Guidelines No. 3/2022 FSS MU
Guide to the Approval of Research Activity Ethics at the Faculty of Social Studies of Masaryk University

Researchers at the Faculty of Social Studies must be familiar with and uphold the recognised ethical procedures, ethical principles, and ethical standards related to research ethics.

Committees dealing with ethical procedures

Masaryk University (MU) and its Faculty of Social Studies (FSS MU) defines and determines ethical procedures for researchers in the following committees:

1) The **MU Research Ethics Committee** is an independent multidisciplinary MU body and an integral part of the system for ensuring quality and compliance with ethical standards in research at MU. Any project that includes ethically relevant research on a human subject (including work with biological material of human origin) is subject to a Research Ethics Committee assessment.
   For the purpose of research at FSS MU, researchers observe the specific ethical standards of the field and before starting any research activities apply to get them approved by the Research Ethics Committee, especially in the following cases:
   - if approval is required by the funding body (e.g. grant agency) or the editorial staff of a scholarly journal,
   - if the subjects of the research are children, vulnerable groups, participants with limited ability to give consent, or participants in a dependent position,
   - projects in the field of psychology, especially in cases where a cover story is used,
   - if the research involves the processing of special personal data (previously 'sensitive' personal data), i.e. indicating racial or ethnic origin, political opinions, religious or philosophical beliefs, or trade union membership, genetic data,
     or biometric data for the purpose of the unique identification of a natural person, and data on the state of health, or on the sex life or sexual orientation of a natural person.

   Research Ethics Committee assessments are not required for projects using anonymous questionnaire surveys in the adult population.
   In other cases, involving the collection of data that are not ethically relevant, it is appropriate to consult with representatives of the RMU Legal Office regarding the forms Consent to Participate in a Research Project and Consent to the Processing of Personal Data, so as to ensure compliance with the applicable legislation, especially regarding the handling of personal data.
   If, before or during the peer review process, the editor's office of a scholarly journal demands proof of ethics approval for publications related to research activities that do not require any review by the ethics committee according to MU rules, researchers shall contact the secretary of the MU Research Ethics Committee and agree on an individual processing procedure, which shall typically consist of providing information about the research, including the manuscript, and, if the conditions are met, issuing an appropriate assessment for the editor's office.

2) The **MU Ethics Board** is a permanent advisory body to the Rector and assesses cases violating the general moral principles or rules of the MU Code of Ethics which fall outside the organisational structure of MU.

Rules for publishing research results

Researchers adhere to the following rules when publishing research results:

- to respect the publication rules, and other rules for publishing and providing research and development results, established as standard according to the practices of the field, agreements with external partners, and the requirements of the grant provider,
- to observe ethical rules related to respect for intellectual property, in particular the rejection of plagiarism, the falsification and misuse of results, or the withholding of results in the case of research and development financed by public funds,
- in the case of the repeated publication of one's own results in the original form, to provide information in the text that the result has already been published, including the source of the original publication.

Relevant documents related to research ethics

Relevant documents relating to research ethics and that must be known and followed by researchers at FSS MU:

- Research Data Directive
- Personal Data Processing and Protection Directive
- MU Academic and Professional Employee Code of Ethics Directive
- Research Ethics at MU Directive
- Research Ethics Committee Statute
- Board for Strategic Research Projects
- Research Ethics Committee Rules of Procedure

Researchers also adhere to relevant industry standards:

- Ethics in Social Science and Humanities
- APA Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct
- Internet Research: Ethical Guidelines
- BPS Code of Human Research Ethics
- Ethical Code of the Czech Sociological Society
- National Statement on Research Integrity in Social Work

For the purpose of the preliminary assessment of research projects, including bachelor theses, master theses and doctoral theses, it is advisable to use Appendix 1 of these Guidelines: Checklist of the Ethical Aspects of Empirical Theses.

For the purpose of obtaining consent to participate in research, Appendix 2 of these Guidelines can be used: Instructions for Preparing Consent to Participate in Research and Model Informed Consents.

General and Final Provisions

1) Throughout the text of this guidance note, masculine forms of persons (employee, academic, researcher, administrative, manager, senior, associate professor, professor) are used only to simplify the text to refer to male and female employees, male and female academic and research staff, female and male administrative staff, male and female managers, male and female senior managers, male and female associate professors, female and female professors, etc.
2) These Guidelines cancel the effect of Guidelines No. 1/2022 of the FSS MU.
3) These Guidelines enter into effect on December 13, 2022.

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Appendix No. 1: Checklist of the Ethical Aspects of Empirical Theses

The following checklist serves as an indicative assessment of whether aspects relevant to research ethics are present in your thesis

For each item, please indicate (YES/NO) whether it applies to the research carried out as part of your bachelor/diploma/doctoral thesis.

For each item that applies to your research: (a) describe in detail what it is specifically about, and (b) explain how you have addressed this ethical aspect in your research.

If the answer to one or more of the items is YES, you should consult these items (including a detailed description of them and your proposal on how to address them) with your supervisor. In more complex cases, your supervisor may recommend further consultation with one of the individuals who represent the faculty on the MU Research Ethics Committee.

Completion of the checklist and any follow-up consultations must be done before you start the actual research, i.e. before you start compiling the research file and collecting data.

1. At some stage of the research, I will be working with personal data, i.e. data that potentially enables the identification of specific individuals. This may include names, email addresses, telephone numbers, postal addresses and other contact details, dates of birth, etc. However, this also includes photographs, video or audio recordings of interviews (even if the name is not explicitly mentioned, the person may be identifiable by appearance, voice, or by one or more facts that come up in the interview). Similarly, this may include, for example, material obtained on social media.

2. In order to have them participate in the research, I will approach people who are under 18 years of age or legally incompetent, or who may be at risk of having a reduced capacity to give their informed consent to participate.

3. Vulnerable people (e.g. people facing discrimination or socio-economic disadvantages, people in extreme life situations, people with serious physical or mental illness, or victims of violence) will be approached to participate in the research.

4. In order to have them participate in the research, I will approach people who are in some form of dependent position in relation to me (e.g. my clients, subordinates, wards, or pupils).

5. The nature of the research does not allow participants to be sufficiently informed about the purpose and course of the research in advance, or to obtain their explicit consent to participate in advance.

6. At some stage, I will mislead the participants about the true purpose of the research, or interpret the results in a way that may offend participants by contradicting the expectations with which they gave me their answers (e.g. I might present the research interview to the participants as a neutral exploration of their views, but interpret the results using potentially offensive terms such as prejudice or psychopathy).

7. I will use biomedical methods or methods that traverse the boundary between behavioural and biomedical research (e.g. taking heart rate or skin resistance measurements, saliva sampling, or the administration of any substances).

8. Participation in the research will be a burden for the participants in terms of time spent (approximately >60 minutes), having to travel somewhere on a long, time-consuming journey, or spending their own financial or other resources, etc.

9. I will expose participants to situations and activities they may not be comfortable with (including performing boring tasks and intentionally evoking negative emotions, etc.).

10. I will ask participants about sensitive topics (e.g. psychological and health problems, sexuality, risky or illegal behaviour).

11. I will require participants to engage in some physical activity as part of the research.

12. There is a risk (although very small) that participation in the research will harm the participants (this may be psychological, physical, material or financial harm, as well as harm to the participants' reputations, personal relationships, employment, studies, etc.).

13. The research includes other ethically relevant aspects that do not fall under any of the previous items.

Appendix No. 2: Instructions for Preparing Consent to Participate in Research and Model Informed Consents

Basic Rules

Above all, the text of the consent should be **understandable** from a layman's point of view, so it is important to avoid technical jargon and complex sentence structures. When writing, it is a good idea to keep in mind which target audience you will be presenting the consent to and tailor the text accordingly.

Similarly, it is good to strive for reasonable **brevity**. Although some more complex designs may require more detailed explanations, it is useful to reread the proposed text several times and to consider whether the same amount of information could be conveyed more succinctly. Overly long consents usually lead participants to read inattentively and prevent them from recognising which information is important to them.

The text should be addressed **directly to the participants** so that they can imagine what lies in store for them (e.g. *"I will have a conversation with you for approximately 60 minutes"*).

Consent must be given before you start collecting any data.

Consents typically take the form of a **printed document** in two copies, with both copies signed by the person participating and you. The participant keeps one copy and you keep the other.

In the case of anonymous research conducted **online**, the text of the consent can be placed on the home screen, while participants confirm their consent by clicking on a designated button (without having to provide their name or any other personal data). However, consent given in this way should only be used for research that is conducted on adult populations and is not ethically problematic[1].

Always consult your supervisor when obtaining consent for more ethically challenging research and when using alternative ways to obtain consent.

What Type of Consent Do I Need?

The type of consent required depends on your answers to items 1 and 2 in the checklist of the ethical aspects of empirical theses.

> 1. At some stage of the research, I will be working with personal data, i.e. data that potentially enables the identification of specific individuals. This may include names, email addresses, telephone numbers, postal addresses and other contact details, dates of birth, etc. However, this also includes photographs, video or audio recordings of interviews (even if the name is not explicitly mentioned, the person may be identifiable by appearance, voice, or by one or more facts that come up in the interview). Similarly, this may include, for example, material obtained on social media.

If you are not collecting personal data, a simple 'Consent to Participate in Research' will be sufficient. If you are collecting personal data, your consent must also include a passage concerning the processing of personal data. The document will then be called 'Consent to Participate in Research and to the Processing of Personal Data'.

> 2. Participants in the research will be persons who are under 18 years of age or who are legally incompetent, or who may be at risk of having a reduced capacity to give informed consent to participate.

[1]Research for which you did not indicate YES for any item in the checklist of the ethical aspects of research theses can generally be considered as research that is not ethically problematic.

If your research participants are under 15 years of age or legally incompetent, you must obtain the consent of their legal representative (usually e.g. a parent). The text of the consent for the legal representative must meet all the usual requisites and be addressed directly to the legal representative (e.g. "*I will have a 20-minute conversation with your child*"). However, in addition to the legal representative, you should also obtain consent directly from the participants. Its exact form always depends on the specific population. For older children, it is possible to use a similar procedure as that for adults, i.e. signing a document that might be simplified (compared to the consent for the legal representative) in order to make it understandable for children. For younger children, it is possible just to present the research verbally and to obtain their verbal consent. However, you should always consult the specific form with your supervisor.

If your research involves people who are under 18 years of age but who are already 15 or older, we usually assume that they are able to give their own consent for ethically unproblematic research. In such cases their consent is sufficient and the consent of a legal representative is not required. However, if the research is more ethically challenging (i.e. you indicated YES for some of the other items on the checklist), in some cases it may also be desirable to obtain the consent of a legal representative. Always consult your supervisor in such situations.

What parts must be included in the consent?

After reading the text, participants should have a clear answer to the following questions:

1. Who is doing the research and for what reason?
2. What is the purpose or goal of the research? What does the research aim to find out?
3. Which participants is the research intended for? Are there any obstacles to participation in the research?
4. What does participation in the research entail? (How long will it take? What are all the things that will happen? What will generally be covered in the questions I will be answering? etc.)
5. Is the research fully anonymous or will any of my personal data be collected? If personal data are collected, which exactly, how will they be processed, who will have access to them, and when will they be deleted?
6. Do I get any remuneration for my participation?
7. Are there any risks for me if I participate?
8. Participation in the research is voluntary. If I decide to withdraw during the research, under what terms and conditions, at what stages of the research, and how will I be able to do so?
9. Who can I contact if I need help?

The text ends with the wording that contains the consent to participation (or the processing of personal data) and space for signatures. The fact that participants put their names and signatures on the consent form is not considered to be the collection of personal data, because the informed consent document cannot be linked to the data collected.

Model informed consent when I am not collecting personal data[2]

Consent to Participate in Research

My name is ... and I am studying at ... I would like to ask you to participate in research that is part of my Master's thesis. The aim of my research is to find out ... Participation in the research is open to everyone who ...

First, I will ask you to complete a questionnaire that will ask questions related to ... (about 15 minutes). Then I will ask you to read aloud a text containing random words, and I will time you on a stopwatch (about 3 minutes). In total, it will take you no more than 20 minutes to participate in the research.

The research is anonymous and I will not collect any of your personal data. There is no remuneration for participation in the research and participation does not involve any risks for you.

Your participation is completely voluntary. You have the right to cancel your participation at any time during or immediately after the procedure without giving any reason. In this case, I will delete all your data. Withdrawing from the research later on is not possible, because the data collected will be anonymous (i.e. it will not be possible to identify which data are from you).

If you have any questions, you can contact me by e-mail: ...

Based on the above information, I agree to participate in the research.

First name and surname: Signature:

In on:

Author of the Research:

First name and surname: Signature:

In on:

[2]The text can be adapted and completed according to the needs of your thesis; however, do not change the wording in those parts highlighted in blue.

Model informed consent when I am collecting personal data[3]

Consent to Participate in Research and to the Processing of Personal Data

My name is ... and I am studying at ... I would like to ask you to participate in research that is part of my Master's thesis. The aim of my research is to find out ... Participation in the research is open to everyone who ...

I will conduct a research interview with you lasting approximately 60 minutes in which I will ask you questions related to .... I will make an audio recording of the conversation on my mobile phone.

The audio recording of our conversation can be considered personal data. I will keep this recording password-protected, and will transcribe it into text form and permanently delete it no later than one week after the interview. Therefore, I will only be working with an anonymous text transcript of our conversation in which all names and other facts will be replaced by pseudonyms so that it will not be possible to identify you or other persons.

There is no remuneration for participation in the research and participation does not involve any risks for you.

Your participation is completely voluntary. You can withdraw your consent without giving any reason, and may do so at any time until I make an anonymous text transcript of the interview and delete the original recording. If you withdraw from participation, I will delete all your data and will not use them in the processing of my thesis. After the interview has been anonymised, withdrawal from participation is no longer possible.

If you have any questions, you can contact me by e-mail: ...

Your rights in relation to the processing of personal data:

- To request access to, rectification or erasure of, or the restriction of the processing of personal data relating to you;
- To lodge a complaint with a supervisory authority (the Office for Personal Data Protection, www.uoou.cz) if you believe that the processing of personal data is in breach of the legal regulations;
- To withdraw your consent to the processing of personal data granted below at any time, without any penalty or disadvantage, by notification sent to the contact details of the data controller. The lawfulness of the data processing prior to withdrawal of consent is not affected.

[3]The text can be adapted and completed according to the needs of your thesis; however, do not change the wording in those parts highlighted in blue.

Data controller: ...*[insert your name, faculty address, your e-mail (preferably university e-mail), and phone number if applicable]*

Contact of the Masaryk University Data Protection Officer: poverenec@muni.cz

Based on the above information, I give consent to my participation in the research and to the above-mentioned processing of my personal data for research purposes.

First name and surname: Signature:

In on:

Author of the Research:

First name and surname: Signature:

In on:

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