

Protecting people who participate in research

*CITI Training Study Guide
Internet Research*

The Power of Using the Internet for Research

- The internet has 2 billion users worldwide.
- Researchers can conduct survey research with less expense than mailed surveys.
- It facilitates recruitment of groups of subjects with characteristics or experiences not found in local communities.
- It provides the opportunity to observe communications among individuals and to analyze diverse phenomena, such as use of online support groups, decision-making behaviors of online consumers, or adoption of new technologies.

Human Subjects Issues in Internet Research

- Ensuring that subjects understand the consent process

Possible solutions:

- No reliable methods
- Limit recruitment to research for which parental permission can be waived by an IRB.

Human Subjects Issues in Internet Research

- Confirming adult status of online subjects

Possible solutions:

- No reliable methods
- Limit recruitment to research for which parental permission can be waived by an IRB.

Human Subjects Issues in Internet Research

- Subjects' ability to withdraw from an online survey that may permanently record responses as they are entered.

Possible solutions:

- Explain at the beginning of the survey options for retrieving and discarding responses
- Provide "no response" options on sensitive questions
- Do not require a response on one question before moving on to the next one.

Human Subjects Issues in Internet Research

- Inadvertant disclosure of private identifiable information.

Possible solutions:

- IRB can ensure that researchers fully explain risks
- Researchers may caution subjects about practices that could put them at risk, such as failing to close their browsers or using public kiosks that record "trails" of web use on individual computers; and make clear to participants that they are responsible for the security of their own computers.
- Protect data during collection, transmission and storage by retaining an expert in Internet security protocols.
- Protect data in transit by using an SSL protocol or a secure file transfer protocol.

Human Subjects Issues in Internet Research

- Potential for Deception (researchers conceal their identifies or adopt false ones).

Possible solutions:

- IRB must determine that such deception is justified to achieve beneficial aims in the research.
- Broader IRB and academic community discussion about applying ethical guidelines to research conducted in the Internet environment.