There is now broad consensus that children’s participation in social research is important: holding different standpoints, conceptualisations and experiences of the world to adults, children and young people’s views can help develop knowledge about the social problems they encounter and assist adults to better consider their needs. However, considerable uncertainty remains around children’s inclusion in research on ‘sensitive’ issues. Key to this are deeply embedded assumptions and beliefs about children and childhood, especially concerning notions of capacity and vulnerability.

This study aimed to better understand and address the tensions between the protection of children and their participation when involved in research on sensitive issues. It focused on exploring how Human Research Ethics Committees, parents, other gatekeepers and children themselves manage and navigate the tensions between children’s participation and protection in research on sensitive issues.

Research Design
This study adopted a mixed method approach involving four aspects:

1. Describing the processes through which children’s participation in research is determined, asking: what are the ontological (the way children are constructed), epistemological (what children know), methodological, ethical, professional, ideological and practical factors that influence the decisions of HRECs, gatekeepers, parents and children.
2. Identifying the key barriers and enablers to children’s participation in research about sensitive issues.

3. Identifying, through the use of scenarios, the factors that influence decision-making including: how gatekeepers assess risk level and the appropriateness of particular research topics and methodologies.

4. Using the information collected to provide more nuanced and urgently-needed guidance to HRECs and other gatekeepers on how to best identify the risks and benefits of children’s participation in research, and guidance to researchers on how to help ensure children’s rights and wellbeing are attended to throughout the entire research process.

Research Team

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Academic Publications

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