

# The Ethics of Net-Risk Geriatric Research

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## DESCRIPTION

As our society ages, geriatric research becomes increasingly crucial for understanding and addressing the unique healthcare needs of older adults. However, conducting research involving vulnerable populations, such as the elderly, raises complex ethical considerations. One approach that has garnered attention in this context is the concept of "net-risk" research. "Net-risk" research in geriatrics refers to studies that involve interventions or procedures with potential risks to participants.

### Key ethical considerations

**Informed consent:** In geriatric research, obtaining informed consent is a fundamental ethical principle. Older adults, like all research participants, have the right to understand the potential risks and benefits of their participation. However, this can be particularly challenging when dealing with elderly individuals who may have cognitive impairments or diminished decision-making capacity. Balancing the need to include older adults in research with their ability to provide informed consent is an ethical dilemma.

**Vulnerable populations:** The elderly are considered a vulnerable population in research due to factors such as potential cognitive decline, health disparities, and greater susceptibility to adverse effects of interventions. Ethical research practice demands extra vigilance to protect the rights and well-being of older adults. Researchers must ensure that the elderly are not exploited for research purposes.

**Risk-benefit assessment:** The "net-risk" approach relies on a careful assessment of the potential benefits versus the risks of research interventions. Researchers must weigh the potential for harm against the possibility of improved health outcomes for participants and society. This ethical balancing act underscores the importance of rigorous study design, monitoring, and reporting of results.

**Equity and inclusion:** Ethical research practice also demands that older adults from diverse backgrounds are included in studies. Health disparities among older populations must be addressed, ensuring that research benefits are accessible and equitable for all.

## Ethics and geriatric research

**The principle of autonomy:** Respecting the autonomy of elderly participants is essential. Researchers must take the time to explain the research, the potential risks, and the expected benefits in a way that is understandable to the participants. This principle is critical for ensuring that older adults provide informed consent freely and without undue influence.

**The principle of beneficence:** This principle calls for actions that promote the well-being of research participants. In geriatric research, this means that the expected benefits of the research should be maximized while minimizing potential risks. Researchers must work to ensure that older adults receive the best possible care while participating in studies.

**The principle of non-maleficence:** Geriatric research should do no harm. Researchers must actively minimize risks and protect the safety and health of participants. This includes comprehensive safety monitoring, rigorous study design, and adherence to ethical guidelines.

**The principle of justice:** Fairness in research is paramount. Older adults, regardless of their backgrounds or health status, should have equitable access to the potential benefits of "net-risk" geriatric research. Addressing health disparities and ensuring inclusivity are ethical imperatives.

## CONCLUSION

The ethics of "net-risk" geriatric research is a challenging but necessary field, particularly as our aging population grows.

Balancing the potential risks and benefits, ensuring informed consent, protecting the rights of older adults, and addressing health disparities are all integral parts of ethical geriatric research. The guiding ethical principles of autonomy, beneficence, non-maleficence, and justice serve as the moral compass for researchers in this field.

Ethical practice is not just a requirement; it is a moral obligation to ensure that research aligns with the principles of respect, fairness, and protection for one of our most vulnerable and valuable populations.

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