

ETHICAL DILEMMAS IN STATISTICS

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This is a Panel Session that will focus initially on some specific ethical dilemmas. Selected panellists will be asked what they would do if they were faced with these dilemmas. Audience participation will also be encouraged. The dilemmas to be considered are:

1. It is not uncommon for senior staff in an official statistical agency to come under pressure from Ministers to make changes in methodology often not for sound statistical reasons. How should you respond if you are under pressure from someone of influence to change the methodology for statistical series?
2. Many of us are responsible for Statistical analysis which is published in one form or another. How should you react if the statistical analysis you have been working on, or are responsible for, is accidentally or deliberately misused to provide misleading results? What if this misrepresentation occurs in the public media?
3. We are often dependent on external sources for funding including research grants. What should you do if the 'funder' insists on using what you believe is a non-optimal methodology? Furthermore, how do you react if a funder wishes to have the power of veto on the release of statistical analyses arising from the work they funded? These type of conflict of interests situations often arise when reliant on external funding. How do you best manage those conflicts?
4. What protocols should you follow if there is potential harm to the participants in a statistical study (eg a clinical trial or a survey on a sensitive topic)?
5. You are asked to predict the probability of a natural disaster. Although the probability of the disaster is relatively small, the consequences are disastrous. Do you exaggerate the truth or are there other means of conveying the information so that there is sufficient awareness?
6. A more senior researcher, who may have control over promotion and advancement, suggests you do something that is questionable. How should you react?

The audience will also be given an opportunity to raise their own dilemmas with the panellists.