representations in advertising and communication. <https://zorrola.be/nl/>

WHAT ARE SENSITIVE TOPICS?

At EASHW, we do not have a **fixed definition of 'sensitive research themes'**: as an expert, you have to assess for yourself whether or not the theme of your study is sensitive. Think of research into topics that **may be taboo** among your target population, or that can be **psychologically taxing**. Sensitive topics are things that people don't like to talk about openly, can feel uncomfortable about, can feel shame, etc. As a 'measure', you can ask yourself whether participants may feel the need to talk about the study with a confidential advisor afterwards.

WHAT ARE PHYSICAL OR PSYCHOLOGICAL DISCOMFORTS?

Think of stress, anxiety, humiliation, discomfort due to the use of certain experimental methods, etc. This **can occur both in research with sensitive themes and in research on non-sensitive topics**. For example: a study of eating habits where psychophysiological data is collected by placing electrodes on the body: the theme is not sensitive, but the method can be experienced as uncomfortable.