**Milgram Activities**

**Activity 1 – Procedures**

**Aim: To consolidate students’ knowledge of the procedures of Milgram’s study and to encourage co-operative working amongst students.**

Cut up the following table of procedures and place pieces in envelopes. Give each pair of students an envelope and ask them to sort the procedures into the right order. If you prefer, you could omit words and make this into a cloze activity.

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| Milgram recruited 40 male participants by advertising for volunteers to take part in a study of memory and learning, to take place at Yale University psychology department. |
| Everyone was paid $4.50 and told that they would receive this even if they quit during the study. |
| When they arrived, they were met by the experimenter wearing a grey lab coat. |
| They were introduced to Mr. Wallace (47 year old accountant), who was a confederate pretending to be another participant. |
| The experimenter told the naive participant and Mr. Wallace that the experiment was about the effects of punishment on learning. |
| One of them would be the ‘teacher’ and the other would be the ‘learner’. Things were rigged in such a way that Mr. Wallace was always the learner and the participant the teacher. |
| The experimenter explained that the punishment was to take the form of electric shocks. All three then went into an adjoining room. There, the experimenter strapped Mr. Wallace into a chair with his arms attached to electrodes. |
| Mr. Wallace was asked whether he had any medical conditions and announced that he had a heart problem. |
| The teacher was to deliver the shocks via a shock generator. This was situated in an adjacent room. The generator had a number of switches. Each switch was clearly marked with a voltage level (starting at 15 volts) and a verbal description (‘slight shock’ up to ‘Danger-Severe shock’) each switch gave shock 15 volts higher than the one before. The last switch was 450 volts. (***In reality, no real shocks were delivered)*** |
| The teacher was instructed to deliver a shock each time Mr. Wallace made a mistake on a paired- associate word task. Mr. Wallace indicated his answer by switching on one of four lights located above the shock generator. With each successive mistake, the teacher had to give the next highest shock. The participant was given a sample shock of 45 volts to demonstrate that the generator was indeed capable of delivering a dose of electricity. (This came from a hidden battery) |
| Mr. Wallace, the ‘learner’, gave mainly wrong answers and received his (fake) shocks in silence until they reached 300 volts (‘very strong shock’). At 300 volts, Mr. Wallace kicked against the wall that joined the two rooms, and then fell silent. He cried out in pain, complained that his heart was bothering him and then eventually gave no responses. |
| If the ‘teacher’ asked to stop, the experimenter had a standardized set of ‘prods’ to repeat, these were:   1. Please continue 2. The experiment requires you to continue. 3. It is absolutely essential that you continue 4. You have no choice, you must go on. |
| Only if the participant refused to continue after the 4th and final prod was the experiment stopped. |

When they have completed this task, give them the following questions on the procedures.

**Questions about the procedures:**

1. **How did Milgram recruit his sample? Is this representative?**
2. **Where was the experiment conducted? Is this important?**
3. **What did he tell the participants he was testing teaching and learning? Why deceive them?**

**Activity 2 – Ethics**

**Aim: To develop students’ skills of critical thinking, in particular about ethical issues.**

Ask students to read through the following ethical guidelines answer the questions and then fill in the table.

**ETHICS**

**ETHICS are standards of conduct** that distinguish between right and wrong, good and bad, justices and injustice.

The primary aim of psychology must be to improve the quality of human life and to do this it is necessary to carry out research with human participants. Research psychologists have a duty to respect the rights and dignity of all participants.

This means that they must follow certain **moral principles and rules of conduct**, which are designed to protect both participants and the reputation of psychology. The professional organisation that governs psychology in Britain is the **British Psychological Society (BPS).** They have produced a list of **ethical guidelines** that all practising psychologists must follow.

**An ethical issue** **is any situation that repeatedly gives rise to an ethical dilemma.** For example, whether or not to deceive a research participant in a psychological study in order to gain more worthwhile findings is an ethical issue because it creates an ethical dilemma for the researcher i.e. What should they do? One of the main reasons organisations like the BPS have developed ethical guidelines is that it removes the need for researchers to resolve these dilemmas on their own.

**The BPS ethical guidelines**

# Informed consent

Participants must give their consent to take part in research and this consent must be ‘informed’. **This means that information must be made available on which to base a decision to participate or not.** Participants should be told what they are letting themselves in for. Only then are they in a position to give informed consent.

**To study participants without consent would be ethically acceptable so long as what happens to the participants could just as likely happen to them in everyday life.** E.g. observation in naturalistic setting such as bus queues. People in bus queues may be observed by anyone. In the case of young people under 16, consent should also be obtained from their parents.

A major problem with informed consent is the possibility that the researcher will ‘give the game away’ and thus influence participants’ behaviour. As a result, a case can be made for withholding information.

**Deception**

Deception means that information is withheld from participants; they are misled about the purpose of the study and what will happen during it. According to the BPS guideline ***‘Intentional deception of the participants should be avoided whenever possible’.*** In particular deception is unacceptable if it leads to ‘***discomfort anger or objections from the participants’ when the deception is revealed after the research has been complete’.***

But, the BPS accepts that **sometimes deception is unavoidable**. In such cases the researcher must:

* 1. Make sure that alternative procedures that ovoid deception are not available
  2. Consult with colleagues about how participants might be affected by the deception
  3. Reveal the deception to the participants immediately after the research has been completed.

# Protection from harm

The BPS ethical guideline states that ‘***Investigators have a primary responsibility to protect participants from physical and mental harm during the investigation’.***

But, no investigation is risk free; the guiding principle is that **risks should be no greater than the risks participants are exposed to in their normal lifestyles.** Participants should be encouraged to contact the investigator after the research if they have any worries or concerns. The investigator has a responsibility to detect and remove any consequences of the research.

# Confidentiality

Protection from harm involves confidentiality. Participants may be asked personal questions. **They must be told that there is no need to answer these questions and, if they do that their answers will be treated in confidence.** That is, they should remain anonymous. Invasion of privacy can result in unease or distress. The **BPS states that unless people have given their consent, they should only be observed in situations where they would expect to be observed by strangers.** This limits observational research to public places.

# Withdrawal

Participants should have the right to withdraw from an investigation at any time. This is true even if they are being paid to take part. They should be told this at the start of the research. No attempt should be made to encourage or persuade them to remain.

# Debriefing

Debriefing involves **telling it all after the investigation is complete**. Researchers should discuss the aims of the research with the participants, making sure they understand how they have contributed to meeting those aims. **Any deception is disclosed, explained and justified**. Attempts are made to undo any negative effects of the research. Codes of conduct for research state that all participants have a right to a debriefing session after the investigation has been completed. But, participants may be reluctant to express negative feelings during debriefing due to embarrassment or not wanting to upset the researcher.

**Questions on Milgram’s ethics**

**Where did deception occur in Milgram’s experiment?**

**Did the participants have the right to withdraw at any stage of the process?**

**Did the participants give their informed consent?**

**Did Milgram protect his participants from physical and psychology harm?**

**Can Milgram’s study be justified because he gave participants an excellent debriefing?**

**Did the ends justify the means?**

Fill in the following table with details of the ethical criticism and the researcher’s defence.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Ethical Issue** | **Criticism** | **Milgram’s defence** |
| **Deception** |  |  |
| **Informed Consent** |  |  |
| **Protection from Harm** |  |  |
| **Right to withdraw** |  |  |
| **Debrief** |  |  |

**Activity 3 – Validity**

**Aim: To develop students’ skills of critical thinking, in particular about validity.**

Class notes: - Ask students to read through the following notes, answering questions where required.

#### Criticisms of Milgram’s Study

Milgram’ study has been widely criticised for a number of reasons.

In any study of behaviour we hold the theoretical idea that there is a real way that people behave and psychologists are trying to demonstrate /uncover what this is. But they may not succeed because there is something wrong **within** the experiment **or** because in some way we are **unable to generalise** from this experiment to the rest of the world.

1. **INTERNAL VALIDITY (aka ‘experimental’ validity).**

An experiment has internal validity if it measures what it is intended to measure. Milgram’s experiment was designed to measure obedience to authority.

**Orne and Holland** point out that the participant knows that people in psychology experiments don’t come to harm, in the same way that anyone volunteering to take part in a magician’s act involving a guillotine knows that no harm will come to him or anyone else. Therefore a participant will obey an experimenter’s orders whereas he would not obey the same orders given by someone else. This means that Milgram’s study did not investigate what it intended i.e. it lacked internal validity.

**Did Milgram’s participants really believe that they were inflicting painful electric shock?** Orne and Holland also claim that Milgram’s participants knew the shocks were not real. They must have otherwise wondered why such severe shocks were used in such a relatively trivial learning experiment. Participants may have defined the situation as ‘artificial’ and thus played along to please the experimenter and to earn their fees. Thus Orne and Holland claim that Milgram’s participants may have been affected by demand characteristics. If the participants believe that the shocks are not real, then they will look for cues about how to behave.

Milgram rejects this criticism.

**What evidence from his findings are there to back him up not his critics?**

In addition, a questionnaire given to participants a year after the experiment asked if they believed they were really inflicting painful shocks.

* + 56.1% fully believed
  + 24% had some doubts but believed
  + 11.4% had doubts but thought probably not
  + Only 2.4% were certain the shocks were not real.

**What do these findings show?**

1. **EXTERNAL (ECOLOGICAL) VALIDITY**

External validity refers to the extent to which the results can be generalised to other settings, other people and other times. **Can Milgram’s findings be generalised to other settings outside the laboratory and outside the USA? What about other times apart form the 1960s? Other people?**

##### The lab setting

**What was unrealistic about this setting?**

These arguments support the criticism that Milgram’s experiment **lacks ecological validity- his findings cannot be related to other settings. Ecological validity is one aspect of external validity**

In response to this criticism, Milgram states that the **relationship between experimenter and participant is little different from the relationship between any authority figure and those subject to their authority**. Since the relationships are essentially the same, it is possible to generalise from the lab to the wider society.

**What do you think of this?**

Other elements of external validity are:

##### People, settings and time

Milgram repeated his first experiment with female participants and found the same percentage willing to continue to 450 volts. **This suggests that his findings can be generalised to both men and women.**

His experiment has been conducted in a number of countries (see detailed notes on culture and obedience). Complete obedience varied from 90% in Spain, 50% in the UK to 16% for Australian females. So, it would appear that Milgram’s findings are generally supported to some extent by other studies but that **cultural variations do exist** (experimental design might also have varied and affected these findings)

Because of changing ethical standards, researchers are no longer able to conduct this type of research. So**, we do not know whether Milgram’s findings can be generalised to other time periods**.

Ask students to fill in the following summary table: -

Fill in the following table to summarise the Validity of Milgram’s research.

**ECOLOGICAL VALIDITY**- being able to generalise the findings of a study beyond the particular laboratory setting in which they were collected. Are the findings true to life? Also called ‘mundane realism’.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Arguments for** | **Arguments Against** |
| **Ecological Validity**  **(External Validity)** |  |  |

**EXPERIMENTAL VALIDITY-** the belief of participants in an experiment that the experimental situation is real. E.g. did the participants begin to believe that they really were in prison? Also called experimental realism.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Arguments for** | **Arguments Against** |
| **Experimental Validity**  **(Internal Validity)** |  |  |