



RISK

LEVELS OF RISK

Negligible risk – where there is no foreseeable risk of harm or discomfort; and any foreseeable risk is no more than inconvenience

Low risk – where the only foreseeable risk is one of discomfort

More than low risk – where the risk, even if unlikely, is more serious than discomfort

TYPES OF RISK

Harm

- physical (injury, illness, pain)
- psychological (feelings of worthlessness, distress, guilt, anger, fear, humiliation)
- social (damage to relationships, discrimination, stigmatisation)
- economic (imposition of direct/indirect costs)
- legal (discovery and prosecution of criminal conduct)

Discomfort

- body (minor side-effects of medication, minor discomfort when measuring blood pressure)
- mind (minor anxiety induced by an interview)

Inconvenience

- such as filling in a form, taking part in a street survey, giving up time to participate in research

GAUGING RISK

Consider:

- the kinds of harm, discomfort or inconvenience that may occur;
- the likelihood of these occurring;
- the severity of any harm that may occur.

MINIMISING RISK

Researchers have an obligation to minimize risk to participants. They must assess the research aims, their importance, and the methods by which they can be achieved.

BENEFITS & RISK

Research is ethically acceptable only when its potential benefits justify any risks involved in the research.

MANAGING RISKS

This requires that:

- researchers include, in their research design, mechanisms to deal adequately with any harms that occur; and
- a monitoring process is in place and carried out.

The greater the risk to participants in any research for which ethical approval is given, the more certain it must be both that the risks will be managed as well as possible, and that the participants clearly understand the risks they are assuming. (1)