

**Title:** Full Disclosure: Use of Control Groups in Behavioral Intervention Research

**Author:** Celia B. Fisher, *Decoding the Ethics Code: A Practical Guide for Psychologists*, Sage Publications, 2003

**Description:** Fearing that parents of children who are in the control group of a school-based substance abuse intervention study will feel slighted, a researcher does not mention the intervention—only the questionnaire—in the control group parental permission form. Fisher presents this as an example of poor research practice.

**Headings:** Informed Consent: Disclosure and Deception; Obstacles to informed consent; Study Design and Risk-Benefit Analysis; Experimental designs (randomization, clinical trials)

**Case Type:** Illustrative

### **Full Disclosure: Use of Control Groups in Behavioral Intervention Research**

A developmental psychologist designed a substance abuse prevention study to determine whether providing a program to junior high school students would yield more effective results than previous studies examining programs initiated during high school when students have had more exposure to or experience with illicit drugs. Students would be surveyed through 12<sup>th</sup> grade to evaluate the effect of the program on drug attitudes and use. The psychologist received permission from the school district to implement the prevention program in five schools and use five additional schools as controls. Parents and students in the schools receiving the experimental program were given full information about the project. However, the psychologist decided that there was no reason to tell the control group parents and students that they would be taking part in an intervention study, because they might feel angry or deprived that they were not getting the program. The informed consent for these schools simply said that the purpose of the study was to use questionnaires to examine students' drug use and attitudes across 7<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grades.