



HOW DO MENTAL HEALTH RESEARCHERS UNDERSTAND ‘VULNERABILITY’ IN RESEARCH?

Despite scholarly debates, the descriptive and normative meanings ascribed to the concept of vulnerability in research have remained disengaged from the perspective of users of the concept and those concerned by its use. In this study, we report a survey- and interview-based investigation of mental health researcher perspectives on vulnerability.

Reference: Lajoie, C., Poleksic, J., Bracken-Roche, D., MacDonald, M.E., Racine, E. (2020). The concept of vulnerability in mental health research: A mixed methods study on researcher perspectives. *Journal of Empirical Research on Human Research Ethics*. DOI: 10.1177/1556264620902657

WHO SHOULD READ THIS?

This article is intended for many people, including mental health researchers, research participants who are identified as members of “vulnerable” groups, research ethicists and policy-makers, as well as clinicians working in the field of mental health.



WHAT IS IT ABOUT?

This paper examines the perspectives of mental health researchers on the notion of vulnerability. This notion is widely used in the context of research ethics to signal participants who warrant more careful consideration in research contexts because of increased risks of harm.

WHAT DID THE RESEARCHERS DO?

The researchers conducted a survey and one-to-one interviews with mental health researchers to investigate their perspectives on the notion of vulnerability.



WHAT DID THE RESEARCHERS FIND?

While autonomy-based understandings of vulnerability were predominant in the literature, mental health researchers brought different perspectives to the table. They identified many important problems with the notion of vulnerability, such as the stigma associated with this label for research participants, the risk of overprotecting participants, and the lack of consensus over the use of this notion.

WHAT NOW?

Given the confusion about the application of this notion, the researchers recommended further training on its use and application.

