



Ethical Evaluations and Research Involving Children

Background

When the IFRC conducts evaluations or research involving children it is necessary to put into place steps to ensure children are free from all forms of violence, abuse and exploitation.

Evaluations and research involving children should follow the charter from Ethical Evaluations and Research Involving Children (ERIC; childethics.com). ERIC aims to assist researchers and the research community to understand, plan and conduct ethical research involving children and young people in any geographical, social, cultural or methodological context.

ERIC is a joint project between UNICEF's Office of Research, Innocenti, the Childwatch International Research Network, the Centre for Children and Young People at Southern Cross University, Australia, and the Children's Issues Centre at the University of Otago, New Zealand.

Charter¹

The International Charter for Ethical Research Involving Children is an aspirational statement of seven key commitments aimed at elevating the status, rights and well-being of all children involved in research. It has been written with and for researchers and others who are committed to children and to fulfilling their responsibility to undertake quality, ethical research, irrespective of context.

INTERNATIONAL CHARTER FOR ETHICAL RESEARCH INVOLVING CHILDREN

As a research community working with children, we are committed to undertaking and supporting high quality ethical research that is respectful of children's human dignity, rights and wellbeing. The following seven commitments guide our work:

Ethics in research involving children is everyone's responsibility

We, the research community, including all who participate in undertaking, commissioning, funding and reviewing research, are responsible for ensuring that the highest ethical standards are met in all research involving children, regardless of research approach, focus or context.

Respecting the dignity of children is core to ethical research

Ethical research is conducted with integrity and is respectful of children, their views and their cultures. Involving children respectfully requires that researchers recognise children's status and evolving capacities and value their diverse contributions.

Research involving children must be just and equitable

Children involved in research are entitled to justice. This requires that all children are treated equally, the benefits and burdens of participating are distributed fairly, children are not unfairly excluded and that barriers to involvement based on discrimination are challenged.

¹ The content for the following sections is taken directly from the ERIC website: childethics.com/home/background.

Ethical research benefits children

Researchers must ensure that research maximizes benefits to children, individually and/or as a social group. The researcher bears primary responsibility for considering whether the research should be undertaken and for assessing whether research will benefit children, during and as a consequence of the research process.

Children should never be harmed by their participation in research

Researchers must work to prevent any potential risks of harm and assess whether the need to involve the individual child is justified.

Research must always obtain children's informed and ongoing consent

Children's consent must always be sought, alongside parental consent and any other requirements that are necessary for the research to proceed ethically. Consent needs to be based on a balanced and fair understanding of what is involved throughout and after the research process. Indications of children's dissent or withdrawal must always be respected.

Ethical research requires ongoing reflection

Undertaking research involving children is important. Ethical research demands that researchers continually reflect on their practice, well beyond any formal ethical review requirements. It requires ongoing attention to the assumptions, values, beliefs and practices that influence the research process and impact on children.

Key Areas for Ethical Consideration

Harm and Benefits

The most fundamental consideration in undertaking research involving children is deciding whether the research actually needs to be done, if children need to be involved in it and in what capacity. Accordingly, at the very outset of the research process researchers need to engage with critical issues regarding the purpose of the research and the impact that participating in the research may have on children in terms of potential harm and possible benefits.

Informed Consent

Obtaining consent from parents/carers and children is central to the research relationship and signals respect for the research participant's dignity, their capability to express their views and their right to have these heard in matters that affect them. Informed consent is an explicit agreement which requires participants to be informed about, and have an understanding of, the research. This must be given voluntarily and be renegotiable, so that children may withdraw at any stage of the research process.

Privacy and Confidentiality

Respecting the privacy and confidentiality of children participating in research involves close consideration of several aspects: privacy with regard to how much information the child wants to reveal or share, and with whom; privacy in the processes of information gathering/data collection and storage that allows the exchange of information to be confidential to those involved; and privacy of the research participants so that they are not identifiable in the publication and dissemination of findings.

Payment and Compensation

Research participants should be appropriately reimbursed for any expenses, compensated for effort, time or lost income, and acknowledged for their contribution. Payment should be avoided if it potentially pressures, coerces, bribes, persuades, controls, or causes economic or social disadvantage. The guiding principles of justice, benefit and respect underpin the need for research participants to be properly acknowledged, adequately recompensed and given fair returns for their involvement.