



Research Ethics Framework

1. Our aims:

Refugee Support Network (RSN) seeks to protect the dignity, rights and welfare of all those involved in research and to promote high ethical standards of research. We achieve this by:

- fostering a culture within the organisation that embraces the principles set down in this policy and the obligations contained in relevant legislation to protect the rights, dignity and welfare of those involved in research;
- providing ethical guidance that communicates regulatory requirements and best practice, and offering ongoing support and training to staff and interns to maintain high ethical standards;
- maintaining a review process that subjects research to a level of scrutiny in proportion to the risk of harm or adverse affect;
- Partnering, through our Advisory and Trustee Boards, with academics from leading universities, who will act as ethical reviewers for all proposed research.

2. Scope

In this policy, the term 'researcher' refers to staff, interns and volunteers, and to other persons engaged in any research project related to RSN's work or involving young people associated with RSN.

3. Our commitments

Refugee Support Network is committed to ensuring that its research activities involving human participants and personal data, are conducted in a way which:

- respects the dignity, rights, and welfare of all participants in research;
- minimises risk to participants, researchers, and third parties;
- appropriately manages personal data; and
- maximises the public benefit of research.

RSN requires that all those carrying out such research engage with our commitment to conduct research to high ethical standards; understand the reasons for, and participate fully in, the ethical review process; and fulfil their moral and legal responsibilities in respect of the rights and welfare of participants.

3.1 Rigour

Refugee Support Network is committed to ensuring that research involving human participants and personal data linked to our organisation or carried out by RSN staff, interns or volunteers is carried out to high ethical standards.

We meet this commitment by:

- requiring that research is designed and undertaken in a manner that evidences a commitment to accountability and quality;
- identifying and reviewing all research involving human participants and personal data in proportion to the level of risk;
- ensuring that research complies with current legislative requirements.

3.2 Respect

Refugee Support Network is committed to ensuring that all research linked to our organisation involving human participants and personal data contributes to the public good and the advancement of our charitable objectives, and that the dignity, rights and welfare of researchers, research subjects and third parties (which may include family members, carers or the wider community) are respected.

We meet this commitment by:

- avoiding harm to people involved in, or affected by, the research, through the early identification and considered assessment of risk;
- requiring that people are fully informed about the purpose and intended possible uses of the research, what their participation involves and details of any risks;
- ensuring that consent to participate in research is informed, valid and freely given;
- respecting the participant's right to withdraw from research at any time without adverse consequences;
- observing the confidentiality of information provided by participants and, where appropriate, respecting their anonymity.

4. Particular issues regarding research with young refugees, asylum seekers and survivors of trafficking

4.1 Existing guidance concerning these groups

These participant groups have experienced particular and often acute disadvantage, violence or exploitation. It is essential that, in addition to these guidelines, all potential researchers wishing to work with this group familiarise themselves with the wealth of guidance applicable to research with these vulnerable groups, and tailor the research proposal accordingly. Examples of further reading include but are not limited to:

- Hopkins, P.E. 2008. **Ethical Issues in Research with Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children.** *Children's Geographies Vol 6 Issue 1 pp37-48*
- Forced Migration Online. 2011. **Methods and Ethics of Research with Refugee Children and Youth.** Refugee Studies Centre, Oxford University. Accessed [here](#) Dec 2013.
- Pittaway, E. Bartolomei, L. Hugman, R. 2010. **Stop Stealing Our Stories: The Ethics of Research with Vulnerable Groups.** *Journal of Human Rights Practice. Vol 2, Issue 2, pp 229-251.* Oxford University.
- Zimmerman, C. 2003. **WHO Ethical and safety recommendations for interviewing trafficked women.** World Health Organisation. Accessed [here](#) Dec 2013

- Harrison, D. 2006. **Victims of trafficking or victims of research? Ethical considerations in research with females trafficked for the purposes of sexual exploitation.** Accessed [here](#) Dec 2006

4.2 Do no harm

It is of paramount importance that no harm of any type should come to any participants as a result of participating in any form of research that they have become involved in through RSN. RSN is first and foremost an organisation that exists for the benefit of the young people it serves – any research or approach to research that may damage this for a group of or an individual young person will not be undertaken.

Reliving distressing experiences

When working with these groups, 'harm' also includes feelings of discomfort, which may be caused as some questions may lead former unaccompanied minors or survivors of trafficking to reflect on difficult experiences or circumstances. In assessing research proposals, we will look for evidence that all possible measures have been or will be taken to minimise such discomfort, including making it clear that young people may stop the interview or leave the group at any time, and are not obliged to answer any question they do not wish to. Research projects that have a high risk of causing young people to re-live distressing events are unlikely to be approved.

Frequent exposure to research

These groups of young people are regularly 'researched'. They become tired of telling their story again and again. All researchers must remember that young people participating in the research are giving up their time, and sharing a part of their experience and life for a project that is unlikely to benefit them personally. They may have been asked to do this on a regular basis. For this reason, RSN reserves the right to reject a research proposal simply on the basis that the relevant young people have been over-researched or have expressed any degree of reluctance whatsoever about participating in another study. Adoption of measures to thank young people who do participate in research through tokens (e.g. for a particular shop or cinema etc) is encouraged.

Clarity about impact of research

On occasion, researchers have inadvertently misrepresented the potential impact of their research to young participants. For example, it is easy to say 'I am researching children's experiences of the asylum process so that the Home Office can make better decisions in future', or 'I am researching the level of care provided for survivors of trafficking so that this improves' etc. The implication to the young person hearing this is that their personal situation in that respect may change for the better as a result of participating in the research.

Young people newly arrived in the UK are usually not familiar with the nature of the relationship research has to policy – and that even the most applied research, conducted explicitly for a policy organisation, will take several years to instigate practical change. It must be made explicitly clear to participants that their own situation, in particular their immigration status, and the level of support they receive from statutory or voluntary organisations will not change as a direct result of their participation in a research piece.

Failure to be clear about this can result in young people experiencing 'harm' as a result of feeling disappointed, let down or even betrayed when they do not see the change they anticipated.

4.3 Language and Communication

Many (although not all) of the young people RSN works with have very low level literacy skills. Some are recently arrived in the UK and have never been to school before. Many speak only basic English.

Interpretation and translation

For some young people, provision of interpretation will need to be considered – if this is necessary, the interpreter should be a professional interpreter, and not a friend or family member of the young person concerned.

Some young people will not be literate in their mother tongue. If however, the young people concerned are literate in their mother tongue but unable to read to a sufficient level in English, translation of participant documentation and information (such as consent forms, complaints procedures and outlines of research) into the mother tongue should be considered.

Appropriate language

If it is acceptable for written materials to remain in English, care should be taken to use accessible and straight forward language at all times. In the case of research projects proposed by partner organisations (such as academic institutions) RSN staff are unlikely to be able to devote time to adjusting the language level of research documentation – if researchers are unable to tailor the language appropriately, the research project may not be able to move forward.

Use of visual aids including pictures and objects should be considered as a means of enabling young people with very little or no literacy to participate in research.

4.4 Consent

Informed consent or perceived obligation?

Any young people participating in research linked to RSN are likely to also be receiving support from RSN. This creates issues around consent. Young people may, if the consent process is not appropriately handled, appear to provide informed consent, but, in reality be participating reluctantly in a research project out of a sense of obligation, gratitude, or fear that they will not receive the same extent of support should they opt not to participate.

It must be made explicitly clear to young people that the research is completely separate to the support they are receiving, and that their decision to participate or not will in no way or at any time affect the support they receive from RSN. Participating in the research must never be presented as a way of doing a favour for a member of staff or volunteer. It must be repeatedly made clear to young people that RSN has no expectations that they will participate in research, that they can withdraw their participation at any point in any project, including after the project has been completed. Exerting any kind of pressure on young people to participate in research will be considered a disciplinary offence.

Written consent is preferable, but verbal consent will be considered when working with young people with low literacy levels. The mode of consent gathering must be approved by the RSN Director.

Confidentiality and child protection

All research must be conducted in line with RSN's Child Protection Policy, and the guidelines in this policy must be followed in the event of any child protection concerns arising throughout the process of the research.

Interviews, data collection exercises and focus groups must take place in a public place that maintains the appropriate need for confidentiality – for example, in RSN's meeting room, on college premises, on university premises. Efforts to create a young person-friendly environment and to conduct interviews in locations the young people are both familiar and comfortable with should be undertaken at all times. Participation of young people with disabilities should be considered in the selection of a research location. The location of the research must be agreed by the RSN Director.

5. Refugee Support Network staff, interns and volunteers as participants in research

RSN extends to its staff and volunteers participating in research the same protection as to all other participants. Staff and volunteers may be invited to participate in research carried out by a researcher linked to RSN, but their participation must be entirely voluntary, they may withdraw at any time, and their participation or decision not to participate will not affect their employment or voluntary work in any way.

6. Status and sanctions

Refugee Support Network regards any breach of this policy or any breach of the approved terms of a project, as a very serious matter. Where staff, interns or volunteers are concerned, this may result in disciplinary action, the ultimate sanction being dismissal for staff and interns, and suspension of responsibilities for volunteers. In this instance, all participants, including young people, linked to RSN, will be informed that the research is no longer taking place and that they should not be contacted by the researcher. When the concerned researcher who has been partnering with RSN is linked with an academic institution, RSN will also report the breach to the linked department, university or other relevant body.

7. Submitting a research project for approval

No proposals for research should be submitted without the project being discussed in advance with RSN's Director. In consultation with the academic research advisors on our Trustee and Advisory Boards, the Director will advise the researcher (whether staff, volunteer or independent/university linked researcher) whether or not it is appropriate to submit a proposal for approval at this time. This decision will be linked to factors including but not only:

- the extent to which the research fits with our overall charitable aims and objectives;
- the extent to which the research fits with our current priority identified issues;
- capacity within RSN Senior Management to provide appropriate supervision for the research project;
- capacity within RSN Project Teams to provide logistical support to the research project;
- the extent to which the researcher needs to be present in the RSN office or is able to work from home;

- the cost implications to RSN of supporting the research and the availability of either a) partner organisation resources or b) internal resources to cover these costs.

The Director's decision whether or not to take forward a research project to the ethics approval stage is final.

If the decision to proceed is taken, the lead researcher should, having read and understood this guidance, complete the accompanying proposal form and an information for participants form, drafted by the researcher using the 'Information for participants guidance notes'.