

Research Sensitivity Protocol for Student Projects

When participants volunteer to answer survey questions about - or discuss - personal issues, it may lead to them thinking of - or talking about - things that they find difficult or even distressing. To address situations where this can occur, a number of approaches are commonly considered to help address potential distress to participants. These include making good use of participant information sheets and consent forms, referral sheets, and the implementation of a research sensitive protocol.

Participant Information Sheet and Consent form

It is useful to make the following clear to participants, in all written participant information sheets and conversations you have with participants (e.g. during recruitment and data collection):

- a) What the overall interview topic will be
- b) What are the typical kinds of questions that will be asked
- c) That they may stop or delay the survey/interview at any time
- d) That they may withdraw from the research entirely, without having to give any reason at all
- e) That they may additionally withdraw their data from the research, provided analysis has not yet begun
- f) (If relevant) that their participation in the research, including their comments on it, or their declining to participate in the research, will not affect their participation in education/medical care/social care/[**or insert relevant category**] in any way
- g) That all data they provide is confidential and will be reported in a way that preserves their anonymity
- h) That you will provide all participants with a debrief sheet after the research that participants can use to gain further help

Research sensitive protocol

For interviews, the student will implement a 'sensitive research protocol', which will involve:

- Monitoring participants for distress during interviews
- Stopping an interview if a participant becomes upset and only recommencing when (and if) the interviewee is ready to do so
- Any interview will be ceased completely if the interviewee is too distressed to continue, without any blame from the researcher or pressure to reschedule
- Asking specifically if there are any issues raised by doing the interview (at the end of the interview)
- Encouraging participants to contact the student's supervisor if they have any concerns post interview
- Providing all participants with a support and information sheet that includes free and low-cost counselling options (see below)
- Asking the supervisor to follow up on any participants that become upset in the days following the interview.

Researcher experience and expertise

The researcher should have a supervisor or manager who they are able to debrief with after interviews. Alternatively, it may be recommended that a researcher talk to a counsellor to further debrief if they are particularly affected by an interview.

Support and referral sheet

Consider providing participants with a list of organisations who can provide support including information and free or low cost counselling options, once the research is over.

Type of organisation	Support	Contacts
Telephone counselling e.g. Samaritans	Free or Low cost counselling	e.g. Helpline 116 123 Website www.samaritans.org
Consider including info about a well known charity that is relevant e.g. Mind.	Charity about mental health and related topics, also provides counselling in some areas.	Website www.mind.org.uk
If research with students, include University of Westminster counselling information	Counselling sessions offered at the university of Westminster.	Website: https://www.westminster.ac.uk/current-students/support-and-services/counselling Email: counselling@westminster.ac.uk