

**January 2024**

## **Ethical Issues of Obtaining Informed Consent Among Illiterate Farmers in the Global South**

By: F. Quist

### **Abstract**

Informed consent is a fundamental principle of ethical research involving human subjects, ensuring that individuals have the autonomy to make informed decisions about their participation. However, obtaining informed consent becomes particularly challenging when working with illiterate populations, such as farmers in the Global South. This article explores the multifaceted ethical issues surrounding the process of obtaining informed consent from illiterate farmers. It addresses the cultural, linguistic, and educational barriers that complicate the consent process, as well as the potential power imbalances that may arise. Through a comprehensive analysis of existing literature, this article aims to shed light on the complexities of obtaining informed consent in such contexts and proposes practical strategies to enhance ethical practices while respecting the rights and dignity of illiterate farmers.

### **Introduction**

Informed consent is a cornerstone of ethical research involving human subjects, ensuring that individuals understand the nature, purpose, risks, and benefits of their participation and voluntarily choose to take part. This principle becomes particularly challenging to uphold when working with illiterate populations in the Global South, where barriers of culture, language, education, and power dynamics intersect. Illiterate farmers in these regions face unique challenges in comprehending research processes and providing meaningful informed consent. This article delves into the ethical issues surrounding informed consent among illiterate farmers, highlighting the need for culturally sensitive and context-specific approaches to uphold ethical research standards.

### **Barriers to Informed Consent**

**Linguistic Challenges:** Language barriers pose a significant obstacle to obtaining informed consent. Illiterate farmers may speak local dialects or languages that researchers are unfamiliar with, impeding effective communication. Language misinterpretations can lead to misunderstandings about research aims, risks, and participant rights.

**Cultural Sensitivity:** Cultural norms, beliefs, and practices influence how information is communicated and received. Researchers must navigate these cultural nuances to ensure that the

consent process is culturally appropriate and respectful. Failure to do so may result in the misinterpretation of research objectives or perceived disrespect, leading to unethical practices.

**Educational Disparities:** Illiterate farmers often have limited formal education, which affects their ability to comprehend complex research concepts and procedures. Consent forms written in formal language or technical jargon may be inaccessible to them, rendering the consent process ineffective.

#### Power Imbalances and Vulnerability:

**Socioeconomic Factors:** Illiterate farmers in the Global South often face socio-economic challenges that impact their decision-making autonomy. Poverty, lack of access to resources, and dependency on external aid may create power imbalances between researchers and participants, potentially coercing illiterate farmers into participating without fully understanding the implications.

**Trust and Relationships:** Building trust within illiterate communities is crucial. Researchers must invest time in establishing rapport with participants and community leaders to facilitate meaningful informed consent. Failure to establish trust can lead to skepticism, resistance, or misinformation about the research.

#### Potential Solutions

**Community Engagement:** Involving community members from the inception of research projects can ensure that consent processes are culturally sensitive and linguistically appropriate.

Community leaders can play a key role in mediating communication between researchers and illiterate farmers.

**Visual Aids and Storytelling:** Utilizing visual aids such as pictures, diagrams, and videos can enhance understanding, as illiterate individuals often rely on visual and oral communication. Storytelling and role-playing can also help convey research concepts and potential risks.

**Ethical Training:** Researchers working with illiterate populations should undergo specialized training in cross-cultural communication and ethical considerations specific to these contexts. This training can sensitize researchers to potential pitfalls and guide them in navigating ethical challenges.

#### Conclusion

Obtaining informed consent from illiterate farmers in the Global South is a complex ethical issue that requires careful consideration of cultural, linguistic, and power dynamics. The challenges of working with illiterate populations should not deter researchers from upholding ethical standards but rather inspire them to adopt innovative and context-specific approaches. Addressing these challenges necessitates a collaborative effort involving researchers, community members, and

policymakers to ensure that the principles of autonomy, respect, and justice are upheld while conducting research that benefits vulnerable populations. By acknowledging and mitigating these challenges, the research community can contribute to equitable and ethical knowledge generation that respects the rights and dignity of illiterate farmers in the Global South.

## References

1. Young S, Wheeler AC, McCoy SI, Weiser SD. A review of the role of food insecurity in adherence to care and treatment among adult and pediatric populations living with HIV and AIDS. *AIDS Behav.* 2014;18 (Suppl 5):S505–515.
2. Tsai AC, Bangsberg DR, Frongillo EA, Hunt PW, Muzoora C, Martin JN, et al. Food insecurity, depression and the modifying role of social support among people living with HIV/AIDS in rural Uganda. *Soc Sci Med.* 2012;74:2012–2019.
3. Palar K, Kushel M, Frongillo EA, Riley ED, Grede N, Bangsberg D, et al. Food Insecurity is Longitudinally Associated with Depressive Symptoms Among Homeless and Marginally-Housed Individuals Living with HIV. *AIDS Behav.* 2014
4. Kalichman SC, Cherry C, Amaral C, White D, Kalichman MO, Pope H, et al. Health and treatment implications of food insufficiency among people living with HIV/AIDS, Atlanta, Georgia. *Journal of urban health : bulletin of the New York Academy of Medicine.* 2010;87:631–641.
5. McCole, D. T. & Vogt, C., (2011). Informing sustainability decisions: The role of parks, recreation, and tourism scholars in addressing unsustainability. *Journal of Park and Recreation Administration.* 29(3), 38–54.
6. Cloke, P. (2002). Deliver us from evil? Prospects for living ethically and acting politically in human geography. *Progress in Human Geography,* 26, 587–604.
7. Cutchin, M. P. (2002). Ethics and geography: Continuity and emerging syntheses. *Progress in Human Geography,* 26, 656–664.
8. Gannon, W. L. (2014). Integrating research ethics with graduate education in geography. *Journal of Geography in Higher Education,* 38, 481–499.
9. Gilbert, N. (Ed.). (2006). From postgraduate to social scientist: A guide to key skills. London: Sage.
10. Ocansey, R. T. A., Nyawornota, V. K., Adamba, C., Tay, D. A., Musah, K., Nyanyofio, O. C. N., & McCole, D.T. (2023). Promoting development of entrepreneurial skills of youth in Ghana through a structured sport intervention program. *Frontiers in Education, 11,* 1135084.
11. Gilligan, C. (1977). In a different voice: Women's conceptions of self and morality. *Harvard Educational Review,* 47, 481–503.
12. Gilligan, C. (1982). In a different voice: Psychological theory and women's development. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
13. McCole, D. T. (2005). The influence of psychological sense of community on summer camp employee retention. *Journal of Experiential Education,* 27(3), 328–332.
14. Cloke, P. (2002). Deliver us from evil? Prospects for living ethically and acting politically in human geography. *Progress in Human Geography,* 26, 587–604.
15. Cutchin, M. P. (2002). Ethics and geography: Continuity and emerging syntheses. *Progress in Human Geography,* 26, 656–664.
16. McDowell, L. (1992). Doing gender: Feminism, feminists and research methods in human geography. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers,* 17, 399–416.
17. McCole, D. T., Maleté, L., Tshepang, T., Ocansey, R., Mphela, T., Maro, C., Adamba, C., and Kazi, J. (2022). Can youth sport spark job creation in Africa? Using a sport-based intervention to nurture future entrepreneurs. *Gateways: International Journal of Community Research and Engagement,* 15(2).
18. Mitchell, D. (1995). There's no such thing as culture. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers,* 20, 102–116.
19. Noddings, N. (2003). Caring: A feminine approach to ethics and moral education (2nd ed.). Berkeley: University of California Press.
20. Maleté, L., McCole, D., Tshepang, T., Ocansey, R., Mphela, T., Maro, C., Adamba, C., and Kazi, J. (2019). Effects of a multiport-sport PYD intervention program on life skills and entrepreneurship in youth athletes. *Journal of Sport & Exercise Psychology,* 41(1), 77–88.
21. Oakes, J. M. (2002). Risks and wrongs in social science research: An evaluator's guide to IRB. *Evaluation Review,* 26, 443–479.
22. Gannon, W. L. (2014). Integrating research ethics with graduate education in geography. *Journal of Geography in Higher Education,* 38, 481–499.
23. McCole, D. T., Bobilya, A., Holman, T., Lindley, B. (2019). Benefits of summer camp: What do parents value? *Journal of Outdoor Recreation, Education and Leadership,* 11, 239–247.
24. Gilbert, N. (Ed.). (2006). From postgraduate to social scientist: A guide to key skills. London: Sage.
25. Gilligan, C. (1977). In a different voice: Women's conceptions of self and morality. *Harvard Educational Review,* 47, 481–503.
26. Gilligan, C. (1982). In a different voice: Psychological theory and women's development. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
27. Weiser SD, Palar K, Frongillo EA, Tsai AC, Kumbakumba E, Depee S, et al. Longitudinal assessment of associations between food insecurity, antiretroviral adherence and HIV treatment outcomes in rural Uganda. *AIDS.* 2014;28:115–120.
28. McCole, D. T., Everett, M., & Rivera, J. (2014). Integrating Facebook into the College Classroom: Student Perceptions and Recommendations for Faculty. *Journal of the National American Colleges & Teachers of Agriculture,* 58(3), 244–249.

29. Kenya National Bureau of Statistics and ICF Macro. *Kenya Demographic and Health Survey 2008–09*. Calverton, Maryland: Kenya National Bureau of Statistics and ICF Macro; 2010.
30. Cohen CR, Steinfeld RL, Weke E, Bukusi EA, Hatcher AM, Shiboski S, et al. Shamba Maisha: Pilot agricultural intervention for food security and HIV health outcomes in Kenya: design, methods, baseline results and process evaluation of a cluster-randomized controlled trial. *SpringerPlus*. 2015;4:122.
31. Lee, J. -H., McCole, D., Holecek, D. (2020). Exploring winery visitors in the emerging wine regions of the north central United States. *Sustainability*, 12(4), 1642.
32. Brandsma T. *Newsweek*. 2003. Waterworks: Kenyan Farmers Are Getting A Big Boost From A Simple Piece Of Equipment.
33. Swindale A, Bilinsky P. Development of a universally applicable household food insecurity measurement tool: process, current status, and outstanding issues. *J Nutr*. 2006;136:1449S–1452S.
34. McCole, D. T. & Holecek, D., & Popp, A. (2014). Understanding the travel behaviors of wine tourists in Michigan’s Leelanau Peninsula. *The Northern Grapes News*, 3(3), pp. 3-6.
35. Frongillo EA, Nanama S. Development and validation of an experience-based measure of household food insecurity within and across seasons in northern Burkina Faso. *J Nutr*. 2006;136:1409S–1419S.
36. Hoddinott J, Yohannes Y. *Dietary diversity as a household food security indicator*. Washington, D.C: Food and Nutrition Technical Assistance Project, Academy for Educational Development; 2002.
37. Grosh M, Glewwe P. Data Watch: the World Bank’s Living Standard Measurement Study household surveys. *Journal of Economic Perspectives*. 1998;12:187–196.
38. McCole, D.T. (2022) Influence of wine packaging on consumers’ decision making. In Dixit, S. K. (ed.), *The Routledge Handbook of Wine Tourism*, 248-261. London: Routledge.
39. James WP, Ferro-Luzzi A, Waterlow JC. Definition of chronic energy deficiency in adults. Report of a working party of the International Dietary Energy Consultative Group. *Eur J Clin Nutr*. 1988;42:969–981.