Research Ethics (2)

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Informed Consent in Practice: The Havasupai

- Havasupai Indians suffer a very high rate of diabetes.
  - Tribal members gave blood samples for research in the hope of finding a cure.

- The consent forms they signed were very broad.

- Two dozen papers were published using the blood samples
  - Many had nothing to do with Diabetes

- Arizona State University had to pay a settlement and give back the blood samples.
Clicker Question

• If you were on the IRB, would you have allowed the Havasupai research to move forward?
  • A. Yes
  • B. No
Other examples

• Interviewing the IRA
• Studying vote buying in the Philippines
• Anthropologists embedding with the US military in Iraq and Afghanistan
The Ethics of Randomized Controlled Trials

- On a randomized experiment on the effects of public housing in NYC:

  - “They should immediately stop this experiment,” said the Manhattan borough president, Scott M. Stringer. “The city shouldn’t be making guinea pigs out of its most vulnerable.”
The Ethics of Randomized Controlled Trials

• Claim:
  • RCTs (experiments) are the best ways to know what works.
    • Wasting money (and failing to produce results) in development economics literally kills people.
    • It is unethical NOT to test programs fully

• Counterclaim
  • We don’t run many experiments in rich countries
    • When the “treatment” is valuable, control groups are inherently unethical.
    • The power disparities say it all.
Other examples

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What about fraud?

• Michael LaCour
  • Police patrols vs. fire alarms