



## Explanation of Risk

**Risk** is a "function of the magnitude or seriousness of the harm, and the probability that it will occur" (TCPS 2, 2014, p. 21). Risks may cause a degree of emotional, psychological, social and/or physical discomfort. Real and potential risks need to be considered and anticipated by researcher(s) relative to the probability and magnitude of potential harm deemed no greater than what the subject(s) may potentially encounter in everyday life.

**Minimal Risk** research is that "in which the probability and magnitude of possible harms implied by participation in the research is no greater than those aspects of their everyday life that relate to the research" (TCPS 2, 2014, p. 22).

Evaluating and balancing the risks and potential benefits of research is an important part of the research ethics review, and as such, the level of scrutiny during a research ethics review will depend on the level of risk to participants that the research may impose (TCPS 2, 2014, Article 2.9).

### Considerations for Assessing Risk

- Will participating in this research cause participant(s) to be at risk physically?
- Will participant(s) be unduly vulnerable for any reason (s) (e.g., developmental disability; age; culture; social/economic status)?
- Will participant(s) feel any pressure/obligation to participate in this study, whereby they may not have volunteered under other circumstances (e.g., inmates; adult learners registered in programs; workplace employees; agencies receiving funding or other forms of support from BVC)?
- Do risks flow from confidentiality (e.g., might the information be of interest to a law enforcement agency)?
- Will participant(s) suffer undue psychological stress?
- Might individuals or groups be stigmatized by participating in the study?
- Might individuals' or groups' reputation be at risk by participating in this study?
- Might individuals or groups be at risk with regards to political and/or immigration status by participating in this study?

### Categories

**No risk:** None of the above apply, although it is very unlikely that some components of this research will not involve at least minimal risk if human participants are involved.

**Minimal risk:** Risk that would normally be experienced and sustained in everyday life.

**More than Minimal Risk:** Risk that would be experienced above and beyond that experienced and sustained in everyday life.

**Note:** Most applied research projects involving human participants will probably have some minimal risk associated with it.

**If More than Minimal Risk:**

- 1) What precautions have been taken to minimize risk to those participating in this study?
- 2) Are the risks reasonable in relation to the benefits?
- 3) Have you described supports available for 'more than minimal' risk?
- 4) The researcher is bound to advise anyone involved in this research, of the risk involved AND of the appropriate support services available AND if there will be any costs incurred by accessing these support services, as a result of having participated in this research.

If the study puts participants at more than minimal risk, it automatically needs a Full Ethics Review. If the study is of only minimal risk, it can be referred to an Expedited Review.

**For more information on risks, please see:**

- TCPS 2 (2014):  
[http://www.pre.ethics.gc.ca/pdf/eng/tcps2-2014/TCPS\\_2\\_FINAL\\_Web.pdf](http://www.pre.ethics.gc.ca/pdf/eng/tcps2-2014/TCPS_2_FINAL_Web.pdf)