

# Ethics case studies

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Ethical Case Studies: Questions and Answers in Research Ethics In this paper, the answers some questions regarding the ethicality of three experiments: the Tearoom Sex Study, the Milgram Experiment, and the Tuskegee Syphilis Study.

In all three experiments, the principles of voluntary participation and risk minimization were violated in various degrees. On a broader level, it is the principle of informed consent that was violated, because the participants were left ignorant of some relevant information regarding their participation in the studies, and such information could have affected their willingness to participate. What is alarming is the fact that there were even instances of deception on the part of those who conducted the experiments, in order to ensure the willful participation of individuals. These violations pave the way for other unethical components in the conduct of research, such as the potential for breaches in confidentiality and disclosure.

It can be noted that with the Tearoom Sex Study, a number of the participants were actually not willing participants because they were never informed that they were participating in this particular study. They were never informed of the purpose of the actual study being conducted, and who the beneficiaries will be. There was even deception because Laud Humphreys surreptitiously followed some unwilling participants to their houses in order to get them to answer questions on the pretext that they were answering them for a different study. In the Milgram experiment, the participants were deceived into thinking that they were directly responsible for inflicting extreme pain on another individual, when that “ other individual” was actually a member of the experiment team. As a result, the experiment proved extremely stressful and traumatic to some participants. A <https://assignbuster.com/ethics-case-studies/>

more sinister and tragic result from deceptive research is seen in the Tuskegee Syphilis study. Thinking that they were receiving treatment when treatment was in fact withheld, a number of participants died, while some family members contracted the disease. In these cases, a significant amount of information about the study being conducted was withheld from the participants, effectively taking away their capacity to render informed consent.

It is undeniable that the three studies contributed much in their respective fields. Humphreys' and Milgram's findings deconstructed various stereotypes about sexual behavior and psychological depravity respectively, while much about the effects of untreated syphilis was known as a result of the Tuskegee study. However, the intrinsic value of the human person is still more important than generating knowledge for its own sake. In neglecting informed consent, the volitional capacity of a person is essentially overlooked, making the study unethical. In this sense, the perceived value of the research is not seen as sufficient justification for breaches in ethical research. More importantly, it is still possible to arrive at essentially the same results without having to resort to unethical means. The main challenge is to ensure that the value and dignity of the human person is upheld, and that the participant should be informed of the purpose of the research, the perceived benefits of the research, and those who will benefit from it.

#### Reference

Holmes, Robert. Basic moral philosophy. United States of America: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1998.

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