



ETHICAL AND PROFESSIONAL CONSIDERATIONS IN TRAUMA PSYCHOLOGY: RESEARCH

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To Ask or Not to Ask

- **Individual Benefits vs. Costs**
 - Some participants asked about sexual abuse report benefits: insight, catharsis, normalization
 - A small minority report increased distress
 - An even smaller minority regret participation
- **Societal Benefits vs. Costs**
 - Value of knowing more about sexual abuse
 - Reinforcing a culture of secrecy vs. encouraging control over one's life story





Common Concern 1: Triggering/Revictimization

- Collect detailed information vs. minimize risk
- Reported rates of distress
 - Roughly 10% in survey
 - Roughly 25% in detailed interviews
- Expected vs. unexpected distress
- Distress vs. revictimization
- “Minimal Risk”





Triggering/Revictimization

- Expected vs. Unexpected Questions
 - Truly Informed Consent
- Venting & Normalization vs. Distress & Despair
- Asking about Abuse vs. Recreating the Experience
- Key Questions
 - How do we respond to disclosure/distress?
 - Are participants in a “safe place”?





Common Concern 2: Framing Sexual Abuse

- Many who have been sexually abused do not label their experience “sexual abuse”
- Rejection of “survivor” or “victim” labels
- “Getting on with life”
- Key Questions:
 - Labels vs. accurate descriptions
 - How do those who have been sexually abused frame their experiences and define themselves?





Common Concern 3: Legal Issues

- Mandated reporting
 - In cases of current/recent abuse of minors
 - Effects on third parties
- Subpoenas
- Dealing with suicidality and other risks
- Key Question:
 - How best to protect subjects
 - Having adequate resources available





Issues Endemic to Research: Privacy

- The stakes of privacy in sex abuse research
 - Physical safety
 - Health insurance
 - Stigma
- Disguising the nature of the research from non-participants
- Rigor in maintaining privacy





Issues Endemic to Research: Informed Consent

- Can survivors truly give consent?
- Authority of researcher
- **Informed** consent
 - Possibility of distress
 - Freedom to discontinue
- Responding to distress and upset
- Dependent and/or vulnerable participants
- Compensation





Dimensions of Research

- Sexual abuse focused vs. including sexual abuse
- Interviews vs. surveys
- Gender
- Age of participants
- The needs of interviewers and research staff
 - Effects on world view
 - Stress





Conclusion

- Asking about sexual abuse is important, and important to do well
- Ethical research on sexual abuse is ethical research
- Be empathic and respectful
- Have a good plan





Thank You

- Benefited from comments from co-presenters, as well as Richard Calica and Tisha Wiley

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