APPENDIX 1

Best practices for designing forms

When designing informed consent forms and questionnaires, a number of aspects should be taken into consideration prior to requesting an ethical review, as such aspects may have an impact on the research subjects’ understanding of the study and their attitude towards it. Below is a compilation of aspects that often emerge during ethical reviews.

- **Clarity and intelligibility**: In the information letter to the subjects and in the consent form, researchers should use language that is intelligible to the target group. For example, in a study involving children, care should be taken to describe the research in a manner that takes into account the child’s phase of development. Similarly, information letters and consent forms designed for laypersons should not contain field-specific terminology that non-professionals cannot be expected to understand.

- **Language**: Information letters and consent forms should be in the subjects' native language or in a language that they understand fluently. Within the resources of the study, it might be necessary to consider the translation of questionnaires to ensure the participation of linguistics minorities in the study. For example, it is recommended that in national surveys based on random samples the questionnaire be translated into Swedish. Care should also be taken to ensure that the language used in the forms is polished.

- **Gender- and status-neutral language**: Depending on the research topic and target group, researchers should consider whether their choice of words excludes any group of respondents. For example, when studying the diversity of families, it might be necessary to include other alternatives for the background variables of “male”, “female” / “father”, “mother”, such as “other” / “other parent or adult carer”.

- **Sensitive questions**: The cover letter should be carefully formulated to ensure that the recipient is well informed about and prepared for the researcher’s sensitive questions. Also, attention should be paid to the content of the background variables and questions on the form, the options provided for potential responses and the accuracy of measurements. For example, is the collection of details on some sensitive matter really necessary?

- **Collection of unnecessary data**: Questionnaires and consent forms should not contain questions asked merely to be on the safe side. The questions should be relevant and to the point.

- **Data protection**: Forms must be designed so that the respondents need not worry about the misuse of the information they submit. For example, identification markers printed on the form may raise suspicion. When asking for background data, it is advisable to mention that such data are collected for statistical purposes.

- **Respect for others**: When drafting information letters and forms, use polite, respectful language. Depending on the target group, the manner of addressing the recipients may well serve as a sign of respect for them.

Further information in Finnish about designing forms:

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