

Committee on Human Research (CHR) 2019 Annual Report

Committee Members

B. R. Simon Rosser, PhD (Chair), Emil Chiauzzi, PhD, Valentina Ivezaj, PhD, Leah Light, PhD, Marguerita Lightfoot, PhD, Maria Marquine, PhD, and Karen Saules, PhD.

Staff Liaison(s)

Sangy Panicker, PhD

Use of Digital Health Technologies in Psychological Science

The ubiquity of digital technologies in everyday life and the proliferation of applications that can be used to track, gather, and store information about individuals' health information including mental health status, diet and exercise levels, sleep patterns, etc. has challenged the prevailing ethical framework for research with human participants. To raise awareness about this complex issue within the behavioral and psychological science community, the Committee developed a proposal for a special issue of a journal, which will feature articles exploring the ethical, legal, regulatory and social issues associated with the increased use of digital technologies in behavioral health research.

Risk of Harm in Research Using Mobile, Pervasive-sensing, Imaging, and other Digital Technologies

The Committee also initiated a project exploring the impact of ubiquitous digital technology use both in everyday life and in the research setting on key regulatory concepts such as minimal risk. Traditionally, the bulk of behavioral, cognitive, and psychological research has met the regulatory definition of "minimal risk." This has been true of both laboratory-based and field-based research. Qualifying for a "minimal risk" determination does not merely mean a more efficient and less onerous institutional review board (IRB) approval process, but it also has ramifications for the integrity of the study. For example, often the regulatory requirement to obtain informed consent from prospective participants has to be waived in order to ensure validity of the data obtained. However, one principle criterion for waiving informed consent is that the IRB determines that the research poses minimal (or less than) risk of harm to the participants. Thus it is crucial for the determination of level of risk be as accurate as possible. This project will explore if and how the ubiquity of digital technologies has influenced the meaning and determination of risks of harm in research.

Impact on APA's Strategic Priorities

The two interrelated projects initiated by CHR in 2019, strengthens APA's standing as an authoritative voice for psychology and prepares the discipline and profession of psychology for the future.