CRIJ 5331

Quantitative Methods in Criminology

Maxifield & Babbie Chapter 3 PPT

Chapter 3:

Ethics in Criminal Justice Research

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Recognize how criminal justice research is shaped by ethical considerations.
- Understand that what is ethically "right" and "wrong" in research is ultimately a matter of what people agree is right and wrong.
- Understand why researchers may not recognize whether their own work adequately addresses ethical issues.
- Summarize how ethical questions usually involve weighing the possible benefits of research against the potential harm to research subjects.
- Understand the norm of voluntary participation and how it can conflict with generalizability.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES, CONT.

- Describe examples of the special ethical questions sometimes raised by criminal justice research.
- Discuss how informed consent addresses many ethical questions.
- Distinguish anonymity and confidentiality as ways to protect the privacy of research subjects.
- Summarize ethical principles presented in the Belmont Report.
- Describe why prisoners and juveniles require special ethical considerations.
- Understand the role of institutional review boards (IRBs) in protecting human subjects.

Ethical Issues in Criminal Justice Research

- Ethical concerns – Typically associated with morality; both deal with matters of right & wrong
- Ethical - May be defined as behavior conforming to the standards of conduct of a given group
- Ethics are a matter of agreement among professionals
- We need to know of this general, shared conception among CJ researchers

NO HARM TO PARTICIPANTS

- Dilemma – Balancing potential benefits against possibility of harm
- Collecting info from active criminals presents the possibility of violence against them
- Psychological harm via remembrance of unpleasant/traumatic experience
- Possible harm may be justified by potential benefit of study (still arbitrary)
- Perrone – Drug use in N.Y. dance clubs

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

- CJ research often intrudes into people's lives
- Asks them to reveal what is generally unknown
- Participation must be voluntary
- This threatens generalizability

ANONYMITY AND CONFIDENTIALITY

- Anonymity – When a researcher cannot identify a given piece of information with a given person
- Confidentiality – A researcher can link information with a subject, but promises not to do so publicly
- Techniques: Replace names/addresses with IDs, specify when survey is C rather than A, specify that info will not be disclosed to third parties

DECEIVING SUBJECTS

- Generally considered unethical
- Sometimes useful and even necessary to identify yourself as a researcher
- "Don't go undercover"
- Widom (1999) – child abuse and illegal drug use
- Inciardi (1993) – studying crack houses

Challenge Question 1

Do you think being deceived during the course of a criminal justice study would change the way you view the role of science in public policy?

ANALYSIS AND REPORTING

- Researchers have ethical obligations to the scientific community
- Must make shortcomings and/or negative findings known
- Must tell the truth about pitfalls and problems you've experienced
- It is as important to know that two things are not related as to know that they are

LEGAL LIABILITY

- Researchers may expose themselves to criminal liability by:
  - Failing to report observed criminal activity to the police
  - Engaging in participant observation studies where crimes are committed
- Subpoenas violate confidentiality
- Legal immunity (42 U.S. Code §22.28a)

Challenge Question 2

What if someone asked you to identify the most pressing ethical issue in your life? How would you reply?

SPECIAL PROBLEMS

- Becoming aware of staff misbehavior in agencies
- Research can cause crime or influence its location or target
  - Crime may be displaced
- Withholding desirable treatments from control group
- Mandatory Reporting: the Federal Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act of 1974

PROMOTING COMPLIANCE WITH ETHICAL PRINCIPLES

- The National Research Act (1974): signed into law after a few highly publicized examples of unethical practices in medical and social science research
- The Belmont Report (1979): a brief, but comprehensive set of ethical principles for protecting human subjects
  - Respect for Persons
  - Beneficence
  - Justice

CODE OF PROFESSIONAL ETHICS

- The American Psychological Association (2002) code of ethics is quite detailed, reflecting the different professional roles of psychologists in research, clinical treatment, and educational contexts
  - Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences Ethical Standards
  - American Society of Criminology Code of Ethics
  - U.S. Department of Health & Human Services
  - American Bar Association Code of Professional Responsibility

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARDS

- Gov. agencies and non-gov. organizations must establish Institutional Review Boards (IRBs)
  - Members make judgments about overall risks and their acceptability
  - Members decide whether research procedures include safeguards to protect safety, confidentiality, and general welfare of subjects

Challenge Question 3

What would modern social science look like without the IRB?

INFORMED CONSENT AND SPECIAL POPULATIONS

- Informed consent – Requires that subjects both have the capacity to understand and do understand the research, risks, side effects, benefits to subjects, and procedures used
  - New Jersey State Troopers and Racial Profiling
- Special populations – Specific regulations exist for certain populations, such as juveniles and prisoners

RESEARCHER RIGHTS

- Many social research study designs are regarded as exempt from IRB review under federal guidelines
- Exempt means that research proposals do not have to be subject to full IRB review

TROUBLE IN THE TEAROOM

- Laud Humphreys (1975) – Studied homosexual acts between strangers who meet in public restrooms in parks ("tearooms")
- Served as "watchqueen"
- Noted plate numbers of participants, tracked down names and addresses through police, conducted a survey to obtain personal info at their homes

THE STANFORD PRISON EXPERIMENT

- Dispositional hypothesis – Prisons are brutal and dehumanizing because of people in them
- Situational hypothesis – Prison environment creates brutal and dehumanizing conditions independent of the people in them
- Haney, Banks, and Zimbardo – Sought to test situational hypothesis by simulating a prison in 1971

THE STANFORD PRISON EXPERIMENT, CONT.

- "Prison" constructed in basement of psychology building
- 24 healthy/psychologically normal subjects selected, offered $15 a day for their participation
- Asked to sign a contract that they would be confined, put under constant surveillance, and have their civil rights suspended – but would not be subject to physical abuse

THE STANFORD PRISON EXPERIMENT, PART III

- Terminated after 6 days (planned for 2 weeks)
- Subjects displayed "unexpectedly intense reactions"
- Five had to be released b/c they showed signs of acute depression or anxiety
- Guards became aggressive, prisoners became passive

RESEARCHERS SENSITIVE TO ETHICAL ISSUES?

- Obtained consent via signed contracts
- Those who developed signs of acute distress were released early
- Study was terminated prematurely
- Group therapy debriefing sessions were conducted, along with follow-ups, to ensure negative experiences were temporary