



# WHAT IS VULNERABILITY? INSIGHTS FROM INDIVIDUALS LIVING WITH MENTAL ILLNESS

Vulnerability is a central concept in research ethics and typically serves to identify individuals or groups whose participation in research prompts specific concerns or warrants special consideration. Theoretical discussions on vulnerability have contributed valuable insights to discussions of mental health research and care.

**Reference:** Corinne Lajoie, Justine Fortin & Eric Racine (2019) “Enriching our understanding of vulnerability through the experiences and perspectives of individuals living with mental illness”, *Accountability in Research*, 26:7, 439-459, DOI: 10.1080/08989621.2019.1679121

## WHO SHOULD READ THIS?

The article is intended for many people, including research participants who are identified as members of “vulnerable” groups, people who identify as living with mental illness, family members of these people, as well as researchers and clinicians working in the field of mental health.



## WHAT IS IT ABOUT?

Theoretical discussions on vulnerability have not been enriched thus far by stakeholder perspectives. This study aims to fill that gap. Our study explores how individuals living with mental health illness can help refine our understanding of the concept of vulnerability.

## WHAT DID THE RESEARCHERS DO?

The researchers conducted open-ended interviews with mental health research participants and patient-advocates. They then combined a pragmatist ethics framework and interpretive phenomenological analysis to analyze the content of these interviews.



## WHAT DID THE RESEARCHERS FIND?

Ultimately, most participants agreed that vulnerability is highly variable and can mean different things for different individuals, as well as identified issues that should be taken into consideration when researchers and ethics committees are using this concept.

## WHAT NOW?

This study illustrates the importance of making deep revisions to research ethics practices based on the insights gained from the experiences of mental health research participants and patient advocates.

