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Beyond standard procedure : The ethics of educational research with adolescent students experiencing mental health problems.

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Background

This work forms part of a PhD research project entitled, '*How do we manage and support students experiencing mental health issues in further education?*'. In this study I am investigating the different forms of mental health issues experienced by students, aged 16-19 from the student perspective, and how their mental health status and experiences has impacted on their life and learning careers. This study also seeks to assess the levels of college staff knowledge about student mental health and establish how staff, currently support students with mental health issues. In the wider context, I am also concerned with if and how a large further education institution utilises internal and external services in supporting such students.

Research Questions

This paper seeks to explore the ethical issues arising when engaging adolescent students, from within a large further education institution who have experienced mental health issues, in a research project. This paper creates an opportunity for me as a researcher to consider the numerous ethical dilemmas arising from such a study, beyond what would normally be considered 'standard' ethical issues and procedures, including methods of data collection, accessibility, duty of care, participant vulnerability and legitimacy

Methods

In the early stages of my research, it became apparent that addressing and overcoming the ethical issues when carrying out a study of this nature would prove to be an ongoing, embedded thread throughout the duration of the study and not merely a hurdle or set of hurdles to overcome solely isolated to the planning stage of the study. Following the initial research proposal submission and University Ethics Committee Application process (BERA, 2004), it became increasingly evident that the nature of this study was more complex than originally thought. Therefore by identifying the 'standard' ethical issues faced by the researcher in relation to this study but also the more challenging aspects of managing such a project, including recognising and meeting the expectations of the adolescent participants in an ethically correct and morally acceptable manner.