

CORRECTIVE SERVICES ETHICS COMMITTEE

POSITION PAPER No. 1



ISSUE: INCENTIVES TO RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

Guiding principle:

As a general principle, the Corrective Services Ethics Committee does not support the offer of incentives (such as financial payment) to any individuals as inducement to participate in a research study.

This principle holds for any potential research participants—regardless of whether the research candidate is an inmate, offender or staff member.

The Corrective Services Ethics Committee will consider any proposal for incentives on their merits. For example, those circumstances where an inmate loses wages for reason of participating in the project.

Background:

In the past, a diverse range of inducements or incentives have been offered to individuals in the correctional system in order to entice them to participate in a research study. For inmates, this financial payment has also been considered a reimbursement for the inmate's lost wages from prison employment (due to the inmate participating in the research study).

These strategies have included:

- (i) financial payments to inmates, where the money has been directly deposited into the inmate's "buy-up" account
- (ii) a raffle ticket into a prize draw (where the prizes have exceeded \$200 in value, e.g. a television set) and
- (iii) gift vouchers to department stores (for staff members).

Position:

Researchers from various disciplines (e.g. medicine, social sciences, etc.) consider the offer of incentives as a valuable research tool towards encouraging a high participation or response rate from potential research candidates.

The appropriateness of this strategy in the correctional system is contentious given that inmates/offenders are vulnerable and are located in an environment of 'powerlessness'. Inadvertent coercion of the inmate to participate is possible. In particular, the inmate may feel a tacit obligation to answer all questions (with no option available to refuse any questions) given the 'research contract' which exists between the researcher and the inmate (based upon the promise of an incentive). On this basis, the inmate may feel the incentive will be withdrawn if they do not fully co-operate with the researcher.

Incentives are also contentious when used as inducements for inmates to participate in research studies involving very invasive medical procedures. The appropriateness of financial rewards for certain studies, such as research into drug use in prison, is also brought into question given the potential for the incentive (in whatever format it is provided) to be used in exchange for other gaol-based currency.

Lastly, a 'false economy' may be generated where the individual may expect that a financial inducement, of comparable value to their previous research experiences, will be offered by all agencies (whether government or non-government agencies) whenever they are asked to participate in a research or information gathering exercise. This jeopardises work undertaken by some agencies where such financial inducements cannot be accommodated within their budget allocation.