Tackling ethical issues and dilemmas in community-based participatory research
A practical resource

What is community-based participatory research (CBPR)?
An approach to research based on commitment to sharing power and resources and working towards beneficial outcomes for all participants, especially 'communities' (groups of people who share something in common or groups based on common identity, interest or practice). It may be led and undertaken by members of community groups and organisations themselves, or by community groups working alongside, or in partnership with, professional researchers (including academics and research students).

What are some common ethical issues in CBPR?
- How to develop equal partnerships/ collaborations and share power
- Blurring the boundaries between researcher and researched, academic and activist
- How to handle issues of community rights, conflict and democratic representation
- Issues of ownership and dissemination of data, findings and publications
- How to ensure anonymity, privacy and confidentiality, when appropriate.

Who owns this information? Are we being fair? Is this an equal partnership?
Questions like this often come up when doing research. These are ethical questions about:
- Doing good and harm
- How people are treated
- Who benefits from research.
In research that is community-based and participatory there may be particular issues about sharing power and resources and mutual respect.

The Tackling ethical issues project
- Coordinated by Durham University's Centre for Social Justice and Community Action
- Funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council through the Connected Communities programme.
- Involved 14 people from community organisations and universities across the UK working together in 2012
- Produced an ethical guide and a collection of case studies and case examples
- Developed a webpage, including short films and podcasts and collected further resources to help researchers with ethical challenges.

Resources
Downloadable booklets:
- Community-based participatory research: A guide to ethical principles and practice (including an EasyRead version)
- Ethics in community-based participatory research: Case studies, case examples and commentaries

Web-based resources:
Films, podcasts, case studies and annotated lists of further resources are available on the Ethics in CBPR section of the NCCPE.

www.publicengagement.ac.uk/how-we-help/our-publications
www.durham.ac.uk/beacon/socialjustice/ethics_consultation

www.publicengagement.ac.uk/about/ethics
Community-based participatory research
A guide to ethical principles and practice

Ethical principles

1. Mutual respect
2. Equality and inclusion
3. Democratic participation
4. Active learning
5. Making a difference
6. Collective action
7. Personal integrity

Practice principles and guidelines

1. Preparing and planning
   • Why work together?
   • Who should be involved?
   • What are the aims and objectives of the research?

2. Doing the research
   • How will the participants work together as research partners?
   • How will researchers handle information and treat people who provide it?

3. Sharing and learning from the research
   • How to analyse and interpret research data and findings?
   • How to share the research?
   • How to make an impact?
Project details

This project was a partnership between a lesbian, bisexual and transgender young women’s group (aged 14-25 years) and a university researcher. The group runs an allotment where young women meet, learn to grow fruit and vegetables, cook and socialise together in a safe space. The research project involved the group documenting their work and participating in exchange events with two other community research groups in different parts of the UK. The group made YouTube videos and the university researcher and youth workers worked with them to develop interviewing skills and to generate questions to use for their research.

Ethical issues

Many ethical issues emerged during the project, as the research and relationships developed and changed over time. Two examples are:

1. Sharing responsibility between the young women, youth workers and university researcher for ensuring everyone was comfortable with their participation

The youth workers and young women were used to noticing when young women might be concerned about taking part in activities. For example, a youth worker saw a young woman looking uncomfortable when watching the final version of the film the project had made. After discussion the film was edited and this young woman’s appearance was removed. The university researcher would probably not have noticed this.

2. Deciding when to share personal information

The youth workers knew many details of the young women’s personal lives. Generally the youth workers would keep this information confidential. On one occasion, a youth worker was aware that a young woman had accused a teacher of having a relationship with her and the teacher had been suspended from school. The youth worker sensed from her behaviour that the young woman might be attracted to her. Therefore, before going on a residential weekend, the youth worker told the university researcher about this situation. She wanted to ensure that everyone was protected, including the young woman, and asked the university researcher to make sure that neither she nor the youth worker was left alone with the young woman. The youth worker decided that it was OK to share this information in order to protect everyone who was involved.

Learning points

• All project partners and participants can be a resource when identifying ethical issues
• All research partners face ethical issues
• All research partners may be vulnerable.

Discussion questions

1. Was the youth worker right to disclose the allegations made by the young woman and her related concerns to the university researcher?
2. What are the implications of recognising the vulnerability of all research partners and participants for how research is conducted and supported?