



Australian Government

Department of Defence

Department of Veterans' Affairs

PEOPLE IN DEPENDENT OR UNEQUAL RELATIONSHIPS

What is a dependent of unequal relationship?

A dependent or unequal relationship can exist where there is a pre-existing relationship between participants and researchers or between participants and others involved in facilitating research.

Examples of dependent or unequal relationships

The '[National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research](#)' (National Statement) Chapter 4.3 provides the following examples of people who may fall into this category:

- Carers and people with chronic conditions or disabilities, including long term hospital patients, or people in residential care or supported accommodation
- Health care professionals and their patients or clients
- Teachers and their students
- Prison authorities and prisoners
- Governmental authorities and refugees
- Employees or supervisors and their employers (including members of the Police and Defence Forces)
- Service providers (government or private) and especially vulnerable communities to whom they service.

Considerations

For research that falls under this category, consideration should be given to ensuring that:

- The process for obtaining consent is free from coercion. Consideration may need to be given to having an independent person involved in the consent process.
- Risk mitigation measures are in place to minimise the impact of dependencies where the participants are in a relationship of dependence with the researcher or those involved in facilitating the research. This should include identifying the nature of the relationship or a relationship that is likely to rise during the research between participants, the researchers and/or those facilitating research.
- For research proposals that include Defence members as part of the research cohort, consideration should be given to the additional potential for perceived coercion, and other issues that may arise from the command structure of the Australian Defence Force.

Additional reading

People within the categories of relationship described in this Fact Sheet have the potential to be over researched. Further guidance is available in the National Statement Chapter 4.3, the 'Departments of Defence and Veterans' Affairs Human Research Ethics Committee (DDVA HREC) Researcher and Administrative Guidelines' and the Project Description template.

The 'DDVA HREC Researcher and Administrative Guidelines' and Fact Sheets are available on the [DDVA HREC website](#).