

Title: Conducting Survey Research with Adolescents with Anxiety Disorders

Author: Emily E. Anderson (based on a case in Kimberly Hoagwood, Peter S. Jensen, and Celia B. Fisher, *Ethical Issues in Mental Health Research with Children and Adolescents*, Lawrence Erlbaum, 1996)

Description: You are a researcher administering surveys to adolescents with anxiety disorders. The IRB asks you to change the information included on parental consent forms.

Headings: Special Populations and Cultural Competence; Minors; Study Design and Risk-Benefit Analysis; Survey and qualitative research; Privacy and Confidentiality; Certificate of Confidentiality; Mandatory reporting

Case Type: Decision making

Conducting Survey Research with Adolescents with Anxiety Disorders

You are a researcher proposing a study to examine psychosocial correlates of an outpatient psychopharmacological treatment for adolescent anxiety disorders. Participants will be randomized to receive medication or placebo for a period of one month. They will be required to come into the clinic once a week for that month for medical monitoring and for interviews designed to measure a broad range of personal life experiences including cognitive processes, emotional stability, school and occupational activities, and home and social life. A short section of the survey asks about sexual activity and illegal drug use.

The original version of the parental permission form you submitted to your university's institutional review board (IRB) described the questionnaire in general terms, stating, "Your child will be asked about his or her feelings and about relationships with family and friends." Your proposal was returned with contingent approval. The IRB would like to you modify the consent form to include the following statements: "The interviews will ask your child sensitive questions about sexual activity, illegal drug use, and child abuse. There is a possibility that participating in the interview may make your child uncomfortable or upset."

As these sensitive questions are only a small part of the research, you feel that highlighting them in such a drastic way misrepresents the purpose of the research study.

How do you respond to the IRB's comments?

See Hoagwood et al. (1996) for a discussion of how this case was addressed by the researchers.