



OPINION n°2010-21

# « ETHICS OF RESEARCH IN SOCIAL EXPERIMENT »

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## I. SUMMARY

If the ethics of experimentation on the human body is incorporated into law since the Act of July 29, 1994, ethical issues raised by experimentation on human behaviour remain unsettled from a legal point of view, even though there is a growing body of research in social sciences using such methods. The CNRS Ethics Committee (COMETS) has already commented on the science of human behaviour in a statement issued on February 23, 2007, focusing on the risk faced by persons subject to. This review focuses on another aspect of the experiment on people, called the «social experiment», financed by public funds to support and give a basis to the reforms. In these experiments, the researcher is placed in the awkward position of being associated with the political decision-maker, or even being presented as a co-author. The issue takes a sharp turn when the funding for experimental programmes is competing with other forms of research. In this context, the ethical impact not only deals with the conditions in which the research is conducted, but also affects researchers in their dealings with supporters of the programmes, who are at the same time the ultimate decision makers in the realm of social policy.

Without commenting on the political relevance of the use of experimental evaluations, and without interfering with the choice scholars can make to join a particular research programme, the COMETS proposes four ethical recommendations. The aim is to avoid confusion about the nature of researchers interventions in these programmes, to support the theoretical analysis of experimental research, and to preserve the diversity of approaches used in social issues.

