Ethical issues in psychological testing psychology essay

A major issue confronting a psychological researcher is ethics. Research ethics comprise many different topics, including test construction and psychometrics. Areas of concern within these areas include, but are not limited to, measurement bias; validity and reliability; errors and the use of negligence or deception; areas of limitations in the research, and recommendations. The scientist must provide enough information about the research to ensure the applicability of the results. However, the experimenter should also include information about the misuse of research and the need to consult multiple sources of information. The researcher must ensure that they are abiding by ethical process as results may have consequences that the experimenter cannot foresee, and failing to comply with these processes may lead to the scorn of the scientific community. Because of the daunting nature of this process, it is necessary for the researcher to work with fellow scientists to confirm their research is reputable.

Keywords: ethics, errors, measurement bias, reliability, research, validity

Ethical Issues in Psychological Testing

Activity 9

Psychologists regularly conduct research where they have to ensure they are meeting ethical guidelines and professional standards. This may range from informed consent and confidentiality, to appropriate test use and proper testing protocol. Ethics plays a major role in how the scientific community perceives the work of a researcher. For example, a discovery where the researcher plagiarized the work of another, or was intentionally negligent in

their research, would lead to their research being unaccepted by fellow scientists. Lesser examples of this include issues of a test not meeting the purposes of a research study. Therefore, ethics is an important element to legitimate research practices.

Test construction is an important part of research ethics. The American Psychological Association (APA) (2010) published the manual Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct. This provides a statement on test construction in Standard 9. 05, which says, “ Psychologists who develop tests and other assessment techniques use appropriate psychometric procedures and current scientific or professional knowledge for test design, standardization, validation, reduction or elimination of bias, and recommendations for use” (p. 13). Test construction in ethics refers to psychometrics and professional knowledge of research methods. Klein (2005) adds to the importance of research methods because “ the psychometric characteristics of the instrument itself are of primary importance in test use” (p. 289). As noted in the standard, this broad area of study incorporates issues of validity and reliability, measurement bias, and recommendations for applying the research in different settings, as well as knowledge of the research study and misuses of the research.

In measurement bias, the test shows unintentional preference towards people of a certain background. Klein (2005) notes, if the overall test scores or the “ differential selection rates of individuals from identifiable subgroups by themselves…behave differently across groups, then measurement bias is said to occur” (p. 296). When this happens, the research results are not accurate because the test results show distortion to favor one group over

another. One cannot make accurate policies from tests that have measurement bias. In addition, the Joint Committee on Testing Practices (JCTP) (2004), in Code of Fair Testing Practices in Education, mentions that differences relating to test scores from various groups must relate to " the skills being assessed," not the difference in linguistic or cultural background (p. 4). Therefore, there can be differences in research results as long as they reflect the abilities of a group. One group may have a greater ability to perform a task than another group. This is not measurement bias; on the contrary, it is a reflection of the realistic capabilities of the group. Researchers have to ensure their test is fair and unbiased against a minority.

The JCTP (2004) provides further information related to test construction. Researchers must ensure they give information regarding what the test measures, what its recommended use is, and the measure's strengths and limitations. There must be a sufficient amount of information for a policy maker to make decisions from the research, including being aware of how the research might be unhelpful. The validity and reliability of the test must meet " its intended purposes" (p. 4). Patten (2004) refers to validity as " the extent that it measures what it is designed to measure and accurately performs the function(s) it is purported to perform" (p. 59). Reliability refers to the test yielding " consistent results" (p. 71). There should be an indication regarding whether the test measures what the researcher intended, and how consistent it is in those measurements. Researchers must also provide recommendations for the interpretation of test results, including the possible misuse of research. Readers should be aware that they should not rely on one research study when making decisions. There should also be

procedures for setting “ performance standards or passing scores” if another researcher was going to give the same test (JCTP, p. 8). In the research article, there should be an indication of what score a participant requires to “ pass” a test, or what constitutes sufficient performance.

Test construction also involves errors in research. The Committee on Science, Engineering, and Public Policy (1995) notes, when an unintentional error promptly corrected, the scientific community accepts the mistake. However, when a scientist is negligent due to inattention, haste, or carelessness, the researcher can be admonished because this can lead to work that “ does not meet the standards demanded in science” (p. 15). Deception in research also has huge consequences. Deception involves “ Making up data or results (fabrication), changing or misreporting data or results (falsification), and using the ideas or words of another person without giving appropriate credit (plagiarism)” (p. 16). Therefore, to ensure ethics in research, scientists should ensure they are not using negligence or deception.

I agree with the readings in this assignment because, in academic fields, researchers have to ensure they abide by ethical procedures. Science has its basis on the scientific method, which strives for honesty during the scientific process. In addition, many previous research studies have had far-reaching consequences that the researcher did not anticipate. Therefore, it is critical that scientists abide by research ethics. This appears to be a daunting task because of the many issues regarding ethical psychological testing. However, just as college students cannot plagiarize their assignment for a class because they are breaking the rules of ethics for academic integrity,

researchers cannot use deception in research. This is violating research integrity. Researchers have to be open in their study because the scientific community will scrutinize their work to ensure it acts in accordance with ethical guidelines. The Committee on Science, Engineering, and Public Policy (1995) mentions that “ research results [must] be accepted by other scientists” (p. 3). In addition, because science is a social process where scientists review the work of others to guarantee it meets “ socially accepted standards in science,” researchers strive for “ responsible scientific practice” (p. 4). Research must meet the guidelines devised by other professionals in their academic field because of the nature of science.

In this assignment, I learned about the importance of ethics in research and the consequences of failing to abide by them. There are many “ grey” areas in research ethics, as indicated in the book On Being a Scientist: Responsible Conduct in Research. While doing research, the experimenter should make every effort to ensure that studies are valid, reliable, and lack measurement bias. The researcher must give recommendations for further use of the research and setting passing scores or performance standards. Because this appears to be a large task, beginning researchers should work closely with an advisor or faculty member to ensure they abide by ethical practices. This mentor can give practical advice on research ethics, as well as provide additional sources to consult regarding correct research disciplines.