COMPENSATION OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

Research is not possible without the participants who consent to participate in studies. The ethical principle of respect is demonstrated by acknowledging the centrality of participants to the research endeavour and rather than participants potentially being viewed as a means to an end.

Researchers should ensure fairness in ensuring that (a) direct costs to participants are fully reimbursed; and (b) participants' time, inconvenience and effort (TIE) are respectfully valued.

Compensation of participants must be age appropriate.

1 TIME

• Research participants should be adequately compensated for their time

Researchers should estimate the amount of time participants will spend engaged in research activities for each research visit.

• Participants should be compensated whether or not they are employed

Where participants are not formally employed, it could be considered that participation may compete with efforts to find other similar economic opportunities and that participants forgo such opportunities while engaged in the research study.

• Payment should be at unskilled labour rates

The minimum wage is normally used as a guideline for compensation of research participants. Current (2023) minimum wages in South Africa for unskilled labour starts from approximately R25.42 per hour. However, this needs to be nuanced in terms of the level of participation, discomfort, and inconvenience or time required.

2 INCONVENIENCE

• Participants should be compensated for inconvenience

- In some studies, participants will be required to undergo certain procedures that may cause not only inconvenience but physical discomfort. Consideration should be given to compensating participants for such inconvenience, over and above time payments.

- Researchers should estimate the amount of time participants will spend engaged in research activities for each research visit.

• The compensation amount should reasonably reflect the extent of inconvenience or discomfort

The inconvenience attached to responding to a survey questionnaire is considerably lower than a blood draw or more invasive research procedures, or research procedures where daily logs need to be kept or where multiple study visits are required.

• Do I compensate both child and parent/caregiver?

Where children participate in studies and need to be accompanied by a parent/caregiver/responsible adult, both parties should be appropriately compensated.

3 EXPENSES

• Research participants should be reimbursed for their expenses

- Direct costs incurred by participants while participating in the research (e.g., data costs to access study app, travel to site, parking) must be reimbursed.

• Virtual or telephonic data collection

Where participants will incur data or airtime costs (as in the case of online interviews) provision should be made for covering these expenses.

• When in doubt, consult with community representatives

The costs of participation could be established in consultation with community representatives who may be familiar with expenses for, for example, travel, parking, meals or childcare.

• Calculating travel reimbursements

The University has prescribed rates for travel by car, or the cost of public transport should be used to calculate fair reimbursement of actual costs incurred.

KEY PRINCIPLES FOR PARTICIPANT COMPENSATION

- Neither the amount nor method of compensation should present the potential for undue influence (especially in research with vulnerable populations) or provide a perverse incentive for participants to underestimate risks associated with the research.

- Compensation for participants must be prorated and not contingent on completion of the study by the participant.

- Where in kind compensation is considered (e.g., gift vouchers, refreshments etc.) researchers should reflect on the appropriateness of the compensation type for the participant population and any ethical dilemmas such compensation may evoke.

- Where the budget is not available for true compensation, tokens of appreciation, such as gift vouchers or gifts, may be more appropriate.

Stellenbosch
UNIVERSITY
IYUNIVESITHI
UNIVERSITEIT

forward together
sonke siya phambili
saam vorentoe

HEALTH RESEARCH ETHICS
VISIT THE WEBSITE: www.sun.ac.za/healthresearchethics