

Ethics of participatory action research on food security related projects: Experiences and lessons learned

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Objectives: This project seeks to examine ethical issues in participatory food security-related work as well as to identify strategies to address these issues. It builds on an identified need by the UREB at Mount Saint Vincent University (MSVU) for University Research Ethics Board (UREB) guidelines specific to Participatory Action Research (PAR). **Methods:** The study used qualitative methods, specifically in-depth semi-structured interviews, to capture community and academic researchers' experiences with food security-related PAR initiatives. The following research questions were addressed: What were the ethical challenges inherent in PAR processes, and what were the strategies to overcome those challenges? Interviews were transcribed verbatim, data were managed using NVIVO 7 software, and a phenomenological method of inquiry was used, which is based on the premise that reality consists of lived experiences. Open coding was used to identify specific themes that were then compared with the theoretical framework of Israel and colleagues (1998). **Results:** By using this process, it was possible to capture themes both within and external to the framework, including the challenges related to partnership, sustainability, confidentiality, dissemination, consent, and REB forms and processes. Strategies identified to address these issues included: the need for face-to-face interactions; emphasis on process; appropriate communication; creating a body of knowledge; clear expectations regarding project sustainability; and support and education for researchers and REBs. **Implications & Conclusions:** The results of this research will help to inform the development of guidelines for ethical practice for UREBs by bringing in the voices and lived experience of those who work in this field.

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