

BROCK UNIVERSITY RESEARCH ETHICS BOARD

Tuesday October 19, 2021

12:00 – 2:00 p.m.

Teams

Minutes of the SREB Meeting

Attendance

Alyssa Bax (non-voting)
Angela Book
Dipanjan Chatterjee
Elizabeth Shulman
Jo-Ann Boyle-Jackson
Lori Walker (non-voting)
Linda Morice

Michele Donnelly
Nicole Luke
Robert Steinbauer
Sandra Bosacki
Sandra Kroeker
Veronica Panchyshyn

Regrets

Heather Chalmers

MINUTES		
ITEM	DISCUSSION	ACTION
1	<p>Motion to approve Agenda</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Approved <p>Motion to approve June Minutes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Approved <p>Motion to approve June-August Decision Reports</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Approved 	<p>Motion to approve: RS Seconded: DC All in favour</p> <p>Motion to approve: RS Seconded: LM All in favour</p> <p>Motion to approve: MN Seconded: LM All in favour</p>
2	<p>Discussion Items</p> <p>Snowball Sampling Presentation/Guideline</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Snowball sampling is a recruitment method that has historically been used for research purposes. The aim of the presentation today is to increase awareness of how snowball sampling can affect researchers vs. participants. What is snowball sampling? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Snowball sampling is a recruitment technique that involves asking current research participants to help identify other potential participants (i.e., referrals). It is a non-probability sampling technique used where potential participants are difficult to find due to the specific traits sought. Because this method of recruitment raises ethical issues it should be justified and not used for convenience. Snowball sampling models: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1) <u>Direct referral (Active)</u>: Researcher contacts potential participants: Researchers can ask current participants to provide the names and contact information of people they think might be interested. Researchers then contact these people directly. 2) <u>Indirect referral (Passive)</u>: Potential participants contacted by previous participants not researcher: Researchers can ask current participants to tell other people about the study, pass on research information package etc. If interested, these people are instructed to contact the researcher directly. Snowball sampling “rules”: 	

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Current participants cannot receive any compensation for providing referrals or be offered any incentives to provide referrals. ○ Current participants <u>MUST NOT</u> be required to refer others or incur any penalty for not referring other participants. • Issues with direct referrals (active snowball sampling): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Having current participants provide referrals' names directly to the researcher <u>may violate referrals' privacy</u>. For example, if participants were to be recruited based on sensitive criteria, such as an illness, asking current participants to refer others may reveal confidential information about these people and leave the potential participant feeling unsure and concerned about contact from a researcher without any warning. ○ Do people have the right to know who the referral came from? Does that further violate privacy? • Issues with indirect referrals (passive snowball sampling): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ If current participants have some degree of power over referrals, such as an employer-employee relationship, then asking current participants to mention the research to others may raise issues of undue influence. • Discussion: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Q1: Could indirect risks be mitigated by having confidential referrals (e.g., the person who referred them won't know if they participated or not)? ○ A1: Yes, that is one strategy to mitigate the risk of indirect snowball sampling. If referral participation is not confidential the potential participants would need to be informed prior to their participation. ○ Q2: Could the results be influenced by sampling bias? ○ A2: Yes, since the participants are hand-picked (non-probability sampling) and do not represent a random sample of the population the results could be impacted. However, we do not review this issue unless it is a high-risk file because it is an issue related to scientific methods and research validity rather than ethics. ○ Comment: It is preferred that researchers use indirect sampling. However, it is often questioned whether or not potential participants have a right to know who referred them, which may result in privacy issues. Our main concern is if researchers are using snowball sampling simply for convenience. Thus, researchers must justify their use of snowball sampling in their application. ○ Q3: Should it be a requirement to tell the participants who referred them and assure them that the person who referred them will not know if they participated or not? Hard to tell if indirect snowball sampling is an ethical issue or just requires proper procedures to be in place since consent goes both ways. ○ A3: For direct snowball sampling the consent of the referred person is taken away since they did not consent to having their information shared or being contacted. Whether or not snowball sampling can be used does not always depend on the level of risk, it depends on the context and justification. Frequently both student and faculty researchers choose the method because it is faster and more convenient. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Example 1: Study recruiting mothers of gay sons – cannot use direct snowball sampling because it could be outing their sons accidentally. 	
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3	Adjourn	Meeting adjourned at 1:24 p.m.	<p>Motion to adjourn: DC Seconded: LM</p> <p>All in favour</p>