



ETHICAL RESEARCH INVOLVING CHILDREN

Centre for Children
and Young People



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ETHICAL GUIDANCE: 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.

PAYMENT AND COMPENSATION

Any financial dealings in the research context change relationships and impact on the power dynamics already at play.

BEST PRACTICE REQUIRES THAT YOU:

- Ensure that any payment is not used to unduly bribe, coerce or pressure children or parents to participate in research, or influence the nature of their responses.
- Take social and cultural contexts into account and consult locally about payment and other forms of reciprocity in research.
- Work to ensure that payment does not directly raise unrealistic expectations or cause disappointment.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical issues arise in relation to payment to research participants, as any financial dealings change relationships (Laws & Mann, 2004) and impact on the power dynamics already at play. There are different reasons for researchers choosing to make payments to children, parents or community groups. Essentially, four types of payment have been identified in research: reimbursement, compensation, appreciation and incentive (Avard et al., 2011; Wendler, Rackoff, Emanuel & Grady, 2002). Each of these forms of payment has ramifications for ethical practice and issues that require consideration.

Reimbursement payments

Participation in research for children and families may have financial costs associated with it. Reimbursement payments compensate children and/or parents for their direct expenses related to participation (for example, transportation, meals, accommodation and childcare). This form of payment complies with the principle of justice, ensuring that research participants are treated fairly.

Compensation payments

In some contexts, the economic and/or social position of children and families may be adversely affected by participation in research. Compensation payments provide recompense to children and/or parents for their time, work and effort, and for any inconvenience caused by participation (for example, loss of income). The ethical principle of justice requires that children's contribution be recognised and the principle of non-maleficence underlies researchers' obligation to ensure potential harms from research, such as lost income, are assessed and minimised or eliminated.

Appreciation payments

Appreciation payments are bonuses or tokens given to children after their participation to acknowledge their contribution to the research and to thank them. This form of payment reflects reciprocity in providing direct benefits to the participant as a consequence of their participation in the research. Research participants are frequently unaware of appreciation payments until after they have consented to participate or after the data collection is completed.

Incentive payments

Incentive payments are designed to encourage the participation of children in research. These may be cash payments or alternatives such as vouchers to a popular shop or mobile phone credit. Incentives can be considered a means of persuasion, pointing out to potential participants that there is a financial benefit to be gained from involvement in the research. However, the use of such persuasion is contentious and some researchers consider that payments purporting to encourage participation contravene the Nuremberg standards that no persuasion of any kind should be put on participants (Alderson & Morrow, 2011). Incentives, and indeed any payments, may bribe, coerce or pressure children to participate in research, or parents to consent to children's participation. This compromises the ethical principle of respect, impacting on an individual's ability to act freely in making reasoned decisions about research participation and provide voluntary, informed consent. Another important dimension involves considering incentives in relation to the potential risk involved in the research. Some researchers argue that small incentives to improve recruitment levels are ethically acceptable where research involves low risk or negligible risk (that is, no more than discomfort), whereas offering incentives to secure the involvement of children and young people in risky research is exploitative, undermining public trust and support for research involving children and young people (Spriggs, 2010).

CHALLENGES YOU MIGHT MEET

Challenges arise for researchers and organizations in determining the nature of payment in different social and cultural contexts. Issues around payment can impact on the distribution and expressions of power within families and communities, raise unrealistic expectations and further entrench the uneven power dynamics already existing in the researcher-researched relationship.

When will participants be given information regarding payment?

The timing of disclosing that payment will be made and of making the payment are issues that require consideration. Researchers may elect not to inform participants in advance that there will be an appreciation payment and give the payment or gift at the end of the data collection, in order to ensure that it is not used to induce children and families to take part and impact on their freely given consent. In addition, delaying disclosure of payment can help reduce the occurrence of children trying to please the researcher by telling them what they perceive would make them happy, rather than sharing their actual experiences and feelings. However, not informing participants about reimbursement and compensation payments in advance to the research taking place may negatively influence recruitment with participants choosing not to take part for financial reasons. This is

particularly relevant in contexts in which children and/or families are economically dependent on income earned by the child.

How can payment of research participants be addressed in locally specific ways?

Careful consideration of the local social and cultural context is crucial in determining the nature of any payment or compensation for children's participation in research. In some contexts, particularly those in which children are involved in the economic support of their family and/or live in poverty situations, participation in research takes children away from productive work that contributes to family well-being. Compensation is therefore necessary for the time in which children would have otherwise been earning money (Porter et al., 2010; Robson, Porter, Hampshire & Bourdillon, 2009; Vakaoti, 2009) and important to ensure that participants are not exploited or disadvantaged in any way through their participation. In these contexts payment or financial compensation may be the most appropriate form of recompense.

In some contexts, forms of compensation other than monetary may be more appropriate. These may include, for example, certificates of recognition, gifts or vouchers. While the benefits of participating directly in research do not equate with or replace payment, it is worth bearing in mind that participation in research can have a formative value and a range of benefits that may be non-monetary. These might include learning about the findings, education, having an enjoyable experience, children knowing that their views and opinions are listened to and it may lead to further action, direct political/economic betterment, and the opportunity to access resources. A range of issues related to ethical decision-making regarding the use of incentives are discussed in the case study by Kathryn Seymour. A participation strategy was developed for use in the study with 12-18 year olds, reflecting the multiple layers of consideration given to the issue.

Case Study 21: Ethical considerations when using incentives in youth research, by Kathryn Seymour (see Case Study section p.162).

Addressing compensation in locally specific ways requires researchers to reflect on cultural contexts about the value of people's time, their willingness to undertake research activities, the reality of poverty and the capacity to miss work to talk to researchers (Morrow, 2009). A critical issue for researchers therefore is finding avenues through which to access and consult with local communities of interest. These can be relatively informal or through more formal means, such as the establishment of community consultation boards (Schenk & Williamson, 2005). Local consultation also allows for transparency and accountability of the research process in the wider community and may facilitate the interpretation and dissemination of results.

Another matter for consideration is the need for flexibility in research design. An implication of being guided by consideration of local context, reciprocity and fair returns is that remuneration can vary accordingly in research studies that span different localities.

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It may not always be appropriate for research participants to have exactly the same payment type or amount, as equity may be more readily achieved through responding sensitively to the local context. For example, in the Young Lives study researchers addressed remuneration differently in different countries – some paid respondents, others gave small thank you gifts and others encouraged children to buy school materials (Morrow, 2009). These issues are discussed in greater depth in the case study by Virginia Morrow.

Case Study 22: Payment in different contexts: How can payment reflect local considerations? by Virginia Morrow (see Case Study section p.164).

What are the additional considerations related to payment in situations of acute poverty?

In contexts where children and families live in poverty, ethical concerns regarding payment (particularly incentives) are accentuated, as potential participants are especially vulnerable to coercion, exploitation and bribery (Schenk & Williamson, 2005). Participants may place themselves at greater than usual risk because they need the goods and services offered by the researcher (Rice & Broome, 2004). Even when inducements are not offered, potential research participants may have raised expectations of benefits or advantages to participation as a consequence of opportunities and interventions offered by other unrelated research projects and non-government organizations (Ahsan, 2009; Ebrahim, 2010; Nyambedha, 2008), that compromise their autonomy in freely consenting to participate.

Communities and potential participants need to be clearly informed if research, such as that which is being conducted under the auspices of academic institutions, will not be tied to implementation or policy change. Potential participants may also have raised expectations, in relation to academic and other organizations, that being involved in research will gain them access to these organizations. The subsequent disappointment may be accompanied by a sense of deception, and represent a harm experienced as a consequence of research participation. These issues require researchers to be critically aware of the expectations that may be raised, to present expected outcomes as clearly as possible and to clarify misperceptions around the benefits that may be forthcoming.

Research in poverty situations also brings to light the relationship between the researcher and research participants, and the issues of fidelity and reciprocity, in ethical decision-making about payment. Some researchers argue that when faced with poverty it is ethical and humane to help participants out with gifts, tokens or small amounts of cash (Abebe, 2009; Angucia, Zeelen & de Jong, 2010; Vakaoti, 2009). Other possibilities include putting people in touch with sources of support and advice. Some researchers advocate remuneration options that are sensitive to practical needs with low income or disadvantaged participants (Barron Ausbrooks, Barrett & Martinez-Cosio, 2009; Mosavel & Oakar, 2009; Sime, 2008). Researchers are required to balance reciprocity with the other ethical issues and implications of payment.

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What are the implications within the community of payment to research participants?

In contexts of extreme poverty there is a possibility of fuelling tension and resentment against children who participate in research and gain some material benefit (Clacherty & Donald, 2007; Hart & Tyrer, 2006). If resentment from others results in retribution or ostracising of the child participant or their family, the research has essentially caused harm.

Researchers may choose to give payment to groups such as schools or community groups for the benefit of the children involved in the research, their families and the community, rather than to individual children or families (Schenk & Williamson, 2005). This may reduce the potential for resentment and help ensure beneficence, but relies on local knowledge and/or discussion with a broad representation of community members and stakeholders to ensure fair distribution.

WHAT GUIDANCE CAN WE DRAW FROM THE UNCRC IN RELATION TO PAYMENT AND COMPENSATION?

- No child should be disadvantaged through their involvement in research (Article 2).
- Children should be protected from any kind of exploitation from research (Article 36).

KEY QUESTIONS

How will children's participation be recognised and supported financially or otherwise?

- How will you ensure that children's participation will not conflict with other responsibilities they have related to their family's economic well-being?
- Will children or parents need any financial compensation (for example, for lost earnings) or reimbursement for costs associated with participation in the research?
- Will there be any appreciation payments for children's participation in the research?
- What form will any payment take (for example, money, food, gifts, educational materials) and who will receive the payment – the child, parents, community?
- How and when will information on payment be disclosed? Will it be disclosed in the consent process, after children have agreed to participate, or at the end of the research?
- Have payments associated with children's participation been factored into the research costs?