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Ethical Concerns of Paying Cash to Vulnerable Participants: The Qualitative Researchers' Views

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Abstract

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Keywords

Cash Payment, Qualitative Social Research, In-depth interviews, Vulnerable Participants, Research Ethics

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Ethical Concerns of Paying Cash to Vulnerable Participants: The Qualitative Researchers' Views

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The aim of the paper is to discuss the ethical issues related to financial payments. The article compares the concerns and experiences of researchers who did not pay the participants with the concerns and experiences of researchers who paid the participants. It draws on in-depth interviews with Polish social researchers who conducted qualitative research with vulnerable participants. The paper indicates that researchers who did not pay the participants believed that financial payment reduces the researcher's relationship with informants to an economic transaction. For this reason, they had more ethical concerns about paying than researchers who did pay. My interviewees suggest that in some cases financial payment may cause discomfort to the researcher or informants, compromise the anonymity of participants, and cause the additional risk of harm. By analysing various concerns related to financial payment, the article may contribute to raising researchers' awareness of possible risks related to cash payment and, as a consequence, can help them to make their own informed decisions, especially as there are few guidelines in this area. Keywords: Cash Payment, Qualitative Social Research, In-depth interviews, Vulnerable Participants, Research Ethics

Introduction

There has been discussion in qualitative research about the consequences of using monetary payment to research participants. One of the issues raised is the ethical concerns related to this practice (Head, 2009; Tyldum, 2012; Vanderstaay, 2005; Zavisca, 2007), especially in research involving vulnerable participants due to their susceptibility to harm by people with more power (Crow et al., 2006). However, there is a lack of research with social researchers about their opinions and experiences related to paying cash to research participants. Studies with researchers allow one to gather a broad range of opinions and experiences. In addition, the existing literature discusses the attitudes of paying cash to the participants mainly on the basis of individual opinions and experiences of researchers from English-speaking countries. I argue that it is necessary to extend the discussion on ethical issues related to the financial payment and include the experiences and opinions of researchers from beyond English-speaking countries since various cultural and systemic factors may influence the views and ethical choices of researchers. To address this gap, this paper analyses some ethical concerns of Polish social qualitative researchers.

I analyse opinions and beliefs as well as real experiences of Polish researchers who have conducted qualitative research with vulnerable participants. I compare the concerns and experiences of researchers who did not pay the participants for taking part in the research (I call them non-paying researchers – NPRs) with the concerns and experiences of researchers who paid the participants (paying researchers – PRs). I begin with a brief literature review and followed by description of my methodology. Then, I analyse two ethical concerns: commercialisation of the researcher-participant relationship and causing discomfort of research

participants. Although these concerns are ethically very important, they are rarely discussed in the literature. After this analysis, I discuss the concerns of researchers regarding undue influence on informed consent. Interestingly, these concerns were mainly expressed by PRs but not by NPRs. I also examine the fear of some of my interviewees that cash payment may force participants to respond and cause the additional risk of harm. Finally, I discuss the concerns expressed by both PRs and NPRs that cash payment may compromise the anonymity of participants.

Literature Review

Qualitative researchers may use monetary payment as inducement, compensation, or reimbursement (e.g., for travel costs). Some studies suggest that it is an effective strategy to encourage participation in qualitative research (Bell & Salmon, 2011; Kelly et al., 2017). However, cash payment as an incentive for people with altruistic motivation is unnecessary and may even have the opposite effect, that is, to discourage participation in research (Clark, 2010, p. 410; Zutlevics, 2016). The reason for using financial payment is not only increasing recruitment, but also the conviction that research participants should receive something in return for their time, expertise, and effort. In other words, money for research participation as compensation or reimbursement can be a form of maximizing potential benefits and minimizing risks of research participation. In the literature on paying vulnerable participants, there are also voices that the researcher is in a socially and economically privileged position in relation to the participants (Collins et al., 2017; Morrow, 2013; Vanderstaay, 2005). Therefore, as Thompson (1996), notes, ‘payment can be one way of recognizing and beginning to equalize such power relations’ (p. 2). However, this practice is not without ethical controversy (Head, 2009; Vanderstaay, 2005), especially in research involving vulnerable participants. There are two main ethical concerns related to financial payment, which are discussed in qualitative and medical research: undue influence on voluntary consent (Head, 2009; Tyldum, 2012; Zavisca, 2007) and the risk that some vulnerable participants, particularly addicts, misuse cash payment (Fry et al., 2006; Seddon, 2005).

The first concern relates to fear that potential participants offered cash payment will agree to take part in the research, although they are not willing to do so (American Sociological Association, 2018, p. 15; Head, 2009). This possibility is particularly problematic in the context of research involving vulnerable people who may not be able to resist the financial incentive to participate in the research because of a difficult economic situation or need for money (Morrow, 2013; Zavisca, 2007). The review of the literature on cash payment indicates that participants, including vulnerable individuals, become involved in qualitative research for a variety of reasons, of which financial gain is one of many (Barratt et al., 2007; Bell & Salmon, 2011; Clark, 2010; Kelly et al., 2017). It may suggest that financial payment does not put people under pressure to participate in research. However, some researchers (Tarkowska, 2000; Wiles et al., 2007) argue that payment may involve risk of undue pressure. Therefore, they do not talk about remuneration before the research and give money after the data has been collected, for example, after the interview is completed. The discussion in the literature on monetary payment concerns whether and what remuneration constitutes due incentives and fair reimbursement (Afkinich & Blachman-Demner, 2019; Belfrage, 2016; Hanson et al., 2012; Seddon, 2005). Researchers who used cash payment as incentives offered potential participants of their research a relatively low amount of money so that it would not become the only motivation to participate in the research. Although generally a low amount of money seems to be a safer option than a higher one, too low an amount may contradict the principle of fair return for participation in research (Association of Social Anthropologists of the UK and the Commonwealth, 2011) and be difficult to reject, because the informants may need money

(Belfrage, 2016). Therefore, one very important concern is how to decide at what level payments are appropriate in the specific research context (Fry et al., 2006; Ripley, 2006).

The second concern is the possibility that the addicted participants spend their payment on high-risk activities such as drugs (Collins et al., 2017; Fry et al., 2006). The object of the dispute between supporters and opponents of financial compensation in the area of research with addicts is the researcher's responsibility for the risk of creating additional harm (Festinger & Dugosh, 2012; O'Brien & Madden, 2007). For example, some researchers suggest that institutional review boards are reluctant to approve offers of payment to drug or alcohol addicted participants *inter alia* because of this risk (Anderson & McNair 2018; Bell & Salmon, 2012; Burris & Moss, 2006; Festinger & Dugosh, 2012; Seddon, 2005). From the opponents' point of view, substance-abusing informants require special protection in research (Fry et al., 2006; Ripley, 2006). According to payments' opponents, vouchers along with other non-monetary payment methods (e.g., food, a gift) are safer options for addicted participants than cash (Festinger & Dugosh, 2012; Fry et al., 2006). However, some addicted participants criticize them for reinforcing negative stereotypes about themselves as irresponsible and irrational people (Bell & Salmon, 2011; Collins et al., 2017; Neale et al., 2017). In their opinion, non-cash forms of compensation or incentives can be sold, which calls into question their "protective" value. In addition, studies involving drug users (e.g., cocaine-dependent individuals; African-American crack cocaine smokers) suggest that cash payments do not encourage further drug use. Most research participants declare they spend the money on everyday living, and only a small part on drugs (Festinger & Dugosh, 2012; Slomka et al., 2007). The advocates of monetary payments for addicted participants believe that financial incentives are an ethical and respectful way of thanking the research participants for sharing their expertise (Bell & Salmon, 2011; O'Brien & Madden, 2007; Seddon, 2005). In their opinion, such remuneration is also a source of income for participants who usually have financial problems (Slomka et al., 2007). In this respect, research participants can even avoid more risky ways of obtaining money, such as gambling, sex work, or crime (Bell & Salmon, 2011; Slomka et al., 2007). This suggests that the opponents and the supporters of paying addicted participants hold different perceptions of their autonomy (Fry et al., 2006); thus, the opponents and supporters also hold different perceptions of the researcher's responsibility for the risk of creating additional harm.

In this context, it is worth noting the institutional rules in English-speaking countries, which have developed institutional arrangements for the protection of the research participants. Tamara Zutlevics (2016) examines IRB/HREC approach to practices regarding payment in the United States, Australia, and Ireland. The approaches show there is no universal approach to the financial reward of research participants. Zutlevics noted that financial payment for participation in research is less acceptable by Irish IRBs/HRECs than by similar institutions in the United States and Australia. The situation of Polish social researchers related to the financial payment differs from the situation of social researchers in English-speaking countries. First, for example, Poland is like Ireland but unlike many English-speaking countries, because the reluctance to pay research participants in academic qualitative social research is of a systemic nature. It is rather difficult to obtain funds for paying the informants and many academic researchers do not even take such a possibility into account. Consequently, social researchers rarely use payment in qualitative academic research. Second, the institutional ethics regulation in sociology or socio-cultural anthropology in Poland is rather weak: there are few ethics review boards, and consulting with the boards is usually not mandatory (Surmiak, 2019). In the context of paying cash, it means that ethics review boards, unlike in the United States or United Kingdom, usually do not have a chance to influence the researchers' decisions regarding the financial remuneration, e.g., the amount of payment, whether to pay before or after the research, and how to pay (Afkinich & Blachman-Demner, 2019; Food and Drug

Administration, 2018; Kolstoe & Holden, 2020, p. 613). This difference provides an opportunity to look at the choices of researchers working without ethical committee directives regarding cash payment to research participants.

Method

Research Idea

I decided to conduct research on ethical issues in qualitative research because of my own research experience. I have an academic background in sociology and cultural anthropology. I have previously conducted ethnographic research with sex workers and with residents of the Catholic Centre for Girls and Women at Risk of Prostitution and Wanting to Abandon It in Poland, during which I faced many ethical dilemmas and problems that codes of ethics were sometimes unable to adequately solve. Other researchers have come to similar conclusions in different research contexts (Kunnath, 2013; Gibson et al., 2012; Wiles et al., 2006). Reading texts on ethical issues in qualitative research with vulnerable people proved helpful but did not fully satisfy my curiosity. I wanted to know, among other things, how other sociologists and cultural anthropologists solved their ethical dilemmas. I was also interested in what factors guide researchers to make specific ethical decisions. As a result, I decided to conduct this research.

Study Design

The purpose of this study was to explore researchers' views and experiences of ethical issues in qualitative research with vulnerable and marginalized participants. My research was not about assessing researchers' conduct, but about understanding their ethical views. I assumed the knowledge and experience of people conducting research could be useful in solving ethical problems (Van Thiel & Van Delden, 2010). I wanted to explore three problem areas: (1) the role of ethics in the practice of qualitative research with vulnerable people; (2) researchers' beliefs about bad and good practices in this type of research; and (3) the concepts, ethical standards and values that underpin researchers' ethical choices and research practice. I decided to use a qualitative approach to explore the experiences and ethical views of researchers and the concepts and standards behind their ethical choices. In my opinion, only qualitative methods can fully capture the complexity and contextuality of researchers' knowledge and take into account their reflectiveness. Research involving researchers often uses a qualitative approach (Clark, 2010; Colnerud, 2014; Corden & Sainsbury, 2006; Dickson-Swift, 2007; Wiles et al., 2006). Moreover, my choice was to a large extent justified by the exploratory nature of the research. To date, no qualitative research has been conducted on the experiences and ethical views of Polish sociologists and socio-cultural anthropologists. Previous qualitative research involving Anglophone researchers has addressed specific ethical issues, such as informed consent (Wiles et al., 2006) or ethical dilemmas and problems (Colnerud, 2014; Dickson-Swift, 2007). Thus, my research design was exploratory (Makombe, 2017).

I decided to focus on vulnerable participants. I believe that in this type of research, ethical issues are particularly important due to participants' susceptibility to manipulation and exploitation (Loue & Loff, 2013; Ripley, 2006). The relevance of ethical issues is further heightened when qualitative methods are used. Qualitative research is based on an intensive relationship between the researcher and the participants, which may be very close and exist for a long time (as in ethnographic studies). In addition, data collection in qualitative research takes

place in “natural” settings. Moreover, such research is open, that is, the researcher cannot fully control the course of the research meetings (Hammersley & Traianou, 2012).

Sample and Study Participants

I used purposive sampling. The participants had to meet two criteria: (1) being a sociologist or socio-cultural anthropologist; and (2) conducting qualitative research with vulnerable participants. I defined the research participants as vulnerable on the basis of knowledge about the particular study (e.g., by reading research results or research projects). I also took into account the opinions of researchers with whom I conducted interviews. My interviewees were primarily identified through university websites and my research network. I contacted most of the researchers via email, as other studies with researchers have shown that this is an effective strategy (Corden & Sainsbury, 2006; Wiles et al., 2006). The researchers received an invitation to participate along with basic information about my research project. I also asked them if they would consent to the conversation being audio-recorded. I did not offer the researchers any money for participation. I assumed we shared an interest in developing knowledge about ethics in qualitative social research. Thus, instead of financial gain, I promised my interviewees I would inform them about the results of my research.

The article draws on in-depth interviews with 48 Polish social researchers. I spoke with nine researchers who paid their informants and 39 researchers who did not. More than half of the PRs paid the research participants with personal money and only one interviewee with scientific grant money (the rest of my PR interviewees were subsidised by private funds or public grants). The selection of the participants was also based on maximum variation sampling (Patton, 1990). Thus, the sample included interviewees of both sexes, although women predominated. My informants were at various stages of their academic careers, represented 13 various research centres and universities in Poland, and applied a variety of research approaches and a range of research methods. Some of them defined themselves as sociologists (29), some as socio-cultural anthropologists (16), and some as both (3). All the interviewees were experienced in qualitative research with people who are particularly susceptible to harm due to their vulnerable position, such as the homeless, the poor, sex workers, refugees, and people with disabilities.

Data Collection

I used in-depth interviews to enable me to adapt the questions, their order and form to a specific participant, and to react during the course of the research process (Fontana & Frey, 2005, pp. 95–100). In this way, I minimized the risk of imposing my own views and conceptual schemes on the interviewees. Such an issue occurs especially in research conducted from the position of an insider, because the researcher has knowledge of and experience in the issue being examined (Greene, 2014; Unluer, 2012). Moreover, an interview is a “natural” way of familiarizing oneself with someone else’s point of view and experience (Lofland et al., 2006). It fosters understanding and confidence building in contact with researchers. Before the interview, I sent my interviewees a list of instructions for the interview so they would know in advance what approximately we were going to discuss. The list of instructions included issues that I planned to raise during the interview, such as a description of the research they conducted, ethical premises, possible dilemmas and ethical problems, and ways of solving them. I also asked the researchers about their opinions concerning bad and good practices in qualitative research with vulnerable participants. I started with general questions. For example, I asked the interviewees whether they give their research participants something in return for their involvement. I then asked specific questions, such as whether they reward their participants

before or after interview and what amount. I often asked the researchers to justify their opinions. I conducted my interviews individually, with face-to-face contact. The interviewees chose where they wanted to meet, which was generally at their workplace or in a café. I met with one third of the interviewees a second time. The purpose of these re-interviews was to deepen the threads raised during the first conversation. I only conducted re-interviews with researchers with whom I had not exhausted the list of interview themes during the first interview, and who had time for a second meeting. The average duration of the interviews was 2.5 hours. With the participants' permission, all of the interviews were digitally recorded and fully transcribed.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

My analysis process was inductive, that is, it started with data and did not rely on testing a hypothesis derived from a theory (Lofland et al., 2006). Like many other qualitative researchers, I was involved in both data collection and analysis (Charmaz, 2006; Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995; Silverman, 2014). For example, if I deemed a thread interesting, I also asked about it in subsequent interviews with successive interlocutors. Such an approach is crucial in collecting rich and valuable data to achieve one's research goals (Kalpokaite & Radivojevic, 2019). When I completed the data collection process, I read all the transcriptions to gain a general impression of the data. I looked for preliminary themes associated with my research goals and listed them for each interview alongside a short note containing information about the research methods used by the interviewee, the research objectives and context, the research paradigm, and ethical assumptions. For example, I distinguished the following theme: payment for research participants. Afterwards, I read each transcription again to apply meaning categorization (Kvale, 1996), that is, I created ad hoc categories to reflect the sense of the fragments of the interviews. I also used meaning condensation (Kvale, 1996), that is, I summarized the meaning of statements marked with a given category in a few words or sentences. In some cases, I added certain reflections in the margins. For example:

Me: What did you offer them in exchange?

Interviewee: Yes, that's what I wanted to say (...) there is a growing practice of paying for the interview, which we interpret as spoiling the participants' market. But I must admit that I actually did it three times to encourage ... this was especially in the initial stages, when I really had a big problem with gaining access to participants. The second issue and the second reason why I did it, what I'm going to say is very unprofessional, is awareness of the material situation of participants. (...) I knew they were in a lamentable situation.

I marked the first sentence of this statement with a code: "argument against financial reward – participants' market corruption." The next part was marked with several categories: "paying research participants," "understanding of the researcher's role," "argument for paying – incentive," and "argument for paying – difficult financial situation of participants." Under the code "way of understanding the researcher's role," I added the following annotation: "Check what the researcher had in mind when talking about lack of professionalism: interfering in the participant's private life, rewarding only some of the research participants or maybe using information obtained from sources other than the interview?"

In the next step of analysis, I re-read several times the coded and uncoded transcriptions in order to verify the quality and the trustworthiness of the themes (and sometimes to add sub-themes), as well as the quality and the trustworthiness of categorization and meaning

condensation (Bengtsson, 2016). Next, I assigned to each theme fragments of the coded interview statements along with the aforementioned notes from the interviews and interpreted it. In the case of the theme “payment to research participants,” I sorted the interviewees’ statements into three sub-themes: 1) arguments for payment; 2) arguments against this practice; and 3) experiences of researchers who paid for their participation in research. I then looked for patterns and relations between the categories and the sub-themes. In the following step of analysis, I drew conclusions and verified them to ensure that they adequately represented the data.

It was important for me to maintain the validity and reliability of my analysis and data interpretation. As Nahid Golafshani (2003) has argued, “the credibility of a qualitative research depends on the ability and effort of the researcher” (p. 600). Following Anna Wyka (1993), I assumed the rigor and trustworthiness of data analysis and interpretation are based on the researcher’s self-control and receipt of feedback from research participants or colleagues. Self-control, as Wyka notes, requires repeating the analysis many times and demands researchers constantly examine themselves and their methods. In qualitative studies, reflexivity (understood as a continuous process of critical analysis of what kind of knowledge is produced in research) is often treated as a way of improving the quality and validity of one’s research (Berger, 2015; Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Mauthner & Doucet, 2003; Pillow, 2003). Therefore, as mentioned above, I re-read the coded and uncoded transcriptions several times. I sought various explanations for the data. I also tried to challenge my conclusions. Moreover, in line with Wyka’s recommendations, I shared my interpretations with other researchers in order to obtain feedback. Furthermore, after Guba and Lincoln (2005), I decided to follow the fairness data presentation principle. Guba and Lincoln define fairness as a balanced view. Achieving fairness may be accomplished by making all of the views, perspectives, problems, and voices of interested parties visible in the text.

Ethical Considerations

My research project was not considered by any ethics committee. In Poland, as mentioned before, there are only a few ethics review boards in the social sciences, and they are usually not mandatory. However, applying for a research grant, I was required to explain how I would handle ethical issues. The reviewers accepted that my ethical research strategies would protect participants’ safety, privacy, and confidentiality. My research participants were fully informed about the aims of the study, the source of its funding, research procedures, how the data would be stored and used, and the possible consequences of participating. Furthermore, I offered them the opportunity to receive and edit the interview transcripts. This was a decision previously made by Wiles and her colleagues (2006) in their research with British researchers regarding informed consent. Wiles et al. believed that doing so would protect their interviewees from recognition and possible harm. I agree with this argument. For example, after reading the anonymous transcript of their interview, some of my research participants indicated certain fragments that they did not want me to use, or that I should use with caution because more thorough anonymization was necessary. Relatively few sociologists and cultural anthropologists in Poland conduct qualitative research with vulnerable individuals. Consequently, researchers can be easily recognized by their colleagues. As Martin Tolich (2004) has highlighted, insiders may recognize the identity of another insider participating in the research, thereby threatening internal confidentiality. My research participants were more aware than me about what information might identify them within the research community. However, this did not mean I imposed anonymity on the researchers in my research texts. Rather, I took into account their autonomy and their right to make their statements. Thus, the researchers were able to determine the extent to which they wanted to remain anonymous. Most

preferred to conceal their identity. Therefore, in the article I changed their names and if necessary hid other identifying information, such as their area of research (Kaiser, 2009; Saunders et al., 2015).

Results

Commercialisation of the researcher-participant relationship

According to many of the NPRs, especially researchers conducting biographical and ethnographic research, cash payment has a negative impact on researcher-participant relationships for two reasons. Firstly, in their opinion, a cash payment in research reduces the researcher's relationship with participants to a superficial and shallow commercial relationship. As Marek (NPR) puts it: "I wouldn't want to pay, because there is no personal relationship. There is just a transaction." From many NPRs' perspectives a researcher who uses financial compensation "buys" the knowledge and stories of the participants: "In my opinion, if a researcher pays a researched person, then there is another relationship. Then I buy this knowledge." The interviewees who criticized this practice believed that in qualitative research, the researcher's relationship with informants should be based on mutual trust, understanding and, kindness, which cannot be bought with money.

Secondly, in their view, financial payment depreciates the value of the acquired knowledge. For example, Monika (NPR) noted in the context of biographical research:

How do you pay for someone's life story and very intimate stories? How much do you pay? (...) Anyway, the amount that we would pay will always be too little because this is not just a few hours that we devote, but these are experiences and other things.

The aforementioned statement suggests the knowledge gained from qualitative research participants cannot be compensated for financially. However, study participants, including the NPRs who criticized paying the informants, accepted reimbursement of the costs of participation in the research (e.g., reimbursement of travel costs to the place where the focus group interviews took place). For example:

I am absolutely opposed to paying for interviews. But if, for example, we do focus group, and I have done more than a hundred of these, and we ask people to come to one place at a certain time, to devote their time, they even have to travel and so on, and so on, then of course I think that these people should be paid or receive some kind of non-monetary form of reward for the time spent.
(NPR)

However, acceptance of financial compensation does not necessarily apply to all research participants. For example, few of my interviewees did not pay sex workers to participate in research because in their view this places the researcher (or university) in a role similar to that of a sex client, which is commercial in nature:

I didn't do the interviews I paid for. Once for financial reasons and twice I also thought about the fact that these relationships in prostitution are such that the client pays – I didn't want to enter into such relationships, where I am also paying. I assumed that if someone wants to talk to me without money, that's great. If somebody wants to talk to me with money, maybe it wouldn't be a

completely open interview either. I don't know if that's a good assumption. I'd have to check it out and see how it works. Though it would probably be hard to get the money to pay the research participants. (NPR)

Interestingly, the PRs also valued mutual trust and understanding in their relations with the participants. From their perspective, money does not change the sense of qualitative research, which should be based on cooperation and an in-depth contact between the researcher and the informants. The PRs understood the issue of payment differently than the aforementioned financial payment critics. They did not treat money as payment for information obtained (with the exception of one researcher who quickly gave up paying) but as an incentive and/or a way to reimburse informants for the time spent on participating in the research. It was also a gesture of recognition and respect for their intellectual and emotional involvement, especially in the case of participants in biographical research. For example, according to Ela:

The biographical method, well, to recall memories from childhood requires a very big intellectual effort. When I once asked myself if I would be able to give a biographical interview, I had doubts whether I would be able to do it at all. It needs time, intellectual effort, and a huge emotional effort. I have heard such stories that at home, for example, I cried all the time because I couldn't cope with them. (PR)

In addition, in such an approach, the researcher is sensitive to the economic needs of informants who are in a difficult financial situation. As Ala argued:

In the case of a homeless person who, for example, makes a living collecting scrap metal, it takes them all day to take part in my research, which directly deprives them of their livelihood because they do not earn anything. How is it controversial that I will compensate them for this financial loss? For me, there is no doubt that this case should be rewarded. Rewarded? Rather, it is to compensate them for the losses incurred, such as tangible financial losses. (PR)

My interviewees also stressed that monetary payment prevents the abuse of informants. Researchers and informants do not benefit from research in the same way. For example, thanks to research, a researcher can make a professional career, gain a higher social and economic status, which is less likely in the case of vulnerable research participants.

Discomfort of research participants

Some NPRs feared that cash payment might cause discomfort to research participants:

Here I think I would have such doubts about paying those in need and... such a red light. Someone could think, maybe she pities me and because of that is giving me some money. Not only am I sick, but she is giving me money, because I have nothing to live on.

One of my interviewees had such a situation when she offered monetary payment to a research participant after the data collection was completed. Her decision to financially reward research participants was due to their very difficult economic situations. Yet, she did not inform them about financial payment before the start of the research to prevent instrumental motivation to

participate in the research. As a result, the research participant – as my interviewee recounts “felt bad because she agreed to participate in the study, to talk to me without wanting anything in return. She wanted to help me, and I reduced it to such a [commercial] relationship by offering remuneration at the end.” It follows from the quoted statement that the cash payment may devalue a participant’s altruistic motivations and the sense of his/her agency connected with his/her contribution to the development of scientific knowledge.

In the opinion of the NPRs (and some of the PRs), financial remuneration may also harm informants when the research objectives concern matters important to them (e.g., identity) or when financial payment violates social and cultural norms of their group. In relation to the last issue, one of NPRs, Karina, noted:

I would insult them and show them how low they are on the [social] ladder by giving them money. I know one thing, these people are very ashamed that they are poor, unemployed and use a lot of techniques to conceal their situation.

In this context, financial payment could cause discomfort to informants, as it would expose their difficult financial situation, which they are trying to hide. However, the participant’s discomfort does not always result from the financial payment itself. Sometimes the form of payment may be crucial. For example, according to PR Krzysiek, financial payment based on a formal agreement would be against the rules of the ethnic community in which he conducted his research:

It is such a community that you have to give money. And of course, they take money in a completely different way compared to us. (...) They would feel better if I gave them 50 PLN as myself [*name of the interlocutor*] than as a researcher. They would have more satisfaction, more joy. Also, in many situations it is easier for them for example in their community to justify talking to strangers when they can say, “I am talking to them to get something.” And then they feel accepted.

According to Krzysiek, members of this community would rather accept money in the form of a gift because they do not respect and accept paid work. Other researchers, on the other hand, suggested that their participants would accept money as a form of payment for work, but they did not consider the sharing of information as work, as opposed to, for example, the production of material objects. It is worth noting, however, that in some social circles the telling of your life may be regarded as work (Collins et al., 2017).

Undue influence on informed consent

Interestingly, the NPRs, unlike the PRs, have rather rarely addressed the concern that money may have an undue influence on informed consent. PRs determined the “right amount” of payment taking into account their own financial capabilities or their grant budget. They also made use of their knowledge of the economic situation of the informants; however, they did not explicitly mention this. In practice, the amount paid was usually equal to the minimum rate for five to six hours of unqualified work in Poland (during the period in which the research was conducted):

I mean, I fixed it at 50 PLN. (...) Now, I think that if I had the possibility, I would have planned more money, but it is also the case that in this project,

you know how it is, every amount must be justified. And in general, because it is controversial – the remuneration – I also planned the amount that I hoped the NCN [National Science Center] would accept it.

Apart from the strategy consisting of establishing a suitably low amount of money, one of my interviewees decided to minimize the possibility of undue influence of money on informed consent by not informing the participants about the exact amount of payment. They were only notified there would be some financial remuneration, and after completing the research they received the payment. In my opinion such a strategy requires careful reflection. On the one hand, a potential participant may always ask about the amount of money, which will invalidate this strategy. In addition, concealing the amount of remuneration may undermine the participant's trust in the research, because the conditions of participation in the research become less transparent. On the other hand, if the participant does not ask the researcher about the amount of remuneration, there is a risk that s/he will imagine a much higher value of cash than the amount the researcher is going to pay. Paradoxically, excessive expectations may have undue influence on this person's consent to participate in the research.

Forcing participants to respond

Many of my NPR interviewees feared that the promise of financial payment would impair the establishing of an equal and democratic relationship with research participants. As Beata puts it:

The cash payment for participation in research has consequences. We put ourselves in the role of the one who pays and demands. And this sucks. We cannot demand anything from the informant. This is a position of power. I have money. I have power.

From this perspective, financial payment forces participants to provide information. Thus, one solution would be to pay the participants before the interview, so as not to put pressure on them to answer the researcher's questions. Contrary to this, the majority of the PRs paid the informants after completion of the research. Perhaps this was due to the fact that the aforementioned researchers did not share the conviction or did not notice that money creates a power relationship between the researcher and the informants.

One of my NPR, Aneta, pointed out that financial remuneration for people in very difficult financial situations may also generate expectations of further help:

Me: Paying for the interview, do you think it's a good or a bad idea?

Aneta: In this context it's a bad one, because it would generate even more expectations. It's like with this help. It's better to have this kind of help – advice – not material help. I once asked one of the respondents: "Why do you want money from me for everything?" And he said, "You taught us this because you did not understand our needs." I would be moving away from that right now. It would only generate more needs.

According to Aneta, this is particularly true for researchers from highly developed countries who carry out research among the poorest communities in developing countries. As she suggested, in the long run, financial remuneration may deepen the vulnerability of participants, because it leads to passive expectation of material aid from researchers and creates a researcher-participant relationship based on economic benefits. This seems to be a

controversial issue. On the one hand, offering money, as well as the expectation of payment from the researcher, confirms the privileged position of the researcher over the informants and marks a certain distance in their relations. The researcher has the financial resources that his/her potential informants need. On the other hand, it seems that, for example, poor people expecting financial aid and seeking it from the researcher is a form of agency: the informants try to protect themselves against exploitation in this way.

Additional risk of harm

Some of my interviewees who conducted research with addicts felt their informants should not be financially rewarded because they would spend the money on drugs. Their fear that cash payment will be misused is based on the assumption that addicts are not able to make fully autonomous choices, because of their compulsion to buy drugs. For example:

Bartek: Sometimes students ask me a question about giving something in return. (...) But money? I say, "No. Do not give money, but if it comes to your mind and you have enough money to buy them a meal, that's fine."

Me: I am curious why a researcher can't give money to this homeless man?

Bartek: It's a simple matter, namely if a homeless person, especially one living outside a homeless shelter, gets money, they'll just spend it on alcohol, so they'll degenerate even more.

Thus, from this point of view, substance-abusing informants require special protection in research (Ripley, 2006). However, some of my interviewees were not opposed to paying addicts. An illustration is an excerpt from my conversation with Agata (PR):

Agatha: Some people have this fear, I don't have it at all, a fear that they will go and drink afterwards. I don't care if they drink or not, because it is their right.

Me: And if you knew they spent it [their payment] on alcohol or drugs, would it change anything, would you still pay?

Agatha: No, no, I absolutely don't think it matters. Everyone has their needs, and they have the right to satisfy their needs the way they want to.

It follows that the interviewees who were against paying, perceived the autonomy of addicted participants differently from those who believed that such people could be rewarded financially. However, my research has shown a belief in the autonomy of research participants may conflict with a sense of responsibility for the additional risk of harm. I will discuss this in the following example.

One of my interviewees, Ala, applied a participatory approach in her research, which is characterized by the emphasis on the subjectivity and agency of research participants, who are given the opportunity to share, with the researcher, in the control of the research process. In addition, Ala offered them money to thank them for their participation in the research. However, during the research she gave up paying because one of the participants had relapse in an addiction. Ala said:

In one case, a person who got 80 PLN from me, because that's what I was offering went on a week-long bender, on which this person hadn't been before receiving this payment for a long time, because he simply couldn't afford it. It was a little frightening for me that I directly contributed to what happened.

On the other hand, if we are to treat these people seriously, as subjects, as adults capable of making their own decisions, we should respect that it is their decision what they will do with the money and how they will behave.

The quoted statement indicates the harmful use of a cash payment by the participant may be a difficult experience for the researchers, even if they make assumptions about the autonomous decision-making and agency of the participants. In addition, Ala's statement draws attention to an issue that so far has not been emphasized enough in the discussions on financial payment in qualitative research (i.e., the values of the researcher). Given that Ala decided to do participatory research, I think she had a problem with reconciling her belief in the agency and autonomous decision-making of the research participants with the choices made by them, which, in her opinion, caused them harm. She did not accept the method of using payment for participation in the research, which is contrary to her values. As a result, she decided to offer vouchers instead of money to subsequent participants in her research. Another of my interviewees coped with the fear that her participants will misuse a cash payment by offering money to an organization working for the environment in which she conducted her research. However, in my opinion, for such a strategy to be effective, potential interviewees should see donating money to the organization as something of value. Therefore, they must benefit from the organization's activities or at least support its objectives.

It is also worth mentioning that in some communities, financial compensation may result in harm to research participants without there being any misuse of money for participating in research. An illustrative example is a fragment of my conversation with Rafał (NPR):

Rafał: The first thing is, how do we know where the money will go? Well, because they [participants] can't have cash in the juvenile detention center. Besides, if they had cash, terrible things would happen.

Me: Do you mean drugs?

Rafał: Not just drugs. There would be extortion, rape, all kinds of situations that would be based on trying to get money in a juvenile detention center.

Compromising the anonymity of the participants

In Poland, in order to receive financial compensation, the research participant must first sign a contract. To sign the contract, it is necessary to provide personal data, which also applies to research participants. Many of my interviewees criticized this requirement for several reasons. For example, Ania (PR) noted: "The university very often requires personal data from us, proving to whom the [payment] is being given, which we cannot provide, because the research is anonymous. And here is the dilemma of how to solve it."

Most of the researchers believed that to sign the contract was at odds with the principle of anonymity, which they considered to be a key ethical and methodological rule in social qualitative research. The interviewees also mentioned the fact that some of their informants treated the guarantee of anonymity as a condition of participation in the research. Some vulnerable participants feared being "discrediting," because they conceal some stigmatizing features or facts (e.g., non-normative sexual orientation), especially from their relatives and friends. The reason why informants want to remain anonymous could also be the low trust in public authorities and official documents characteristic of post-communist societies (Sztompka, 1999). Moreover, some of my interviewees were afraid that signing an agreement with the participants might bring them harm. For example, as Ala (PR) said:

I wonder if this could have some negative consequences for them [research participants] while they're hiding from the tax office. For example, their accounts could be seized by bailiffs and suddenly they have to pay some tax. The tax office receives information that there is a tax.

The aforementioned statement suggests that money for participation in research could limit some of the informants' possibilities to take advantage of various forms of social assistance (due to the income criterion) or provoke the interest of the tax office or bailiff in debtors.

The majority of the RPs tried to ensure the anonymity of their informants. On the one hand, the interviewees who paid the participants with private money did not sign any contracts with them. On the other, the interviewees who used grant funds often concealed money for the participants in the researchers' salary. The participant was then paid without the need for any contract since it was the researchers who formally receive the money: "And it ended up being 50 PLN added to the salary of the interviewer, because we would have to settle with personal income tax" (PR). However, the results of my research indicate that not all vulnerable participants are afraid to disclose their personal data. The researcher who asked the participants to sign a contract stated that the informants had no problem with revealing their identities. As she noted: "Some people don't pay attention to this: especially homeless people who benefit from social assistance are used to signing various papers." These participants benefited from social assistance and were accustomed to providing their personal data. It follows that this is an issue that should be considered depending on the research context.

Discussion

The literature on the ethical concerns of giving a financial payment to research participants discusses two issues in particular: undue influence on voluntary consent, and the risk that addict participants will spend the money on alcohol or drugs. The issue of undue influence has been raised by both critics and supporters of this practice (Head, 2009; Seddon, 2005; Tyldum, 2012; Zavisca, 2007). For the former, it is an argument against paying research participants, while for the latter, it is a warning that the amount offered to research participants should be carefully considered. The amount should not be too high to put pressure on research participants, but also not too low to represent a fair return or an adequate incentive to participate in research. The PRs who participated in my research tried to follow this principle. Interestingly, the NPRs, in contrast to the PRs, rarely addressed the concern that money may have an undue influence on informed consent. One explanation may be that some researchers did not talk about this issue explicitly, but still meant it by saying that a financial payment puts pressure on informants to answer the researcher's questions. In my opinion, this discrepancy also owes to the fact that, unlike in Anglophone countries, there is little discussion about informed consent in Poland in sociology and cultural anthropology. Neither the code of ethics of the Polish Sociological Association (2012) – given that a code of ethics in cultural anthropology has not yet been developed – nor the main institutions financing social research in Poland (like the National Science Centre) require social researchers to obtain written consent to participate in research. However, oral consent must be secured. It seems weaker formalization and bureaucratization, as well as weaker controls over informed consent than in Anglophone countries, has resulted in less controversy regarding this issue in Poland.

As for the controversy overpaying addicted participants, the literature shows researchers can be divided into supporters and opponents of this practice. The former claim that drug and alcohol users should be allowed to spend the money according to their needs, including on drugs. These researchers recognize drug and alcohol users' autonomy and do not feel responsible for creating a risk of additional harm. By contrast, the latter believe that

addicted participants require special protection from the researcher, who is responsible for the misuse of cash payments. The results of my research confirm the existence of this division among researchers. However, my research has also shown that a belief in the autonomy of research participants may sometimes conflict with a sense of responsibility for an additional risk of harm. The reason for this may be that the researcher discovers that their research participant spent the money for participating in drug research on their addiction, and then relapsed.

My article also points to rarely discussed concerns, such as the commercialization of the researcher-participant relationship, the discomfort of research participants, and problems with ensuring their anonymity. For example, the literature sometimes notes that a cash payment as an incentive for people with altruistic motivations is unnecessary and may even have the opposite effect, that is, it may discourage participation in research (Clark, 2010, p. 410; Zutlevics, 2016). Less is said, however, about the fact that a cash payment may hurt some research participants (Grant, 2015). It may offend research participants because of socio-cultural norms or altruistic motivations related to the desire to help the researcher or research participants through contributing to the development of scientific knowledge. In addition, the literature on financial payments in research contexts does not compare the concerns and experiences of NPRs and PRs. My comparison shows, which is understandable, that the former has more ethical concerns about financial payment than the latter. Some NPRs fear, first of all, that paying would reduce the relationship between researchers and informants to a pure transaction. Thus, the researcher-researched relationship would not be based on mutual trust, understanding, and kindness, but on money. Consequently, this relationship would be superficial. This way of thinking seems to result from the internalization of Merton's (1968) conviction that science is a public activity and is based on social cooperation. According to the Mertonian model of academic science, researchers practice "pure" science out of curiosity and a desire to understand the world, and people participate in research because they are interested in developing knowledge, which is perceived as a common good (Merton, 1968). From this point of view, paying informants contradicts both the mission of science and the idea of qualitative research. However, those who believe that paying research participants commercializes the researcher-researched relationship usually accept reimbursements of the costs of participating in research (e.g., reimbursements of travel costs to the place where the focus group interviews took place). Such an opinion may derive from the fact that "reimbursement" does not violate the Mertonian model of science, in which research participants have altruistic motivations to participate. Perhaps NPRs are afraid that paying for participation in research in the form of incentives or compensation would accelerate the process of the marketization of academia and even render universities similar to business corporations. PRs would not agree with this assumption. Interestingly and paradoxically, according to many PRs, paying informants is an expression of faith in the values that NPRs believe financial remuneration negates. Therefore, the results of my research suggest that the use of financial payments for research participants in qualitative research is not a manifestation of some new market or corporate research ethos: the PRs referred to the same values as the NPRs, but they understood them differently in research practice.

Research Implications

This article may be useful to other researchers who are considering offering financial payments to vulnerable participants. By demonstrating the advantages and disadvantages as well as the different problems and dilemmas related to paying, the article has provided researchers with material for critical reflection that may help them make informed decisions. My article has revealed there are no simple solutions to the issue of payment. The analysis has

shown that it is a good idea to get to know the research participants and their socio-cultural environment before starting the research. This facilitates effective recruitment for research, reduces the risk of undue influence that financial payments could have on voluntary consent, and diminishes the possibility of offending research participants by offering them money. If, in the course of such an initial examination, it turns out that the informants have a strong altruistic motivation to participate in the research, it is better not to pay. A more controversial issue concerns whether to talk about the level of payment before starting the research. According to some of my interviewees, informing participants at the beginning of the research may cause undue influence on voluntary consent, forcing them to answer questions. However, as I have argued, concealing such information may also result in undue influence on voluntary consent, because the informants may imagine being paid a much larger amount than the researcher has planned for them.

Limitations

By analyzing the opinions and experiences of Polish social researchers, this article has provided a more general contribution to the debate about financial payments in qualitative social research. However, the results of my research have certain limitations. For example, like many qualitative studies relying on an interpretivist paradigm, my findings cannot be generalized to other settings or situations. My research involved Polish sociologists and socio-cultural anthropologists who have conducted research with vulnerable individuals. Perhaps the participation of qualitative researchers from other countries would allow for a better understanding of which ethical concerns are context-specific and which are more universal. Moreover, the findings of my research are based only on the researchers' declarations. This does not mean the researchers were not truthful in their statements. Nevertheless, they may have forgotten or overlooked certain aspects. It may be worth using other research methods (as far as possible) to enrich the data, such as the analysis of research projects. Another limitation of my study is the interviews did not strictly pertain to the issue of financial compensation for research participants, but ethical issues in general. In addition, there were few researchers with experience of paying research participants. As a result, certain issues remain unclear or are yet to be sufficiently identified. For example, the issue of the impact of socio-cultural and environmental standards on financial payments requires further research, as it represents an important context of the constraints and challenges of offering them to research participants. It also concerns the consequences of informing participants about the amount of cash payment before and after the research has been conducted in the context of various vulnerable participants. In addition, it would be worth examining the opinions and experiences of both researchers and participants regarding non-financial forms of return, such as gifts or assistance. The research results attained from addicted participants (Bell & Salmon, 2011; Collins et al., 2017; Neale et al., 2017) indicate that such forms of remuneration are perceived rather negatively, but this may depend on the research context and the methodology applied.

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