

## EASHW TIPS – DECEPTION

### C13. DECEPTION: DO YOU MISLEAD PARTICIPANTS WITHOUT FURTHER EXPLANATION AND THE RIGHT TO WITHDRAW AFTERWARDS?

Deception in research involves **intentionally withholding information or misleading** participants about the true purpose of the study. Deception may be appropriate if:

- Explaining the exact purpose of the study in advance would compromise the validity of the results, and
- The deception does not expose participants to harm or significant distress.

Different forms of deception in research include:

- **Providing false information:** Actively giving participants untrue information about the study.
  - Example: Telling participants the study is about teamwork when it's actually about gossip dynamics.
  - Example: Claiming participants are interacting with a real person when it's actually a programmed chatbot.
  - Example: Telling participants that the observation research is about everyday routines when it's focused on stress-inducing behaviors.
  - Example: Informing users that they are testing a finalized product when it's actually an early prototype meant to assess usability issues.
  - Example: Claiming to be interested in documenting local food preparation techniques while secretly observing interpersonal dynamics in community kitchens.
- **Omitting key details (vagueness):** Withholding critical aspects of the study without directly lying.
  - Example: Telling participants that you're observing how people spend their free time, without disclosing that the goal is to analyze gendered patterns in leisure activities.
  - Example: Asking participants to complete a series of tasks on a device without revealing that their reaction times are being measured for cognitive load analysis.
  - Example: Observing meetings while not disclosing the research aim about documenting cultural power hierarchies.
  - Example: Saying the survey study is about "preferences" without disclosing that it's about how social media influences those preferences.
- **Actively misleading participants:** Deliberately creating situations or scenarios that disguise the true purpose of the study.
  - Example: Using a fake group discussion scenario to observe how participants negotiate leadership roles.
  - Example: Pretending to be a customer in a market, while observing shopping behaviors; without revealing your role as a researcher.
  - Example: Pretending to a participant in an online chat group, while observing online behaviors; without revealing your role as a researcher.
  - Example: Using confederates (actors pretending to be participants) to influence how real participants behave.
  - Example: Setting up a mock campaign to observe participants' willingness to help.
  - Example: Creating a fake survey section to distract participants from the real focus of the research.

While deception may sometimes be necessary to avoid influencing participant behavior, it raises ethical concerns and must be carefully justified and managed. The basic Ethical Principles of Deception are:

- **TRANSPARENCY IS THE STANDARD:** Participants have the right to understand the purpose and nature of the study. Deception is an **exception** that must be ethically justified.

- **DEBRIEFING IS REQUIRED:** After participation, you *must* provide a clear and detailed explanation of the study's true purpose. You find some **examples at the end of this document**.
- **RIGHT TO WITHDRAW:** Participants should have the option to withdraw their data after being fully informed during debriefing. If this option cannot be given, the study is considered as ethically more risky.

For question 13 about deception, the following answer options are:

- YES to question 13 = **Deception is needed**, and you can **NOT offer** participants **an option to withdraw** after a full explanation of the study.
- NO to question 13 = recordings with identity information are **made or collected BUT NOT retained** during or after data analysis. In this case, the following list of questions needs to be addressed.
- NA to question 13 = **NO deception** is used.

#### YES TO QUESTION C13. DECEPTION

**YES to question 13** = Deception is needed, and you can NOT offer participants an option to withdraw after a full explanation of the study.

In this case you further explain:

1. **HOW and WHY deception is needed**
  - Explain how disclosing the exact purpose of the study in advance would compromise the validity of the results.
  - Explain how the deception will not expose participants to harm or significant distress.
1. **Why after a full explanation of the purpose of the study, THEY HAVE NO POSSIBILITY TO WITHDRAW. Attach the debriefing form.**
  - Provide a clear motivation explaining why withdrawal is not possible.
  - Explain how you will address participants' concerns and manage their emotions if they feel upset after learning the true scope of the study, knowing they cannot withdraw their participation.

#### NO TO QUESTION C13. DECEPTION

**NO to question 13** = Deception is needed, and you CAN offer participants an option to withdraw after a full explanation of the study.

In this case you further explain:

1. **HOW and WHY deception is needed.**
  - Explain how disclosing the exact purpose of the study in advance would compromise the validity of the results.
  - Explain how the deception will not expose participants to harm or significant distress.
2. **HOW after a full explanation of the purpose of the study, they have the POSSIBILITY TO WITHDRAW. Attach the debriefing form.**
  - Explain the process clearly: Detail how participants will be informed of their right to withdraw after the debriefing.
  - Define the withdrawal period: Specify how long participants have to decide whether to withdraw their data (e.g., "Participants will have two weeks to request the removal of their data after the debriefing.").

- Provide clear contact information: Include who participants can contact if they choose to withdraw (e.g., email address or phone number of the principal investigator).
- Respect their decision: Describe how data will be removed promptly and securely if a participant opts to withdraw.

## NA TO QUESTION C13. DECEPTION

NA to question 13 = Deception is not used in your study.

## DEBRIEFING

The **DEBRIEFING STATEMENT** must include:

1. The exact purpose of the study.
2. An explanation of the deception:
  - How were participants misled?
  - Why was deception necessary?
3. The name and contact details of the responsible investigator.
4. **[Optional but recommended]** Instructions for withdrawing participation, including the process and deadline.

We provide two examples of debriefing statements, but **you must tailor the content** to fit the specifics of your study. The language should also be appropriate for your target group.

**If a written debriefing is not suitable** (e.g., for very young children) or not feasible (e.g., for illiterate participants), you must **use an alternative method** (e.g., verbal explanations) and **justify this in your application**. Include any supporting materials or documentation in the **ATTACHMENTS**. Unclear, missing or redundant information in the debriefing form will result in a **PRELIMINARY NEGATIVE ADVICE** from EASHW.

### Example 1: Debriefing Statement for Withholding the Exact Purpose

Thank you for participating in this study. The purpose of this study is to investigate [insert the exact objective].

At the start, we did not communicate the exact purpose of the study. Instead, we told you [explain what participants were led to believe]. This was necessary to [state why deception was required, e.g., “avoid influencing your behavior”].

[Optional **WITHDRAWAL CLAUSE**]:

If, after reading this information, you prefer **not** to have your data included in the study, please click/check the box below to withdraw your participation:

[OPTION BOX]

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact [researcher’s name] at [email address].

[Optional Confidentiality Request]:

To ensure the integrity of this study, we kindly ask you not to share its exact purpose with others. Once the study concludes on [DATE], feel free to discuss all aspects with other participants.

## Example 2: Debriefing Statement for Erroneous/Fictitious Information

Thank you for participating in this study. The purpose of this study is to investigate [insert the exact objective].

During the study, you received information from us that was not true/fictitious. Specifically, we told you [state the erroneous or fictitious information], which was necessary because [state why deception was required, e.g., “to observe natural reactions without external influence”].

[Optional WITHDRAWAL CLAUSE]:

If, after reading this information, you prefer not to have your data included in the study, please click/check the box below to withdraw your participation:

[OPTION BOX]

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact [researcher’s name] at [email address].

[Optional Confidentiality Request]:

To maintain the validity of this study, we kindly ask you not to share details about the study with others until its conclusion on [DATE]. After that date, you are free to discuss all aspects of the study.