

## **Perspectives on Vulnerability**

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# My Experience

My career has involved working with

- Persons or students with disabilities
- Persons or students who are new to Canada or have English as another language

Over the years I have observed changes in the challenges these individuals face. I continue to gain new perspectives, daily.

# Defining Vulnerability

- Vulnerability can be defined as the diminished capacity of an individual or group to anticipate, cope with, resist and recover from the impact of a natural or man-made hazard.
- The concept is relative and dynamic.

*International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies <http://www.ifrc.org/en/>*

# Defining Vulnerability

- Vulnerability is the degree to which a population, individual or organization is unable to anticipate, cope with, resist and recover from the impacts of disasters.

*Environmental health in emergencies and disasters: a practical guide. (WHO, 2002)*

*[http://www.who.int/environmental\\_health\\_emergencies/vulnerable\\_groups/en/](http://www.who.int/environmental_health_emergencies/vulnerable_groups/en/)*

# Populations Often Considered Vulnerable

- Adults and children living in poverty
- Children
- Seniors
- Persons with disabilities
- Persons in care
- Persons with medical conditions

# **An Expanded List of Vulnerable Populations**

- Educationally disadvantaged persons
- Employees
- Students
- Persons who have or are experiencing trauma, post-trauma
- LBGTQ persons

# Considerations in Conducting Research

IRB (Institutional Research Board) processes typically consider the following when reviewing research plans for research involving vulnerable participants:

When collecting data from vulnerable persons individually or in groups we typically consider:

# Considerations in Conducting Research (cont.)

## Strategic issues

- inclusion and exclusion criteria, informed consent, coercion and undue influence; and confidentiality of data

- **Group characteristics**

- economic, social, physical, and environmental conditions

- **Participant selection** to prevent over-selection or exclusion of certain participants



# Considerations in Conducting Research (cont.)

**Application** of state or local laws

- **Procedures** for assessing and ensuring participants' capacity, understanding, and informed consent or assent
- Need for **additional safeguards** to protect potentially vulnerable populations

# Other Considerations

- Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (2014)

## Chapter 9

- Research involving the First Nations, Inuit and Métis Peoples of Canada
- “...establishing an ethical space for dialogue on common interests and points of difference between researchers and Aboriginal communities engaged in research.”

# TRC Chapter 9

- Requirement of community engagement includes defining nature and extent
- Respect for First Nations, Inuit and Métis Governing Authorities
- Recognizing diverse interests within communities
- Respect for community customs and codes of practice



**So.... why do we still struggle with collecting data from vulnerable individuals and groups?**

# We can become Desensitized

Desensitize (*verb*)

- to cause (someone or something) to react less to or be less affected by something :  
to cause (someone or something) to be less sensitive

*<http://www.learnersdictionary.com/definition/desensitize>*

# Some common postsecondary situations

- Junior student working with a senior student
- Student and professor
- Graduate student and Supervisor

# **You are well intentioned**

The international graduate student you supervise and is the lead graduate student in your laboratory is evidencing concerning behaviour. You suspect the student is struggling with depression. You suggest that the student make an appointment at Counselling and Clinical Services, located on campus.

# We can rely on assumptions

Assumption (*noun*)

- something that is believed to be true or probably true but that is not known to be true : something that is assumed

*<http://www.learnersdictionary.com/definition/assumption>*



# **Your thoughts....**

1. Provide a profile of students who sit at the back of a classroom.
2. Provide a profile of students who sit at the front of a classroom.

# What about...

- Students are in the classroom with their laptops open during your lecture.
- They are typing.
- Some are smiling while others look serious. What are they doing?

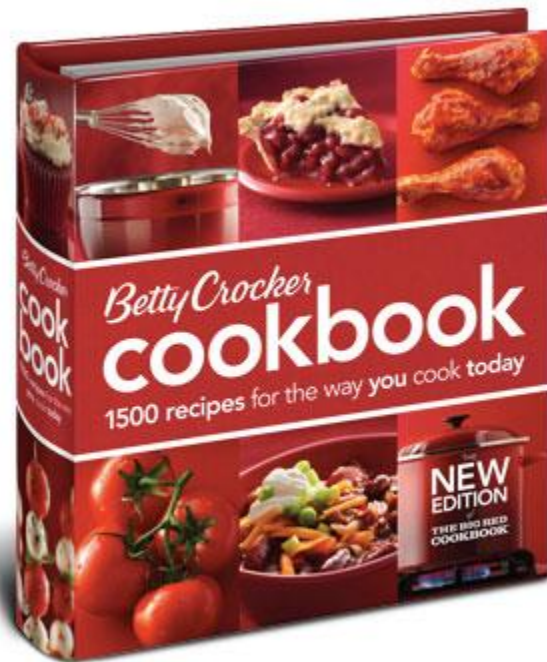
**We ALL may be vulnerable at  
some point**



# **Think of a time when you felt vulnerable.....**

- What led to this reaction?
- What this a typical or atypical reaction?
- How did you address this reaction?

**When working with vulnerable populations we may seek a ‘cookbook’**



# Primary Considerations

- Real estate = location
- Communication = audience
- Interacting with persons and their data = context

# Remember

- Context is
  - Complex
  - Changing
  - Personal

# **We also need to remember**

These are individuals and they behave as such

- We need to consider cultural context
- We need to consider the environment
- We need to consider the impact of the intervention (gathering data)
- We need to consider community or group norms



# Cultural Competence

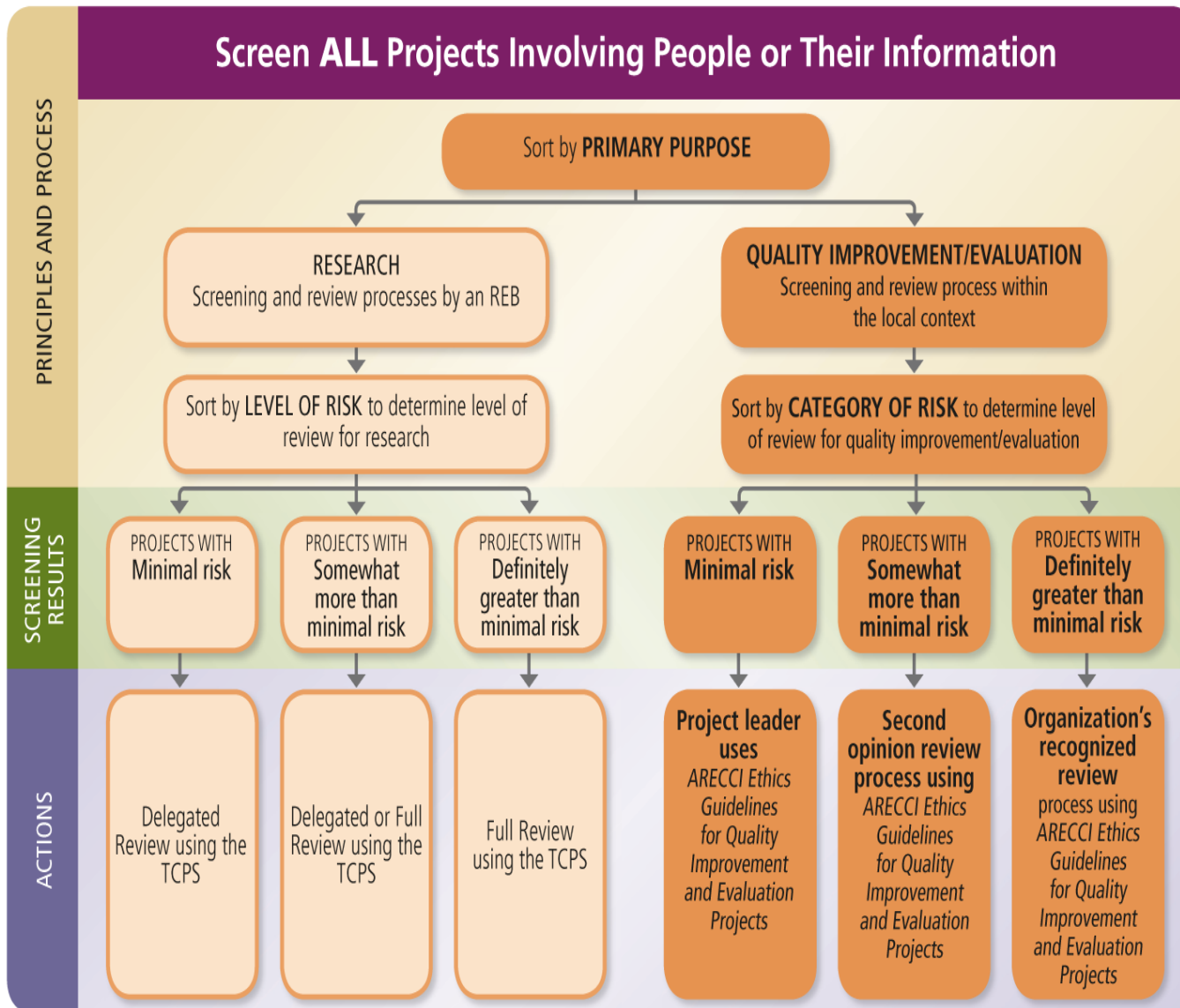
At the most basic level cultural competence requires:

- cultural knowledge and awareness
- strong communication skills
- tolerance for ambiguity

# Key Ethical Principles

- Ethical issues need to be considered in all knowledge-generating projects
- The key ethical principles—and the implications that flow from them—have been incorporated in the framework and tools
- Implementing the framework and using the ARECCI tools can help due diligence in applying ethical principles in your projects

## Screen ALL Projects Involving People or Their Information



# No ethics review conducted

- Agency provided informed consent document
- Evaluation of program required by funder
- Interviews of program participants
- Interpreters were available
- Interviews were held at program site

# Situation that arose

- Female participant was interviewed
- The family was experiencing economic stress since husband had lost job
- Appeared to be some issues about abusive behaviours by spouse
- Participant was responding oddly to interpreter (male)
- She finally yelled, “Tell MY story!”

# REB plus ARECCI review by site

- National study (REB review conducted)
- Interviews and focus groups with students with a specific disability
- Disability that is currently of high interest
- Timing was driven by funding agency requirement

# Concerns identified and mitigated

- On-line survey was to be completed in one sitting – this was amended
- Focus groups would likely be creative disruptive dynamic due to nature of disability – changed to interviews
- Initial data collection time was during academically stressful period – able to postpone a few weeks