

Crash Course

Ethics and Safety for Social Science Research: Risks, Challenges, and Mitigation Strategies

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Course description

Ethical dilemmas and safety concerns can arise in any social science research, regardless of the topic or the researcher's career stage. This crash course equips doctoral students with tools and best practices to address ethical and safety issues at three key stages of the research lifecycle: before, during, and after fieldwork. The course emphasizes the researcher's positionality as a central factor in designing, conducting, and promoting research, encouraging critical thinking throughout this entire process. Its goal is to help researchers uphold the highest standards of integrity and safety in their work.

Participants are expected to develop a more reflexive understanding of their role in the field, as well as the ethical and safety challenges they may encounter both for themselves and for their research participants. This includes preparing risk assessments, negotiating access to where data should be collected, managing relationships with research participants or facilitators, ensuring proper data storage, and writing up and publishing their findings. The course supports participants in devising strategies to mitigate these challenges. By the end of the crash course, researchers will have completed their own risk assessments for their PhD projects and started to develop key ethical documents, including the information sheet and consent forms.

This course is designed for students who are either in the pre-fieldwork phase or in the early stages of their fieldwork. However, students who have already completed their field research are also encouraged to participate and use the workshop as a reflective exercise.

Course Requirements

Attendees are expected to actively participate in discussions, share examples from their past experiences, and reflect on their current research. Suggested readings are provided to foster meaningful engagement in each session's discussions.

Assessment methods: students' in-class participation

During the course, students will be asked to present the ethical risks and challenges related to their doctoral projects, how their positionality may influence their research, and what mitigation measures can be implemented to address these issues.

Course Outline: 8 hours

Session 1 - 14 October 2024 | 9.00 -11.00

Before fieldwork: Planning a safe and ethical fieldwork

Suggested readings

Grimm, J. et al (eds). 2020. *Safer Field Research in the Social Sciences: a guide to human and digital security in hostile environments*. London: SAGE. (Chapter 1: 'Before the field')

Lake, M., & Parkinson, S. E. 2017. "The Ethics of Fieldwork Preparedness." *Political Violence at a Glance*

Association of Internet Researchers. 2020. Internet Research: Ethical Guidelines 3.0.
<https://aoir.org/reports/ethics3.pdf>

Session 2 - 14 October 2024 | 11.15 -13.00

Before fieldwork (2): Preparing ethics checks (information sheet, consent form and ethics clearance)

Suggested reading

Alvesson, M., & Stephens, A. (2024). 'Is it worth doing this or is it better to commit suicide?': On ethical clearance at a university. *Human Relations*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00187267241248530>

Recommended materials

Templates made available by the instructor

Useful links

<https://www.unibo.it/it/ricerca/organizzazione-e-infrastrutture-di-ricerca/comitati-etici-1/comitato-di-bioetica>

Session 3. 15 October 2024, 9.00h – 11.00h

During Fieldwork: Ethical and safety dilemmas when collecting data

Suggested readings

Cronin-Furman, K., & Lake, M. 2018. "Ethics Abroad: Fieldwork in Fragile and Violent Contexts." *PS: Political Science & Politics*, 51(3), 607-614.

Schirru, L., Rocha de Souza, A., Valente, M.G. *et al.* 2024. Text and Data Mining Exceptions in Latin America. *IIC - International Review of Intellectual Property and Competition Law*.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s40319-024-01511-2>

Session 4. 15 October 2024, 11.15h – 13.00h

After fieldwork: Data analysis, writing up, and dissemination

Suggested readings

Knott, Eleanor. 2019. Beyond the field: Ethics after fieldwork in politically dynamic contexts. *Perspectives on Politics* 17, no. 1 (2019): 140-153.

Wilson, R. K., Mishler, W., & Ishiyama, J. (2015). Journal editors as ethics sheriffs. In *Ethics and Experiments: Problems and Solutions for Social Scientists and Policy Professionals* (pp. 262-266). Taylor and Francis Inc. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315694139>

Additional Resources

- Unibo/Comitato di Bioetica: <https://www.unibo.it/it/ricerca/organizzazione-e-infrastrutture-di-ricerca/comitati-etici-1/comitato-di-bioetica>
- Data Protection Laws of World: <https://www.dlapiperdataprotection.com/index.html?t=world-map&c=GB&c2=AT>
- The Embassy of Good Science: https://embassy.science/wiki/Main_Page
- Advancing Research on Conflict: www.advancingresearchonconflict.com
- The New Ethnographer: www.thenewethnographer.org
- The Fieldwork Initiative: <http://fieldworkinitiative.org>
- Conducting immersive fieldwork: <https://securitypraxis.eu/immersive-fieldwork-tunisia/>
- Webinar “Ricerca e Medio Oriente: <http://www.sesamoitalia.it/iniziativa-sesamo-2017-19/webinar-ricerca-e-medio-oriente/>

Further reading:

Clark, J. A., & Cavatorta, F. (Eds.). (2018). *Political science research in the Middle East and North Africa: Methodological and ethical challenges*. Oxford University Press.

Desposato, S. (Ed.). (2015). *Ethics and Experiments: Problems and Solutions for Social Scientists and Policy Professionals* (1st ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315694139>

Gallien, Max. "Solitary Decision-Making and Fieldwork Safety." In *The Companion to Peace and Conflict Fieldwork*, pp. 163-174. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham, 2021.

Peter, Mateja, and Francesco Strazzari. "Securitisation of research: fieldwork under new restrictions in Darfur and Mali." *Third World Quarterly* 38, no. 7 (2017): 1531-1550.

Russo, A., & Strazzari, F. (2020). The politics of safe research in violent and illiberal contexts. *Doing Fieldwork in Areas of International Intervention: A Guide to Research in Violent and Closed Contexts*, 75-94.

Spivak, Gayatri. 1988. 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' In, Nelson, Cary and Lawrence Grossberg (eds), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*. Urbana : University of Illinois Press