

Abstract

In late 2004, the Journal of Traumatic Stress published a special section about the ethics of disaster research, addressing ethical issues related to conducting research after disasters and terrorist attacks, and based on a meeting organised by The New York Academy of Medicine and the US National Institute of Mental Health.¹ Four areas of critical importance to development, evaluation, and conduct of research protocols after a disaster were identified: decisional capacity of potential participants, vulnerability of research participants, risks and benefits of research participation, and informed consent.² The participants at the meeting were mental health professionals, trauma researchers, public-health officials, ethicists, representatives of institutional review boards, as well as family members and emergency personnel from the Oklahoma City and World Trade Center attacks. The attendees agreed that research after a disaster is important and can be done ethically. However, they felt that specific research proposals should be scrutinised by a single body to assess disaster-related research, as was the case after the Oklahoma City bombing, when a good deal of research was reviewed centrally and approved by a special process put in place with the approval of the state Governor.² The attendees at the meeting recommended 12 points as guidance for research after a disaster (panel).