WITS SCHOOL OF GOVERNANCE

AN INVESTIGATION OF STAKEHOLDER INFLUENCE ON PARTICIPANTS' INFORMED CONSENT IN THE MONITORING AND EVALUATION PROCESS.

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Dedication

This research report is dedicated to me as a testament to my abilities, strength, and continued desire to keep learning. I would also like to dedicate this research to all my family and friends who supported and cheered me on throughout this journey. My therapist for knowing exactly what to say and his thought-provoking words when it was needed the most. My best friend Lebogang Mototo (Saranghae), colleague, and close friend Tshepiso Maleswena for their continued inspiration and support.

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Abstract

Monitoring and Evaluations (hereafter referred to as evaluations) aid in decision making, come in many forms and have various functions depending on their objectives. The nature of evaluations is such that they are reliant on participation from various individuals, communities, and organizations. Informed consent is the process by which participants are made aware of the potential risks, benefits, and objectives of a study and thereafter formally or informally indicate their consent to take part in the proposed research. Informed consent is required as it contributes to trust amongst stakeholders in evaluations. However, while issues regarding informed consent (both in theory and practice) have a well-documented history, especially in medical journals that centre on developed nations; further insights still need to be garnered. As such, there is a need to understand the informed consent process and its suitability within low-income nations in research and evaluations. Consequently, this research report aims to provide an understanding of stakeholder influence on informed consent on participants in evaluations and how power and pressure mechanisms from stakeholders affect informed consent. The interviews allowed us to better understand the role of stakeholders and their influence in informed consent through the perspectives and lived realities of evaluators, industry experts, researchers, and academics as well as those currently working in organisations that have been evaluated. It is evident from the interview findings that the power dominance, pressure, and influences that occur in Evaluation can be both implied and explicit. There is no consensus on what constitutes true informed consent or what exactly and to what extent should participants be informed within evaluations. Rather the focus is more on the protection and privacy of information and data of the evaluations than participants' consent. The observed and dominant ways stakeholders influence participant informed consent is through information. This study contributes to the existing literature on the relationship between evaluators, participants, and decision-makers as well as the power dynamics experienced practically within evaluations. The researcher proposes that a more deliberate approach needs to be taken during the conception phase of evaluations. Finally, further research looking at participation in Evaluation from the lenses of participants is required. In addition, a deeper look into ethics within evaluations as service providers to their stakeholders.

Key Words: Informed Consent, Evaluations, Stakeholder Influence

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Informed consent is the process by which participants are made aware of the potential risks, benefits, and objectives of a study and thereafter formally or informally indicate their consent to take part in the proposed research (Hipskind, Shah, Thorton & Turrin, 2020; De Vries et al., 2020). Informed consent is required as it contributes to trust amongst stakeholders in Monitoring and Evaluation (hereafter referred to as evaluations). Furthermore, it serves to protect and endorse the autonomy of those participating in the study. However, while issues regarding informed consent (both in theory and practice) have a well-documented history, especially in medical journals that centre on developed nations (Boyd, 2015); further insights still need to be garnered. It has also been noted that informed consent in the medical field is often positioned as a risk management matter (Moseley, Wiggins & O'Sullivan, 2006) as opposed to centring the rights of participants (Wiles, Heath, Crow & Charles, 2005). Specifically, there is a paucity of research on the best practices to ensure that participation is truly voluntary (Fisher, 2013). As such, there is a need to understand the informed consent process and its suitability within low-income nations in a (M&E) context (Molyneuxa, Peshua & Marsh, 2004). Consequently, this research report aims to provide an understanding of stakeholder influence on informed consent on participants in (M&E), and how power and pressure mechanisms from stakeholders affect informed consent.

1.1 Background

The Constitution of South Africa requires informed consent from participants before evaluation is undertaken. As such, informed consent for participation in Evaluation is crucial (De Vries, Burgess, Blockman & Ntusi, 2020). However, despite this notion being enshrined in the Constitution, informed consent can be influenced by stakeholders, depending on the information required and the subsequent decisions to be undertaken. In view of the fact that the concept of informed consent can be interpreted and practiced in many different ways and that there is no one universal manner for it to be implemented; this then calls into question whether true informed consent can be achieved (Boyd, 2015).

There are many reasons why true informed consent should be deemed important in (M&E). One reason is the practice of trust within the evaluator and participant relationship (Sreenivasan, 2003), especially when the decisions made from these assessments directly or indirectly affect participants (Sreenivasan, 2003). Not only does this allow for participants to make better-informed decisions (Sreenivasan, 2003), but it also allows for evaluators to take responsibility for information sharing with participants (Sreenivasan, 2003). It is thus unsurprising that there is no debate in the literature that evaluators, researchers, or stakeholders need to communicate all possible outcomes and relevant information to participants and that the participants need to be able to fully comprehend this to ensure that informed consent is volunteered (Cavanaugh, Hopwood & Lambert, 2016).

Informed consent is vital especially since there is a growing interest in public participation in national decision-making, such as policies and legislations (Rowe & Frewer, 2004). Yet, although committees such as review boards in organisations are tasked with making sure adequate and accurate information is conveyed to participants, they may also be the ones that perpetuate improper informed consent practices (Paasche-Orlow, Taylor & Brancati, 2003). The level of complexity of the informed consent form provided by these bodies may make comprehension difficult for potential participants. Furthermore, language, as well as cultural, educational, and economic differences, play a role in aiding or hindering comprehension during the evaluation process (Paasche-Orlow et al., 2003).

Evaluations come in many forms and have various functions depending on their goals, directives, and stakeholders (Naidoo, 2010). The nature of evaluations is such that they are reliant on the participation of various individuals, communities, and organizations to satisfactorily reach the desired outcome (Williams et al., 2011). It is therefore important that participants have full knowledge of the potential risks and benefits of participating in these studies. Additionally, evaluations are necessary for effective decision-making (Williams, 2014). However, while evaluations can be noted as a form of research, unlike research (where the researcher has most of the control) evaluations are a function of their funding and stakeholders (Williams, 2014; Williams, Guenther & Arnott, 2011). Moreover, evaluations are employed in support of an action or a decision to be made (such as a public policy) that usually

directly affect the participants or their communities and organisations at large (Hannigan Millstein et al., 1994; Tyldum, 2012; Williams, 2014; Williams et al., 2011).

The nature of evaluations can also foster conflicts as a result of the competing interests of multiple stakeholders (including participants and the public), their inherently political nature, as well as the ethical considerations involved when final decisions are made (Chesterton, 2003; Baur, Van Elteren, Nierse & Abma, 2010). Subsequently, evaluations should be conducted ethically and transparently with the various stakeholders and participants about potential conflicts and challenges throughout the process of evaluations (Baur et al., 2010; Williams, 2014). Evaluators can perform multiple roles including: as an interpreter, as instructors as well as facilitating communications with various stakeholders, particularly vulnerable and marginalised participants (Baur et al., 2010). This allows them to advocate for participants and other stakeholders (Emerson, 2020). Furthermore, evaluators also need to be responsive rather than reactive to data collected and measuring outcomes (Baur et al., 2010).

The control of data and information is vital in evaluations. Specifically, the results of these evaluations. One of the most pressing concerns with the concept of informed consent is information sharing. Specifically, what types of information should and should not be disclosed, who controls what information is shared and how to avoid sharing any information or data that may be deemed harmful to participants (Beauchamp, 2011). Information and the understanding of information is the driving force behind informed consent. As such informed consent is highly influenced by participants' comprehension of information. Furthermore, insufficient or partial information shared, the power differentials amongst the relationship between stakeholders, evaluators and participants may lead to unethical or even harmful outcomes (Jegede, 2009).

Despite the fact that the importance of obtaining informed consent has become more salient, there are still debates about what is considered adequate information as well as consensus on procedures and systems to ensure informed consent as well as inconsistencies on implementation in practice (Kaplan & Bryan, 2009). Hence, it has become important to

consider informed consent to enforce participants' rights as well as make informed consent the norm (Kaplan & Bryan, 2009). As such, evaluators are often faced with pressure from stakeholders concerning the type of information and data they acquire. Thus the protection of ownership of data and privacy becomes an issue (Williams et al., 2011; Miller & Boulton, 2007). Studies have shown that in general, participants have minimal overall knowledge of the evaluations they participate in (Hill, Tawiah-Agyemang, Odei-Danso & Kirkwood, 2008). This leads to the concerns of how much information participants should know about the purpose of evaluations before they are able and fully informed to voluntarily accept (Hannigan Millstein et al., 1994).

It is here noted that the definition of stakeholder is dependent on the context of its environments, interests and activities. Furthermore, there is currently no consensus as to who is considered a stakeholder (McGrath & Whitty, 2017). The figure 1 depicts the relationships between stakeholders according to their chosen definitions and how they correlate to each other.

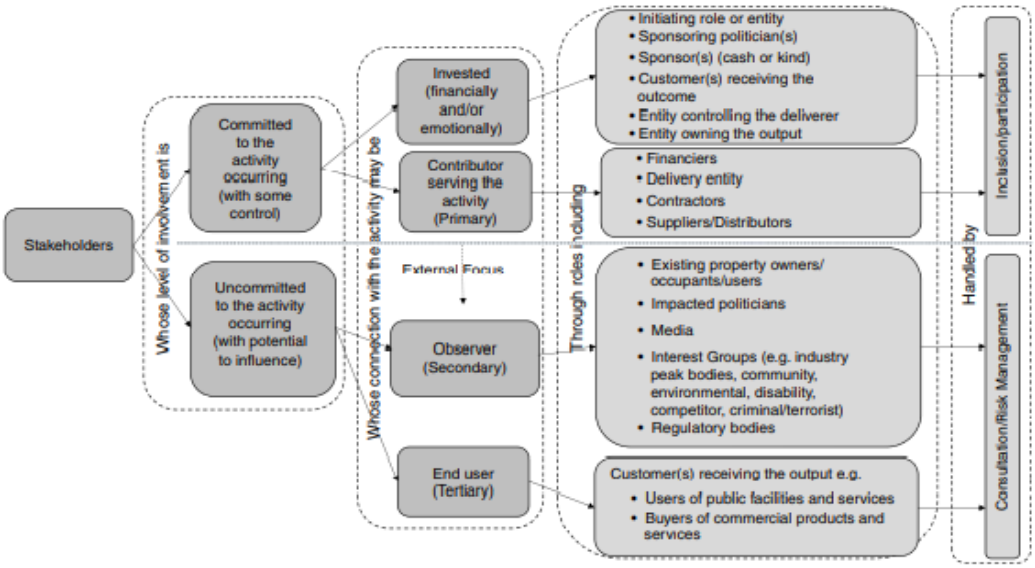

Figure 1: Stakeholder Levels (McGrath & Whitty, 2017)

However, for the purpose of this study, stakeholder will be operationalised as all those involved in evaluations including but not limited to the following: Funders and Donors;

Evaluation Staff (Field Workers and Managers), Specified Programme or Project Staff (Governments, Civil Society Organisations, Public and Private Organisations and Academic Institutions). Moreover, the relationships between all the relevant stakeholders are interconnected and vary according to the different types of evaluations and participants involved.

Stakeholders are fundamental in evaluations, specifically when they are the funding party or have requested the data (Emerson, 2020). As such they are often involved in the selection of participants. Additionally, due to the nature of evaluations involving various types of stakeholders with differences in cultures, political standings, communities, and organisations, challenges, and conflicts of prospects and priorities may arise (Baur et al., 2010; Chesterton, 2003; Emerson, 2020; Naidoo, 2010). Stakeholders may use various strategies as well as their power dynamics to recruit and influence participants in evaluations (Baur et al., 2010; Emerson, 2020; Tyldum, 2012).

Many authors have argued that some form of power or pressure is often necessary to attract the right type or specific participants and to ensure more impactful evaluations (Emerson, 2020; Fisher, 2013; Tyldum, 2012; Williams, 2014). Power and pressure strategies range from economic, emotional, psychological, legislative, or institutional which are employed in various manners that may be simply persuasive or coercive (Emerson, 2020; Tyldum, 2012). However, as power is held by the few, they ultimately can affect the direction, participation, and results of evaluations (Naidoo, 2010). Furthermore, it is noted that these tactics are often overlooked in the influence stakeholders have over participants' informed consent (Tyldum, 2012; Williams, 2014).

Access to participants has also been an ongoing challenge for evaluations (Tyldum, 2012). The issues surrounding participants have always been who should be participating as an emphasis of sampling and not necessarily how they are recruited (Tyldum, 2012). Preferably, participants should be *truly* voluntary with no expectations from the evaluations or research, however, this is not always the case due to the involvement of power and pressure strategies (Fisher, 2013). Furthermore, access to participants is impacted by social and economic factors

of the stakeholders, evaluators, and on the participants' part (Fisher, 2013). Technological advances have additionally impacted recruitment and access to participants (Miller & Boulton, 2007). In addition, many participants do not find value in voluntary participation, noting negative previous experience as a factor (Miller & Boulton, 2007). Ultimately, these issues can be linked back to proper and transparent informed consent as issued and influenced by recruiters and stakeholders.

Monitoring and evaluations conducted in developing countries highlight the complexity of their environments (Emerson, 2020), as the results and consequent decisions from these evaluations may affect participants, communities, and organisations socially, politically, and economically (Emerson, 2020; Fisher, 2013). Emerson (2020) further highlighted the collaborative nature of multiple stakeholders in evaluations may result in pro-poor policy changes. Moreover, participants in developing nations are less motivated to partake in Evaluation without some form of direct benefits (Tyldum, 2012). This also contributes to further challenges in accessing the participants that evaluations require (Tyldum, 2012). As such, there is a need to understand the informed consent process and its suitability in developing nations in the context of evaluations (Molyneuxa, Peshua & Marsh, 2004). Consequently, this research report aims to provide an understanding of stakeholder influences on participants' informed consent within evaluations.

1.2 Problem Statement

The increase in prominence of informed consent can be attributed to participants becoming more aware of how evaluations may affect their daily lives and communities at large. Some other reasons for this include the fact that participants have more access to information as well as the various stakeholders involved in the evaluations and the potential for conflicting goals (Lurvey, Nager & Johnson, 1996). Furthermore, the complexities that technologies and the information era have brought make obtaining informed consent even more difficult (Lurvey et al., 1996).

Informed consent is largely framed by legal, regulatory, and ethical frameworks (Wiles, Heath, Crow & Charles, 2005). However, practically, many of the processes currently in place that attempt to ensure informed consent are insufficient (Beauchamp, 2011). In order for true informed consent to be achieved, there should be no forms of pressure towards participants as well as participants being able to fully comprehend their role in evaluations (De Vries et al., 2020). In addition, informed consent can only occur if participants have a comprehensive understanding of their participation. Specifically, that their participation is voluntary, that they have not experienced undue pressure and that they have complete information (Fisher, 2013). Another major issue is what exactly evaluators or participants should focus on when it comes to informed consent (Miller & Boulton, 2007). This is important as informed consent does not only include data collected but the outcomes from the evaluations as well (Wiles et al., 2005). This has been proven difficult due to the nature of evaluations as well as the strong role stakeholder's play. In response, ethical guidelines and research, as well as Evaluation regulations, have attempted to resolve these issues. However, these regulations tend to focus on the protection of the evaluating firms and merely obtaining consent and not informed consent (Bhutta, 2004).

Beauchamp (2011) even argues that the nature of obtaining informed consent often lacks respect and negates the decisional power of participants. They expand on this notion by asserting that simply disclosing information or the signing of forms by participants before an Evaluation does not translate into informed consent (Beauchamp, 2011). Therefore, this research aims to investigate stakeholder influence on informed consent on participants in the evaluation and how power and pressure mechanisms from stakeholders affect informed consent.

Evaluations should strive towards true informed consent (Tyldum, 2012). However, the balance between the crucial and immediate need for data often neglects the process of obtaining informed consent (IJsselmuiden & Faden, 1992). Although there are rules and specified guidelines in place to manage the potential conflicts and challenges amongst evaluators, stakeholders and participants; these are however mainly focused on the protection of the evaluation data itself as well as participant involvement (Baur et al., 2010).

Moreover, the fact that these guidelines may not be specific to evaluations but a subsection from the research also compounds matters (Williams et al., 2011).

Ethical evaluations require informed consent to be adhered to (Hannigan Millstein et al., 1994; Josephson & Smale, 2020). Yet historically, the practice of informed consent is generally pervasive in the medical and biomedical fields, research, and law from as early as the 1950s (Beauchamp, 2011; Lurvey et al., 1996). Nevertheless, informed consent is highly relevant in all spheres, especially when one considers issues regarding data, access to information, and specifically how this will affect decisions (Beauchamp, 2011). Another reason for informed consent being so important today is due to its impact on individuals, communal and even national autonomy, equalities, rights, and other ethical considerations (Beauchamp, 2011).

One major issue when considering informed consent is the use of western standard measures on nations with varied cultures and populations (Jegede, 2009). Many of the principles, procedures, and structures that inform the guidelines of informed consent are derived from western contexts (and by extension western practices) (Bhattacharya, 2007), thus failing to take Indigenous, and communal African contexts into account (Josephson & Smale, 2020). African cultures are not a monolith, in fact, they are highly nuanced, and however, practices within research and evaluations have not always accommodated these differences (Ijsselmuiden & Faden, 1992). For this reason, studies and evaluations that have been carried out amongst the systematically and systemically marginalized (socially, economically, or educationally) may be subject to a certain level of apprehension (Nelson & Merz, 2002). In response, Faden & Beauchamp (1988) have highlighted the urgent need for solutions that will accommodate all stakeholders. These revisions to informed consent prerequisites should account for the complexities of conducting research and evaluations in developing nations. As there is a growing need for more data in the African or local contents, informed consent becomes pivotal amongst participants (IJsselmuiden & Faden, 1992). These criticisms form the central tenant of this research paper. Consequently, this study aims to investigate stakeholder influence on informed consent on participants in the evaluation and how power and pressure mechanisms from stakeholders affect informed consent.

Along with the lack of research conducted on informed consent within evaluations on the continent, there is also the issue of what exactly comprises informed consent for participants (Fisher, 2013; Williams, 2014). Although ethical and research guidelines are in place to ensure permission from participants, they do not necessarily guarantee informed consent as evaluators and stakeholders control information shared to ensure consent. A few of the reasons as highlighted by IJsselmuiden & Faden, (1992) such as cost efficiencies, legal loopholes, less stringent review boards and specifically the eagerness of the populations to participate in these studies due to participants' need for better outcomes for their environments is also the part of the problem with stakeholders exerting power, pressure, and dominance for desired outcomes or decisions.

As a direct point of contact with participants, evaluators are placed in a unique position; not only for the transfer of knowledge but also for understanding the overall goals of evaluations (Williams, 2014). Thus the practice of informed consent forms the very foundation of the relationship between participants and evaluators (Lurvey et al., 1996). Given this greater level of personal involvement, evaluators need to reconsider current practices of informed consent and the broader implications on evaluations (Williams, 2014).

The increased global uncertainty and the strong need for data, the role of evaluations have become more prevalent. The current literature focuses on medical or health research evaluations and not necessarily informed consent in terms of social evaluations. In addition, there is a lack of adequate research on evaluations, consent, and participation on this continent and specifically within developing nations (Josephson & Smale, 2020; Bhutta, 2004). Additionally, with the understanding of cultures and cultural norms through studies and evaluations, informed consent becomes paramount especially when decisions are being made on behalf of communities and nationally (IJsselmuiden & Faden, 1992).

While there are various ways in which informed consent may be improved (Hill et al., 2008), this paper will bring attention to the role in which stakeholders influence informed consent on participants. Ultimately, this paper will explore these influences by the various stakeholders in evaluations on informed consent through the lenses of the evaluators,

industry experts, researchers, and academics as well as those currently working in organisations that have been evaluated in South Africa.

1.3 The Research Question

The primary research question this paper will attempt to address is: *How do stakeholders influence participant informed consent in evaluations?*

The secondary research questions are:

- *What are the ways in which power is exerted on participants in evaluations?*
- *How do stakeholders exhibit control over information sharing in evaluations?*

1.4 Importance of the Research

The purpose of this research is to explore the role that stakeholders have over informed consent on participants. Evaluators are the primary contact for participants and hence communicate the necessary information to ensure consent is achieved. However, informed consent requires that the participants can fully comprehend the purposes of the evaluations (including their final uses), their participation is completely voluntary and without any form of pressure, and that they have received complete information. Stakeholders often play significant roles in evaluations influencing not only information but also participants. Moreover, there is a need for specific evaluation ethical committees outside of general research guidelines as well as those not within the medical fields (Hill et al., 2008; Williams et al., 2011). This paper will explore these influences by the various stakeholders in evaluations on informed consent through the lenses of the evaluators, industry experts, researchers, and academics as well as those currently working in organisations that have been evaluated in South Africa.

1.5 Structure of the Report

- **Chapter 1: Introduction and Background**

This section gives an overview and purpose of the study. It will outline the background, its problem statements, and the significance of the study.

- **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

The literature review will summarize the relevant sections of informed consent and evaluations from previous studies as well as adopt a conceptual framework to support the objectives of the study.

- **Chapter 3: Research Methodology**

This section outlines the methods of data collection and analysis techniques that will be used.

- **Chapter 4: Results**

The results from the interviews will be presented.

- **Chapter 5: Discussion of Results**

The findings will be analysed based on the findings, literature reviews, and themes that were emergent.

- **Chapter 6: Conclusions and Recommendations**

This chapter will present recommendations for future studies as well as managerial implications.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

Consent is voluntary and informed agreement between two parties without any external forces (Faden & Beauchamp, 1988). Informed consent implies voluntariness, complete information, and comprehension thereof as well as no form of coercion imposed upon participants (Joubert et al., 2003). The process of completing documentation and acknowledgments by participants does not mean the participant was adequately informed (Joubert et al., 2003). Additionally, consent is the fundamental prerequisite in order to gain access to knowledge and resources (Rosenthal, 2006). The concept of informed consent has been around since the formation of the Nuremberg Code but it is still a complex issue today. The changes in research methodologies and how studies are conducted via the different types of institutions as well as technological advances have impacted the concept of informed consent.

What exactly is informed consent? There are currently two understandings of the concept as highlighted by Beauchamp (2011). The first is when a participant intentionally and voluntarily chooses to participate in a study without any forms of coercion after consideration of all the information provided. The second refers to the legal or procedural approvals given by participants for the purpose of studies (Beauchamp, 2011). Whilst the former focuses on participants' autonomy, the latter is based on the more institutionalised practice of informed consent (Beauchamp, 2011). Halley (2016) also identifies two types of consent: positive consent versus constrained consent and performative consent. Positive consent is the consent given by participants because they are in agreement with the studies and explicitly would like to participate (Halley, 2016). Whereas constrained consent is the consent given by participants who view participating as an advantage over not participating (Halley, 2016). Performative consent is consenting as a gesture (Halley, 2016).

Presently, informed consent is guided by the ethical and legal departments of institutions (Kaplan & Bryan, 2009). Although they emphasise the importance of obtaining consent for studies, they are still heavily focused on the processes (lists, documentation, signatures, and

other forms of acknowledgments) of obtaining consent and not the ethical or the rights of participants and their relationships with the studies (Kaplan & Bryan, 2009).

The core of informed consent has to do with the relationship between the prospective participants and evaluators (Fisher, 2013). Exploitation is a risk in studies involving participants as the objectives of evaluators or those administering studies may not be accessible to participants nor of interest to participants once completed (Rosenthal, 2006). However, acknowledgments of contextual factors that may influence participation can reduce exploitation risk (Fisher, 2013). Regarding developing nations, particularly studies of communities, factors such as culture, communication, and appropriateness of studies become a concern when considering informed consent (IJsselmuiden & Faden, 1992; Rosenthal, 2006).

Kaplan & Bryan (2009) have raised concerns of evaluators (those administering studies) tending to not disclose complete information (Kaplan & Bryan, 2009). This is concerning as it influences choices, participation, and further final decisions made thereafter. Moreover, lack of communication after decisions have been made affects participants either through policies or general community changes thereof (Kaplan & Bryan, 2009). It is also noted that information disparities have been a common complaint by participants of studies (Kaplan & Bryan, 2009).

2.2 Theoretical Framework

The contents of the literature review and following through to analysis of the result will be based on adopting the conceptual framework as proposed by Bossert & Strech (2017). Bossert & Strech (2017) present a framework for understanding informed consent as well as improving the informed consent process and structures within participatory research.

The framework is divided into the following five sections: defining comprehension; demonstrating how different approaches to empirical research on understanding informed

consent are related; challenges to adjusting informed consent processes; incorporating participants in the review and updating of informed consent procedures and finding and recruiting individuals of the target community in order to improve participatory consent. Figure 2 shows the process of development for improving informed consent with various stakeholders and structures in place as well as placing autonomy back to participants to improve informed consent.

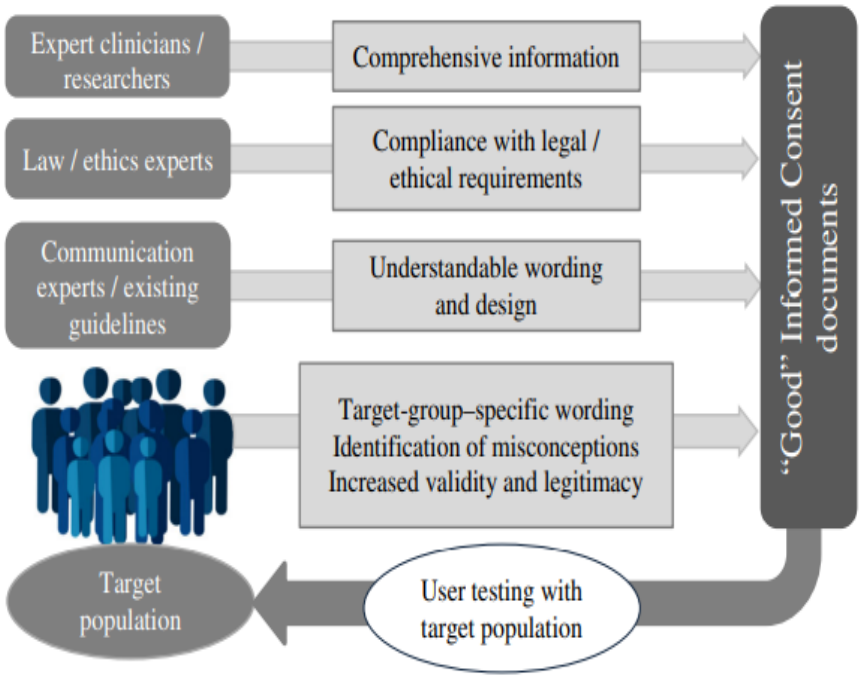

Figure 2: Development of Informed Consent (Bossert & Strech 2017)

Although the framework specifically focuses on documentation improvements, it can be broadly applied to the process of informed consent and not only to this single method. Thus the sections below will highlight the components of each section of the framework and how it will be related to the literature and the structure of analysis further.

Defining comprehension:

In attempts to achieve true informed consent, the procedures need to pay attention to participants' needs and requirements. Specifically, how participants are represented in documentation (Bossert & Strech, 2017). As a result, identifying the contexts within the documentation that are difficult to grasp or be assessed by participants can help improve the documents (Bossert & Strech, 2017). Essentially, the aim is to ensure participants have full comprehension of data provided to them before agreement to participate. Furthermore, as a result, there could be a comparison analysis on the levels of comprehension by participants and thereby defining the levels of understanding (Bossert & Strech, 2017). According to the literature presented above, the sections on access to knowledge and information as well as participation are aligned with this section of the framework.

Demonstrating how different approaches to empirical research on understanding informed consent are related:

There are currently several methods in which human participants are approached in evaluations (Bossert & Strech, 2017). This is mainly in the form of semi-structured or standardised individual interviews. Although these methods are useful when testing and allowing for results to be generalised, on the other hand, methods such as focus groups can be useful in demonstrating understanding and gaining emotional cues from participants (Bossert & Strech, 2017). In addition, they allow participants to make comments on each other's statements, clear up misunderstandings, and discuss issues that are tough and polarizing. Thus combining different methods for ensuring comprehension proves useful for informed consent procedures (Bossert & Strech, 2017). This is relevant when accessing participants, the nature of evaluations, and access to knowledge and information.

Challenges to adjusting informed consent processes:

There is a general consensus on what constitutes true or valid informed consent, however, the challenge arises on how to ensure that this is maintained within studies. Furthermore, the

challenge is to ensure that revised informed consent procedures benefit or are aligned with ensuring autonomy of participants as well as being within legal, ethical, and regulatory frameworks across all stakeholders involved (Bossert & Strech, 2017). This section will guide the literature on ethics and informed consent, stakeholders in evaluations, the role of evaluators as well as the analysis based on the interview results and recommendations.

Incorporating participants in the review and updating of informed consent procedures:

Information is the driving force to ensure participants' informed consent. Prospective participants must have all necessary information about the goals, processes, risks, and rewards of the studies in which they are requested to partake in order to make autonomous consent decisions (Wiles et al., 2005). Information is often supplied by the various stakeholders in evaluations, which is then communicated with participants by evaluators. As a result, these stakeholders must be included in the preparation of informed consent documents in order to verify the accuracy and completeness of the information provided. In addition, they need to adhere to all applicable ethical and legal guidelines. This will then need to be documented in the relevant styles and formats suitable to the participants such as in language and different media formats. Similar to the section above, this correlates with ethics and informed consent, stakeholders in evaluations, the role of evaluators, and participation.

Finding and recruiting individuals of the target community in order to improve participatory consent:

Finding the relevant individual for participation is key for any form of research. Due to the nature of evaluations, it is often necessary to involve these parties to recruit the relevant participants such as community leaders, gatekeepers, and the stakeholders involved. In the same manner, to improve informed consent processes and documents, a selection of key participants would need to be involved in the process to help understand the nuances of informed consent in their context. This is to ensure that future processes have given autonomy back to participants based on the relevant requirements such as language,

comprehension levels, and modes of communication. The section on participation, voluntarism, and access to participants, power, pressure, and decision making is aligned to finding and recruiting individuals of the target community in order to improve participatory consent.

2.3 Nature of Evaluations

Evaluations are necessary for organisations to make deeper informed decisions or changes (Williams et al., 2011). Evaluations can be defined as the assessments of particular problems, environment, or sector as a whole which often leads to policy or practical implications (Williams et al., 2011). Evaluations are inherently meant to be relevant to their specific issue but still be able to achieve multiple goals and contribute to changes through policies, transformation, and governance (Naidoo, 2010).

In qualitative studies unlike empirical studies, the specific outcomes are usually not known at the beginning (Wiles et al 2005). Since qualitative research falls under scientific research, alternative processes for methodologies and analysis could render more complexities. This is further complicated by the research and ethical guidelines and regulations, particularly when dealing with participants (Bhattacharya, 2007). Evaluations, unlike research, are more focused on a particular sector or issue whereas research aims to have more generalizable outcomes (Williams et al., 2011). Furthermore, traditional research assumes a rigid relationship between researcher and participant (Hannigan Millstein et al., 1994). There should not be any disparities between research and evaluations in practice concerning informed consent (Beauchamp, 2011). Evaluations can be viewed as a form of research (Williams et al., 2011). Although informed consent is the legal, regulatory and ethical basis for participant decision making, it is often inferred and not guaranteed (Cavanaugh, Hopwood & Lambert, 2016). Decisions made affecting the public should balance the legal, regulatory, and ethical aspects and the need for policy changes (Rowe & Frewer, 2000).

In South Africa, evaluations are commonly referred to as Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) (Naidoo, 2010). Furthermore, evaluations are usually not objective as they can be influenced by their various stakeholders, donors, and sponsors (Emerson, 2020). Evaluations are

generally externally funded involving various stakeholders with support both financially and operationally (Emerson, 2020). As such, the nature of evaluations is rendered complex with different levels of socio-political involvement as well as the various accountabilities from the stakeholders, donors, and sponsors who aim to ensure that their investment is legitimised (Chesterton, 2003; Emerson, 2020; Williams, 2014). These stakeholders, donors, and sponsors are also known to exert power over evaluators and participants (Williams, 2014). This often leads to conflicts of interest amongst the various stakeholders, evaluators, and participants (Emerson, 2020; Naidoo, 2010, Williams, 2014). Ideally, evaluations and their results should cater to all stakeholders and those involved in a balanced manner (Naidoo, 2010).

Participation should be voluntary, unbiased, informed, and without any influences or forces (Rowe & Frewer, 2000). However, as evaluation and studies rely on significant participation, there may be various strategies in place to influence participation (Rowe & Frewer, 2000). These influences can lead to biases, involuntary participation, or even coercion. There are many reasons for improper consent procedures. Time constraints and financial limitations are the main reason for procedural importance over informed consent deliberations (Kaplan & Valerie, 2009; Rowe & Frewer, 2000).

The relationship between participants and evaluators is often hierarchical. This is due to evaluators being seen as experts by participants (a power dynamic) (Scott, 2013). Therefore the relationship may be viewed as potentially manipulative to participants particularly when decisions need to be made about participants or changes in policies (Scott, 2013). Informed consent is one solution to combating the power dynamic present (Scott, 2013). Informed consent involves the entire process of the evaluation (all information including outcomes of evaluations) presented to participants in order for them to make voluntary non-coerced decisions on their choice to participate. Furthermore, participants should be given options on how to consent in terms of formats, language, and various methods of communication applicable (Chess & Purcell, 1999; Scott, 2013).

2.4 The Role of Evaluators

Evaluators are essentially the link between stakeholders and participants. Their main function is to facilitate mutual communications and understandings (Baur et al., 2010; Hill et al., 2008). Managing cultures and personalities is another significant role for evaluators. Due to the nature and complexity of evaluations, stakeholders and participants often come with various issues that need to be managed (Chesterton, 2003; Naidoo, 2010). In order to ensure effective communications, minimize risks and conflicts amongst all parties, evaluators need to be prepared, transparent, and explicit in their roles (Baur et al., 2010; Naidoo, 2010). This is assisted by professional and industry ethical standards and regulations. These standards and regulations cover issues such as risks, conflicts, participation consent, confidentiality, and ensuring evaluations are completed in ethical manners (Williams, 2014).

Evaluators play a complex role as the main communicators in the consent process as well as their relationship with participants and stakeholders (Molyneuxa, Peshua & Marsh, 2004). It is their responsibility to ensure effective communication, adequate information is imparted and to ensure participants are aware of any consequences either present or in the future (Beauchamp, 2011). Evaluators can influence participation merely from their position as evaluators (Nelson & Merz, 2002). The quality of data and information extracted is dependent on the relationship between evaluator and participant (Bhattacharya, 2007). However, questions have been raised about the scope of the role of evaluators regarding the extent to which they are expected to protect participants from the process and consequences data collection.

As a participant's willingness to participate may change throughout the evaluation cycle, it is unfair to hold participants to the same consent agreements as at the beginning of the evaluations (Bhattacharya, 2007). This is also due to information changes as well as situational (economic, emotional, material, etc.) changes that may occur from the initiation of evaluations which do not always allow strict adherence to consent (Bhattacharya, 2007). Therefore as changes occur during the evaluation cycle, so should the process of consent (Bhattacharya, 2007).

Research in practice has proven that participants are not always provided with adequate information to make complete informed decisions (Kaplan & Bryan, 2009). It is the responsibility of evaluators to ensure that the right and complete information has been given to participants (Sreenivasan, 2003). As evaluators, participants, and stakeholders enter into a relationship for a common purpose (research, studies, or evaluations), the communication also becomes a shared responsibility between them (Sreenivasan, 2003). Evaluators have the responsibility of ensuring consent and that disclosures are adhered to at all levels and the use of the data thereafter (Wiles et al., 2005). Evaluators may not assume participation is voluntary. There are often other factors influencing the decision to participate (Chess & Purcell, 1999).

A significant responsibility of evaluators is to ensure an ethical process throughout the evaluation (Fisher, 2013; Scott, 2013; Wiles et al., 2005). As such, informed consent forms one of the main components, especially from vulnerable participants such as the elderly, youth, and children as well as those affected in any form structurally – economic, status, location amongst others (Fisher, 2013; Scott, 2013). This includes the entire evaluation process, not just their role as participants but the effects of evaluations or any foreseen changes that may affect participants – risks, benefits, alternatives, their rights, and any other implications (Fisher, 2013; Wiles et al., 2005). Similarly, participants should be able to comprehend their roles as participants and understand risks and benefits with all the information given (Fisher, 2013). However, evaluators may not always be able to ensure informed consent nor an ethical process due to legal and other regulatory frameworks they may be subjected to (Wiles et al., 2005).

2.5 Stakeholders in Evaluations

Stakeholders in evaluations refer to all the parties involved for the evaluation to be completed. This includes donors, sponsors, participants, governments, agents, communities,

and supporting organisations. The differences in backgrounds, experiences, and objectives as well as increased public interactions and interest in evaluations foster conflicts and increase evaluation challenges (Baur et al., 2010; Chesterton, 2003).

Stakeholders influence participants and each other through the use of gatekeepers and various uses of power and pressure strategies (Baur et al., 2010; Emerson, 2020; Tyldum, 2012). These tactics bring about ethical concerns, conflicts and may affect the participants either during the evaluations or by the use of the evaluation process (Baur et al., 2010; Emerson, 2020). However, stakeholders' pressure and powers may increase evaluation funding and entice the right types of participants (Emerson, 2020). This is particularly noteworthy within evaluations in less developed nations and their participants and how it will ultimately affect their communities or lives (Baur et al., 2010). Specifically, the issue of informed consent as influenced by stakeholders to participants needs to be further assessed (Williams, 2014).

Stakeholders can affect participation through power dynamics, information sharing, participant recruitment, complex procedures, time limitations and not allowing feedback from participants (Chess & Purcell, 1999). Furthermore, institutional, political, economic, legal, and environmental changes affect both stakeholders and participants (Wiles et al., 2005). Therefore, consent obtained from participants is not always adequately informed (IJsselmuiden & Faden, 1992).

Rowe & Frewer (2000) have noticed that stakeholders may deviate from evaluation results by way of not acting on analysis and results thereof but rather like the appearance of gathering data for decisions. This is further elaborated by focusing on stakeholder representations, selective stakeholder involvement as well as the selection of participants (Wester et al., 2003).

2.6 Informed Consent

Informed consent has been a major topic in ethics and research throughout the years with many regulations and guidelines put in place to ensure it is obtained (Bhutta, 2004; Josephson

& Smale, 2020). Obtaining valid informed consent is challenging (De Vries et al., 2020). The big overall question in research and evaluations is "Consent to what exactly?" (Miller & Boulton, 2007). According to these various authors (Calder et al., 2006; De Vries et al., 2020; Falagas et al., 2009; Fisher, 2013; Hill et al., 2008; IJsselmuiden & Faden, 1992; Josephson & Smale, 2020; Roberts, 2002; Scott, 2013; Wiles et al., 2005; Williams, 2014), whom all are in agreement, valid or true informed consent can only be obtained when the following are in place: consent is given voluntarily; participants are legal and able to receive and understand the information given; there is no power and pressure influences and participants are in environments that ensure confidentiality and the ability to ask questions as well as time to consider all available options. However, many of the guidelines and processes only emphasize voluntariness, confidentiality, and anonymity (Josephson & Smale, 2020).

The concept of informed consent was highlighted after the Second World War with the Nuremberg Code due to medical research malpractice and ethics and has remained the starting point when looking at consent procedures (Cassell & Young, 2002; Jegede, 2009; Molyneux et al., 2004; Rosenthal, 2006; Scott, 2013). This also brought about the awareness of power dynamics between participants and those conducting research or evaluations (Scott, 2013). It is currently broadly embedded in regulations, guidelines, ethical and legal considerations in research and studies involving public participation as an agreement to participate (Beauchamp, 2011; Hannigan Millstein et al., 1994; Cassell & Young, 2002; Rosenthal, 2006; Kaplan & Bryan, 2009). Furthermore, the current functions of informed consent are the focus on human rights, autonomy, and access to information (Beauchamp, 2011; Cassell & Young, 2002).

The procedure of informed consent in the form of documentation or oral agreements is more for institutions to meet their regulatory and legal obligations and not entirely to ensure informed consent to participants (Bhattacharya, 2007; Wiles et al., 2005; Kaplan & Bryan, 2009). Rather it should be about ensuring decision autonomy with complete information and valuation of risk and reward (Roberts, 2002; Rosenthal, 2006; Kaplan & Bryan, 2009). Additionally, informed consent should be a continuous, communicative process throughout evaluations (Boyd, 2015). However, there has not been a consensus on how to obtain

continuous consent (Manson, 2019). Whether it be every time the data is used or a broader consent method to account for future uses and the representation of the data (Manson, 2019; Wiles et al., 2005).

Informed consent is essential to ensure participant voluntariness as well as an understanding of the risks, benefits, and intentions of evaluations (Jegede, 2009; Scott, 2013; Sreenivasan, 2003). At its core, informed consent focuses on the concept of no maleficence (Kaplan & Bryan, 2009). Informed consent can be divided into two aspects according to Kaplan & Bryan (2009): autonomy and procedure. Autonomy refers to the participants' comprehension of all disclosed information as well as risks and benefits and thus consenting voluntarily and without any external factors (Kaplan & Bryan, 2009). In addition, it accounts for ethical considerations. Whereas procedure refers to the legal, policy, and institutional regulations that have to be upheld (Kaplan & Bryan, 2009).

Evaluators as the key communicators to participants have to clearly articulate all the required information, risks as well as possible decision outcomes (De Vries et al., 2020; Fisher, 2013). This is not only as set out according to guidelines and regulations but as an ethical duty too (Fisher, 2013). As stakeholders may become heavily involved or require specific outcomes, their power, and pressure strategies to obtain participants often neglect the need for proper consent procedures (Tyldum, 2012). In an ideal context of consent, it would be the responsibility of evaluators to intervene against instances of power, pressure, and persuasion (Kaplan & Bryan, 2009). Moreover, evaluators need to pay careful attention, particularly to those participants that may be vulnerable (socially or economically) or where full comprehension may be affected due to language and culture barriers or time constraints of the evaluation (Bhattacharya, 2007; De Vries et al., 2020; Jegede, 2009; Josephson & Smale, 2020; Kaplan & Bryan, 2009).

Informed consent is primarily based on a Western notion of consent framework and falls short in countries outside the Western systems (Jegede, 2009). This is particular in cultures, economic and social differences in their means of operations, understandings, and frameworks (Jegede, 2009). Moreover, as communication is nearly entirely through language,

the language barrier between the evaluators and the participants must be overcome (Jegede, 2009).

Informed consent is primarily a moral dilemma and not legal (Beauchamp, 2011; Kaplan & Bryan, 2009). Although the legality in conducting Evaluation is of assistance, it does, however, not include ethical consideration and rather focuses on the law (Beauchamp, 2011). As a result, the different interpretations of the consent form yield both formal and informal expectations (Bhattacharya, 2007). The emphasis on gaining informed consent over the procedure and its ramifications for participants and their communities promote the notion that evaluators will accomplish what they intended (Jegede, 2009). Furthermore, obtaining informed consent does not guarantee that it was done ethically (Jegede, 2009).

Ensuring informed consent is not simple (Wiles et al., 2005). In fact, informed consent is clearer in theory than practice (Wiles et al., 2005). Evaluators are also in most instances the ones who decipher whether a participant is deemed capable of consent (Kaplan & Bryan, 2009). A participant's ability to fully consent changes over time according to their current state of being (Kaplan & Bryan, 2009). In addition, current and projected future usage of the participant samples will largely determine the content of informed consent (Beauchamp, 2011). The obligation to reveal risks, benefits and alternatives is merely a reasonable extension of the prevailing obligation to disclose Evaluations in their totality (Beauchamp, 2011). Therefore, the notion that a signed consent form proves informed consent is not necessarily true (Beauchamp, 2011; Kaplan & Bryan, 2009).

Informed consent in practice is contested and complex to achieve (Boyd, 2015; Jegede, 2009; Molyneux et al., 2004). The complexities become apparent when working with participants from different social statuses, demographics, languages, and cultures (Jegede, 2009; Molyneux et al., 2004). Besides the above-mentioned complexities, politics at all levels is a key driver of the practicality of getting prior informed consent (Rosenthal, 2006). Fortunately, there are alternatives to obtaining consent, such as visual, aural, and other forms of digital acknowledgment practices (Molyneux et al., 2004).

2.7 Power, Pressure & Decision Making

Informed consent can only occur without any form of coercion (Kaplan & Bryan, 2009; Van Staden & Krüger, 2002). Power and pressure are inevitable due to the complexity and multiple stakeholder nature of evaluations. Power and pressure can be manifested in various forms from simple favourable persuasions to coercion or force (Tyldum, 2012). Power and pressure can be emotional, economic, or institutional and are often used as strategies, although they may also coincide with manipulation and deception. (Emerson, 2020; Tyldum, 2012). These can further be explicit such as monetary rewards for participation (or to access participants that may be scarce or hard to obtain) or subtle such as the use of guilt as well as differences in access to information (Emerson, 2020; Fisher, 2013; Tyldum, 2012). Although some form of power and pressure may be regarded as necessary to obtain participants they would not normally have access to, these actions may become unethical and often inhibit true informed consent (Tyldum, 2012).

The exertion of power and pressure on participants may not entirely come from stakeholders but is executed by evaluators as a result (Tyldum, 2012). This is also known as 'application of pressure' and 'power sharing' due to the multi-stakeholder nature of evaluations, different stakeholders will exert these strategies in their manners that will affect the whole (Emerson, 2020). These strategies and application thereof may not always be intentional by evaluators (Emerson, 2020; Tyldum, 2012). Pressures in the form of incentives (monetary or otherwise) have bearing on voluntarism (Roberts, 2002). Although a participant may have all available information, comprehend and act voluntarily, they may still be consenting under some form of influence unknowingly (Roberts, 2002).

While other authors defend the need to apply some form of power or pressure to obtain the "right" participants or direct results or decisions, it is generally viewed as an issue within evaluations (Tyldum, 2012; Williams, 2014). The exertion of power and pressure reduces participants' ability to consent freely (Tyldum, 2012). This is particularly noted with respondents where power and pressure from communities and stakeholders are used to

access participants that they would normally not have access to (Tyldum, 2012). Aside from informed consent, power as a pressure strategy can also be viewed as a risk to participants (Tyldum, 2012). The risk may be direct to the participant or as a result of the evaluation decisions thereafter.

Informed consent necessitates respect for autonomy (Faden & Beauchamp, 1988). Evaluations or any form of study involving participants should be based on respect. In particular, respect for participants' autonomy. This type of respect considers participants as free agents (Manson, 2019). As such participants have the right to not be deceived, pressured, or misinformed in any form (Manson, 2019). The ethical principle at the heart of informed consent is that if an evaluator or stakeholders wants to do something that would violate the other participant's rights, then participants should be allowed to make an informed decision about any proposed instances (Manson, 2019). Although they may not be explicit responsibilities to enforce participant autonomy, there are local onuses to regard autonomy in order for participation to occur (Manson, 2019). In addition, general respect for participants can balance autonomy (Lurvey et al., 1996).

Bhattacharya (2007) argues that even allowing participants to negotiate their terms in the consent process is overshadowed by the power dynamics and relationships amongst participants and those conducting studies through traditional and western notions of the process. Relationships are formed between participants, evaluators, and stakeholders before, during, and often after evaluations. It is common that the relationship between evaluator and participant to be seen as hierarchical whereby the evaluators and stakeholders have power over participants (Scott, 2013). The power dynamics can be seen as relational and may change along the life cycle of the evaluation (Scott, 2013). Participant vulnerability to coercion and influences in evaluations is due to factors such as social status, culture, and demographics, as well as the need or use for programs (Nelson & Merz, 2002). Other forms of influences that can be considered occur from friends, family, and peers. This may be due to their proximity to participants, relationships, and other pressures that may be present (Nelson & Merz, 2002).

Nelson and Merz (2002) identified three types of influence that evaluators can apply: coercion, persuasion, and manipulation. These influences can be described along the axis of control, information, and choices. Control refers to the evaluators' or stakeholders' position that may influence participants' decision to consent (Jegede, 2009). This is particularly observed when vulnerable participants are involved and the act may be seen as a form of coercion (Nelson & Merz, 2002). Persuasion is considered by the use of information and how and what is shared, especially considering the type of relationship formed between participant and evaluators (Nelson & Merz, 2002; Roberts, 2002). Manipulation can be perceived when participant choices are limited, manipulation of information, psychological, and through compensation options (Nelson & Merz, 2002). As decision-making is ultimately a combination of information and options, participants are not able to voluntarily consent when there are influences present (Nelson & Merz, 2002).

Decision-making affects informed consent. Whether it is decisions made by stakeholders or the decision to participate in the M&E process. Decision-making is an action based on information, options, and relationships (Jegede, 2009; Nelson & Merz, 2002). According to Jegede (2009), decision-making is possible through four types of actions namely: instinctively, logically, ignorantly, and contextually. These actions are influenced by information available and shared (Jegede, 2009). Decision-making is further a function of one's social-economic status, geodemographic and cultural backgrounds, and the ability to comprehend, as well as laws and regulations (Roberts, 2002). Subsequently, these are also the fundamentals considered in order for informed consent to be valid (Roberts, 2002). Additionally, factors such as the uniqueness, complexity, and timing of evaluations are also considered when making a decision (Roberts, 2002).

Globally, communities are concerned about their autonomy (Rosenthal, 2006). Autonomy is based on freedom of choice, comprehension, intentions, and lack of power and pressure strategies (Faden & Beauchamp, 1988). The informed consent process prioritizes the protection of participant autonomy and rights in studies (IJsselmuiden & Faden, 1992). The ethics regulations and review processes often allow subtle forms of power due to the focus on explicit practices of influences and coercion (Fisher, 2013). This is further highlighted as

social structures are not considered as a result of the focus on specific individuals and studies during consent processes (Fisher, 2013). Concealed methodologies or evaluation procedures are a violation of trust (Wiles et al., 2005). These could be considered inducements or incentives, and they could be considered a sort of coercion that affects the voluntary nature of research involvement (Wiles et al., 2005). The use of payments, as well as other reward strategies and their appropriateness, is currently not regulated and there is no consensus on their use (Wiles et al., 2005). It's even more challenging when members are from low-income groups or if participation can put them in a financial bind (Wiles et al., 2005). The expansion of what is considered coercion will be required to include structural risks (Fisher, 2013).

Evaluators cannot control the types of power or pressure being exerted by stakeholders (Fisher, 2013; Williams et al., 2011). They can, however, attempt to manage the flow of information more transparently as well as try to eliminate the amount of power and pressure exerted on participants (Williams et al., 2011). There is a need to acknowledge all the variant types of power and pressure methods to address the informed consent of participants (Tyldum, 2012).

2.8 Access to Participants

Access to participants has been a long-standing issue in both research and evaluations (Tyldum, 2012). Access to participants has always been correlated to the population and sampling methods or techniques (Tyldum, 2012). Additionally, social and economic backgrounds for both participants, evaluators and the various stakeholders play an important role in participation as well as the relationships amongst the participants, stakeholders, and evaluations as a whole (Fisher, 2013; Miller & Boulton, 2007).

Some participants are interested in the studies or evaluations, others for the benefits, and some because they were pressured to either by their organisations or communities. However, many studies and evaluations assume that participants should partake to contribute to them

(Tyldum, 2012). Thus use of power and pressure strategies are used to attract those that would not normally participate or are more difficult to obtain (Fisher, 2013). Furthermore, Tyldum (2012) observed those with higher social standing (in terms of education, health, income) to be more willing to participate than those with lower social standing. Additionally, the use of power and pressure strategies, particularly economic benefits, does not always attract the required participants (Tyldum, 2012). Although power and pressure strategies should not be used in evaluations, it does occur and brings about the issues of informed consent and true voluntary participation as a result (Fisher, 2013; Tyldum, 2012).

Participants should be a comprehensive representation of the sample population (Rowe & Frewer, 2000). In order to achieve true representation, members of all affected communities, including those in other countries, should be included (Rowe & Frewer, 2000). This, however, comes with political challenges as well as securing all possible viewpoints from the selected participants (Rowe & Frewer, 2000). Additionally, where applicable, participants should be a part of the evaluation process as early in its conception as possible (Rowe & Frewer, 2000).

When recruiting participants that may be difficult to access, the way in which information is shared is particularly crucial as well as liaising with community leaders, guardians, relatives, and gatekeepers (Mosavel et al, 2005; Wiles et al., 2005, Calder et al., 2006; Wiles et al., 2005). Although they may not necessarily have authority over persons, they can influence participation, access to location and in some instances have legal responsibility for the participants (Mosavel et al, 2005; Wiles et al., 2005). The community-based participatory research model (CBPR) recognises and places the need for collaboration with the different types of communities involved when conducting social research (Mosavel et al, 2005). At its core, CBPR involves servicing these communities through actions and change whilst providing research (Mosavel et al, 2005). Although a useful model to consider when participants are involved, it may not apply to all methodologies and intentions of studies (Mosavel et al, 2005). Moreover, communities may detect a pattern of researchers and stakeholders exploiting participants' disadvantages to justify additional funding or political agendas with no benefits to the community (Mosavel et al, 2005; Rosenthal, 2006). This is a rising issue in low-income or developing nations especially when service delivery in many such nations is already

problematic (Mosavel et al, 2005). Furthermore, this highlights the need for a better and more transparent relationship between stakeholders, researchers or evaluators, and participants and their communities (Kaplan & Bryan, 2009; Mosavel et al, 2005).

Participants are more likely to make sound decisions when they do not have worries as a result of socio-economic issues (Manson, 2019). Compensation is a method of attracting participants, especially those that would be hard to access. Compensation does not only have to be monetary but may come in other forms of benefits such as food, gifts, and various reward incentives (Wiles et al., 2005). However, economically disadvantaged participants may be compelled to participate to receive the compensation benefits (Fisher, 2013). This can result in participants choosing to participate due to misrepresentations and misinterpretations in order to be compensated or benefit from evaluations (Jegede, 2009). There needs to be a balance between remuneration and incentives for conducting studies and participants (Molyneux et al., 2004). Molyneuxa, Peshua & Marsh (2004) observed a 'therapeutic misconception' that participants consenting to evaluations does that necessarily mean that they will directly benefit from the outcomes of the evaluation. Many participants, depending on a variety of reasons, are already known to make decisions with questionable reasoning and motivations. Thus, the expectation of informed consent is already challenged (Boyd, 2015).

The use of the English language (and other Western notions) for many non-English participants is still a concern for studies presently (Bhattacharya, 2007). As language is the main form of communication, consent forms and written information would be best suited in participants' primary language use along with adequate time for them to assess and understand what they will be contributing to (Jegede, 2009). Additionally, not acknowledging the different ways in which participants can retain information is equivalent to disregarding their realities (Bhattacharya, 2007; Moseley et al., 2006). Consequently, there is a question of whose knowledge should be used as a standard? Furthermore, when technical terms and instructions such as those pertaining to evaluations of specific programs and projects, should be in simple understandable terms for participants (Jegede, 2009; Paasche-Orlow et al., 2003). In addition, the use of various other mediums of communication should be deployed

such as the use of technology, multimedia, and verbal communications to accompany written consent documents (Falagas et al., 2009).

The education levels of participants are important in their decisions to participate (Fisher, 2013; Jegede, 2009; Kaplan & Bryan, 2009). Furthermore, the varying language, cultural, physiological, religious, and other socio-economic factors between evaluators and each participant also play a role in their decision to participate (Chess & Purcell, 1999; Faden & Beauchamp, 1988; Falagas et al., 2009; Fisher, 2013; Jegede, 2009; Kaplan & Bryan, 2009; Roberts, 2002; Sreenivasan, 2003). Approaching the consent process with these factors in mind is vital to maintain stakeholder expectations as well as terminologies used by evaluators that are targeted towards specific results (Chess & Purcell, 1999). It is also worth noting the different decision-making styles presented between men and women where women are seen to deem collaboration, relationships, and community more important in decision making and men on rules, regulations, and being assertive in decision making (Roberts, 2002). There needs to be a recognition of these factors as well as effective communication amongst evaluator, stakeholder, and participant relationships (Jegede, 2009; Kaplan & Bryan, 2009).

It is essential therefore essential to ensure the following as part of the consent process for participation: participants are aware of their risk and benefits by participating as well as their available options to withdraw when necessary; they fully comprehend the intentions of the evaluations, its methodologies, and potential results or outcomes if necessary and they have full autonomy and sufficient time to consider all information provided (Falagas et al., 2009; Gudowsky & Bechtold, 2020; Kaplan & Bryan, 2009; Sreenivasan, 2003; Wiles et al., 2005).

2.9 Voluntariness

One essential aspect of achieving informed consent is participant voluntarism (Lurvey et al., 1996; Roberts, 2002). Voluntarism is the action or decision done free from external influence and with intention (Nelson & Merz, 2002; Roberts, 2002). It is the ability to make a choice considering all available information and options (Jegede, 2009; Nelson & Merz, 2002). Voluntary participation in evaluations is contingent on the respondents' ability to

comprehend not only the research's significance but also its potential influence on their life (Jegede, 2009).

There are various factors that can affect a participant's voluntarism. These may be their environment; relationships with communities, evaluators, and stakeholders; socioeconomic and psychological issues, cultural and religious practices, the ability to understand as well as the presented process for making decisions (Lurvey et al., 1996; Nelson & Merz, 2002; Roberts, 2002). The criteria change depending on the nature of the decision when considering impacts on the ability for voluntarism as well as participant's personal experience (Roberts, 2002). Furthermore, time allocation for deciding along with participants' willingness to engage, their ability to withdraw without negative consequences can also affect participants' voluntarism with respect to consent (Joubert et al., 2003; Nelson & Merz, 2002; Roberts, 2002).

Voluntarism is understood as a natural state with its ideologies that stem from individual psychological factors (Roberts, 2002). Ethically and legally voluntarism signifies respect for participants and their autonomy (Roberts, 2002). Voluntarism is seen as a test of willpower (Nelson & Merz, 2002). A key responsibility to obtaining true informed consent is obtaining a voluntary agreement whilst providing enough information as well as participants having or the perception of a variety of choices (Falagas et al., 2009; Fisher, 2013; Sreenivasan, 2003). In institutional contexts, it is common to deny participants the right to choose (Wiles et al., 2005). In addition, any form of influence or coercion disqualifies voluntarism and thus consent (Fisher, 2013; Lurvey et al., 1996).

There are few studies on voluntarism and how it affects participants in decision-making (Nelson & Merz, 2002). This is shown in the lack of a consistent nor suitable method for assessing voluntarism as well as vague laws (Lurvey et al., 1996; Nelson & Merz, 2002; Roberts, 2002).

2.10 Participation in Evaluations

Current practices are giving more significance to how decisions are made. A key component of this is the inclusion of all stakeholders in decision making particularly in politics and governmental decisions (Gudowsky & Bechtold, 2020; Rowe & Frewer, 2000). Public participation refers to a set of methods for consulting, involving, and informing the public so that individuals who are affected by a decision can have a say in it (Rowe & Frewer, 2000). A reason for the rise in public participation is believed to stem from the recognition of fundamental human rights and procedural justice (Rowe & Frewer, 2000). Despite this, participation is merely an act of involvement with the decision-making powers in the hands of the various stakeholders and not the participants (Wester et al., 2003). It is noted that many perceive participation as successful through their desired results (Chess & Purcell, 1999). However, participation success should rather be determined by its process (Chess & Purcell, 1999). This is to ensure autonomy, fairness, and information sharing (Chess & Purcell, 1999). Furthermore, the focus on participation diverts attention away from very genuine social and economic disparities between participants and their need for service deliveries, resources, and opportunities (Wester et al., 2003).

Participants choose to participate for various reasons. Some of the main ones are: as an obligation, potential benefits, and the relationship with stakeholders, evaluators, and within their communities (Nelson & Merz, 2002). In contrast, denial or hesitation in participation can be from lack of trust with stakeholders, risk factors, and disinterest in the studies, and fear of beneficial loss (Nelson & Merz, 2002). The lowest rates of participants are observed to be from Africans, women, the elderly, minorities, the youth as well as those with a lower level of education and income (Nelson & Merz, 2002). Participants with limited resources are more susceptible to being enticed to participate (Nelson & Merz, 2002).

Participation can be flexible and is not determined by consenting alone (Bhattacharya, 2007; Lurvey et al., 1996). Participation involves understanding the inconsistencies that arise from the formal consent process and how the relationship between stakeholders and participants can influence participation (Bhattacharya, 2007). Despite a given consent, there need to be consistent and constant discussions about participation expectations and the option to withdraw at any point during evaluation processes (Bhattacharya, 2007; Wiles et al., 2005).

Participation can be done through the use of devices such as digitally through surveys and questionnaires or through interviews, focus groups, and community engagements (Rowe & Frewer, 2000). There are two levels to participation according to Rowe & Frewer (2000): low-level participation which is characterised by top-down or single flow communication from stakeholders to participants and a high level where the participants are in dialogue with stakeholders.

An important aspect of participation is information and how information is shared as well as understood (Gudowsky & Bechtold, 2020; Rosenthal, 2006). As participants vary in social, economic, cultural, and other demographic statuses, their capacities to retain information are also dependent on how it was presented (Gudowsky & Bechtold, 2020; Jegede, 2009; Moseley et al., 2006; Rowe & Frewer, 2000). Participants should have access to all the information they need to do their weigh their options (Rowe & Frewer, 2000). Although many focus on written consent for participation, the use of verbal, visual, audio, and various other multimedia option has shown a greater increase in information retention and comprehension (Moseley et al., 2006).

2.11 Access to Knowledge and Information

Risks due to information and data exchange occur at the reporting stage to the various stakeholders as well as the decision-making stage for participants and their communities (Williams, 2014; Miller & Boulton, 2007). Furthermore, due to the nature of evaluations, multiple stakeholders, the differences in cultures, fosters, and power levels, concerns regarding access and ownership of information need to be acknowledged (Williams et al., 2011). Although participants are not too concerned with feedback from evaluations, their results present information required for policy, societal and communal changes that may affect participants either directly or indirectly (Tyldum, 2012; Williams, 2014). Hence, evaluators are often pressured into limiting the communication of certain results to participants (Williams, 2014; Williams et al., 2011). Additionally, there are usually constraints on data obtained from evaluations, and results from evaluations have the potential to cause conflicts amongst stakeholders and evaluators (Hannigan Millstein et al., 1994; Naidoo, 2010;

Tyldum, 2012; Williams, 2014). These are important to acknowledge as they ultimately will affect informed consent as well as ethical considerations should evaluators not be able to fully assimilate information to participants for evaluations (Hill et al., 2008).

Knowledge is required to make decisions and learning is the prerequisite for acquitting that knowledge (Gudowsky & Bechtold, 2020). Knowledge is not the same as information (Gudowsky & Bechtold, 2020). Knowledge is not homogeneous; it comes from a variety of sources. (Gudowsky & Bechtold, 2020). The different types and qualities of knowledge contribute to participation (Gudowsky & Bechtold, 2020). One of the goals of evaluations is to bring together these different types of knowledge in order to solve some of the world's issues. (Gudowsky & Bechtold, 2020). As a result, any method that aims to encourage decisions must provide information (Gudowsky & Bechtold, 2020).

Information is a fundamental and crucial component of informed consent regarding participants (Gudowsky & Bechtold, 2020). The following characteristics of information should be considered in the participation process: how the information is presented, education levels of participants, time available to consider and discussions of information as well as who decides the information to be shared (Gudowsky & Bechtold, 2020; Wiles et al., 2005). Prospective participants are influenced by the styles and methods by which information is provided (Kaplan & Bryan, 2009; Nelson & Merz, 2002; Wiles et al., 2005). The term "sufficient information" refers to the information that an objective person would need to make a decision (Kaplan & Bryan, 2009). Information of evaluations should include: details about the evaluations and their potential outcomes, all possible options available to participants, any benefits of any kind, all risks involved in participation as well as the option to not participate (Kaplan & Bryan, 2009; Lurvey et al., 1996). This is also known as material information (Lurvey et al., 1996). In addition, the level of detail and information that will be provided should not be solely determined by the stakeholders but also consider participants' autonomy and their right to be informed (Boyd, 2015). It's important to avoid giving out information in a way that discourages people from participating (Wiles et al., 2005). Inaccurate information, as well as power imbalances between the researcher and the subjects, may put participants at risk (Jegede, 2009).

The purpose of divulging information is to provide a basic understanding of the procedures (Sreenivasan, 2003). As a result, the desire to achieve proper comprehension is inextricably linked to the need for transparency (Sreenivasan, 2003). Comprehension of information by participants can be achieved when they are provided with adequate information in their language of choice, sufficient time to assess the information as well as the chance to clear up any misunderstandings (Falagas et al., 2009). A major issue with information sharing is what precise information should be provided to which participants in which contexts and under what conditions (Hannigan Millstein et al., 1994). If participants are properly informed, many decisions can thus also be better informed and their knowledge foundation more reliable (Chess & Purcell, 1999).

The consenting process along with participation are fragile concepts for producing knowledge (Bhattacharya, 2007). However, identifying which methods of imparting information to participants work best with participants can improve the informed consent conversations (Gudowsky & Bechtold, 2020; Moseley et al., 2006; Rowe & Frewer, 2000). Thus a solution would be adopting various methods that accompany and increase repetition of written consent forms to improve information sharing, retention, and comprehension (Gudowsky & Bechtold, 2020; Moseley et al., 2006; Sreenivasan, 2003; Wiles et al., 2005). The method can include visuals and audio (Moseley et al., 2006). Furthermore, this can improve communication and strengthen relationships between participants, evaluators, and stakeholders (Moseley et al., 2006). Nonetheless, the type of information presented cannot be directly linked to adequate comprehension (Falagas et al., 2009).

Participant environment; relationships with communities, evaluators, and stakeholders; socioeconomic and psychological issues, cultural, political, and religious practices all have a role in moulding individuals' perceptions and, as a result, the way they respond (Gudowsky & Bechtold, 2020). In addition, there needs to be a consideration of evaluation objectives, balance stakeholder interest, and participant's best interests outside of legal and regulatory frameworks (Wiles et al., 2005). The reasons for organizing and listening to participatory studies vary, but there is a universal idea that taking into account a variety of viewpoints can

lead to better decisions (Gudowsky & Bechtold, 2020). There are certain studies such as ethnographic and observational evaluations that may purposefully disclose selective information in order to achieve specific outcomes or extract specific responses (Wiles et al., 2005). In addition, some specific researchers view withholding information as the only option to solicit data from participants (Wiles et al., 2005). On the contrary, the inability to recognize and extract specific data might be a sign of the limitations of the evaluations process (Bhattacharya, 2007).

2.12 Ethics and Informed Consent in Evaluations

Ethics is a fundamental concept not only for daily decisions but especially when research and evaluations are being conducted. Ethics in evaluations should not only comply with written standards and guidelines but consider all other factors such as power, pressures, and benefits or harms that may arise (Fisher, 2013; Josephson & Smale, 2020; Williams et al., 2011). Furthermore, ethics is a continual process that should be observed at each step of evaluation (Josephson & Smale, 2020).

Ethics within evaluations has received much less attention due to the nature of evaluations (Williams, 2014). Although many evaluations comply with the general research guidelines and standards, these may not always be optimal for evaluations and their outcomes (Williams, 2014; Williams, Guenther & Arnott, 2011; Miller & Boulton, 2007; Chesterton, 2003). The multi-stakeholders' involvement fosters conflict and risks which further may highlight ethical dilemmas within evaluations (Williams, 2014; Miller & Boulton, 2007)**.** Ethical standards and guidelines accentuate the need for informed consent about access to information and the use of data or results (Josephson & Smale, 2020; Tyldum, 2012). The question is whether ethical research rules recognized in one region of the world can be applied to different cultural scenarios (IJsselmuiden & Faden, 1992).

The ethics of social research and medical research are very similar (Wiles et al., 2005). The Nuremberg Code served as the ethical foundation for all human studies and established that before participants can freely consent to procedures, they must be advised of the risks and

implications (IJsselmuiden & Faden, 1992; Lurvey et al., 1996; Scott, 2013). The true value of informed consent in terms of ethics is to reassure participants that no form of harm will be caused, neither will they be deceived nor coerced in any form (Boyd, 2015). Practically, the reassurance comes in the form of accurate and adequate information, time to consider, and the ability to opt-out without consequence (Boyd, 2015).

The current ethical guidelines and regulations are based on a self-regulatory structure and thus they are not often enforceable due to voluntary acceptance of these guidelines and regulations (Wiles et al., 2005). Furthermore, they are purposefully vague, allowing researchers to interpret them in ways that best suit their needs (Wiles et al., 2005). It is unethical to impose the same informed consent criteria across all research type settings (Boyd, 2015). At the centre of ethical guidelines are the participant's right to privacy (protection of their data) as well as the link between the individual risk and the broader communal benefit of intellectual work (Hannigan Millstein et al., 1994). The current ethical guidelines are ineffective with how to obtain consent and thus have had many processes unmonitored (J. & A., 2002). There need to be allocations in the current ethical guidelines and regulations to allow for uncertainties that occur in qualitative studies (Bhattacharya, 2007). Boyd (2014) and Jegede (2009) suggest that ethics committees be selected based on their location and not necessarily institutions in order to avoid conflicts of interest.

Obtaining informed consent from participants does not constitute that the study is ethical (Rosenthal, 2006). Rosenthal (2006) and Scott (2013) notes that ethical studies have the following characteristics: produces valuable knowledge, is based on scientific evidence, fairly select participants have a positive risk-to-benefit ratio, is subjected to independent reviews, ensures that participants' privacy is protected and that their well-being is monitored and requires to have consented voluntarily. Although evaluators' ethics approval is becoming more common among client companies, the standards for ethical practice can sometimes lead to unethical conditions (Scott, 2013). Improving the informed consent procedure, on the other hand, is not the same as improving research ethics (Fisher, 2013). Therefore, there needs to be an expansion about what constitutes ethical research (Fisher, 2013).

Various perspectives on research ethics are available (Wiles et al., 2005). The ethical issues that arise in social research vary depending on the situation (Wiles et al., 2005). The ethics of research conducted where participants are not fully aware they are being studied is still not clear and contested (Wiles et al., 2005). However, the increase in ensuring informed consent from participants and ethical governance has reduced the ability for studies to continue with covert evaluations (Wiles et al., 2005).

2.13 Conclusions

There are many ways to develop policies, organisational and national changes. One such is through the use of evaluations (Wester et al., 2003). Evaluations often require human participation in order to gain more data on a programme or project and to further make decisions. In order for participation to occur, participants must give their consent voluntarily, free from coercion, and with a complete understanding of the information provided in order to consent. However, obtaining informed consent is a challenge brought about by the relationships between evaluators, stakeholders, and participants as well as power and pressure strategies that arise due to the complexities of these relationships.

The foundation for preserving participant autonomy is informed consent (Boyd, 2015). A necessity for informed consent requires relevant and adequate information disclosures that enable a specific consent decision to be made (Manson, 2019). Participants consider all contextual factors such as social, economic, procedure and compensations when consenting and not simply the structural risks and coercions presented (Fisher, 2013). In addition, as a requirement for legitimate consent, adequate comprehension is required (Sreenivasan, 2003). This is to ensure that participants are protected and can refuse participation (Sreenivasan, 2003). Furthermore, informed consent necessitates more than just the ability to give consent (Staden & Krüger, 2002). Boyd (2014) observed that the current consent procedures can act as a filter of participants and thus distort the true representation of populations.

Coercion occurs when the evaluators or stakeholders have power over participants making them vulnerable to that relationship (Fisher, 2013). Depending on the type of research and

the nature of the relationship, coercion could take many forms (Fisher, 2013). Nevertheless, the power dynamics can be balanced by providing participants with information about the research to help them make educated decisions (Scott, 2013).

Informed consent is a prerequisite of research ethics (Sreenivasan, 2003). Ethically, the legitimacy of a person's consent is contingent on his or her ability to comprehend the information (Sreenivasan, 2003). Researchers may encounter an ethical challenge in determining how much information is appropriate for participants (Falagas et al., 2009). Further, due to the nature of evaluations, evaluators may be placed in positions to act unethically.

This research study seeks to contribute to the current literature on informed consent in order to motivate changes in evaluation frameworks and governance. The following chapter will outline the methodology used for data collection and analysis through the use of interviews as well as provide recommendations for future research.

Chapter 3: Research Design and Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This paper will be undertaking a qualitative and exploratory design which will allow for the researcher to better understand the role of stakeholders and their influence in informed consent through the perspectives and lived realities of evaluators, industry experts, researchers, and academics as well as those currently working in organisations that have been evaluated. This approach will be best suited for the study as a qualitative approach uses first-hand accounts in the form of words to explore, describe or identify concepts and themes (Hill et al., 2008). Therefore, allowing the researcher to better understand the research problem.

Primary data will be collected through the use of interviews. The semi-structured nature of the questions will allow for the researcher to discover the underlying topics and issues within evaluations and informed consent. This will allow for the researcher to determine both the dominant as well as the dormant patterns of meaning.

The analysis of the data will be prepared using an inductive approach. During an inductive analysis, the researcher approaches the study by looking at a specific scenario and aims to apply it more broadly. This will be suitable as it will allow for the identification of common themes that may emerge from the insights garnered from the participants. These themes can ultimately be used to develop a theory around informed consent and stakeholders in evaluations.

This chapter details the research methodology and philosophy used for this study. It will provide information on the sampling design and research instrument. Furthermore, the method of data collection and data analysis techniques that were deliberated.

3.2 Research Approach

This paper undertook a qualitative and exploratory design which allowed us to better understand the role of stakeholders and their influence in informed consent through the perspectives and lived realities of evaluators, industry experts, researchers, and academics as well as those currently working in organisations that have been evaluated.

The advancements of social sciences and qualitative research in today's world have aided in the study and resolution of social problems. When examining a phenomenon, you must first understand the circumstances that influenced it as each occurrence is unique due to the circumstances that led to it. Typically, problem-solving approaches are subjective and qualitative. An ontological qualitative approach was chosen and undertaken as it best investigates processes in their natural occurrences to capture experiences of individuals, communities, and their interrelated relationships as well as the major data collection tool is the researcher (Teherani, Martimianakis, Stenfors-Hayes, Wadhwa & Varpio, 2015). Furthermore, a constructivist paradigm was applied to allow for the diversity of responses due to the range of participants interviewed as well as to build on the literature of informed consent in evaluations. Constructivists think that reality is made up of individual and communal experiences as there is no such thing as a single reality. Moreover, it is difficult to extrapolate one outcome to other similar scenarios. This approach was best suited for the study as a qualitative approach uses first-hand accounts in the form of words to explore, describe or identify concepts and themes (Hill et al., 2008). Therefore, allowing the researcher to better understand the research problem.

Primary data was collected through the use of interviews. The semi-structured nature of the questions allowed for the researcher to discover the underlying topics and issues within evaluations and informed consent. This allowed the researcher to determine both the dominant as well as the dormant patterns and themes.

The analysis of the data was prepared using an inductive approach. During an inductive analysis, the researcher approaches the study by looking at a specific scenario and aims to

apply it more broadly. Thematic analysis is a method of analysing qualitative data that entails the identification of themes or patterns that arose from the data collection. This was suitable as it allowed for the identification of common themes that may emerge from the insights garnered from the participants. These themes can then be used to develop a theory around informed consent and stakeholders in evaluations.

3.3 Description of the Sample Interviewed

The interview sample consisted of nine individuals from various institutions who are currently employed as evaluators, have worked in evaluation, or are currently working as researchers within the evaluation environment. There were seven females and two males who participated in the interview. The nine participants have been working in evaluations for an average of ten years with more than 243 evaluations conducted amongst them. The interviews were 45 minutes to an hour-long via a digital platform, Zoom. There were 15 questions prepared for the interviewees, and not all were answered due to time limitations as well as the flow of conversation or relevancy of responses.

3.4 Research Design

3.4.1 Target Population

An accurate determination of the target population is not only important for the generalisability of the study but also to ensure accuracy when testing. The target population for this study was evaluators, industry experts, researchers, and academics as well as those currently working in organisations that have been evaluated.

3.4.2 Sample Frame

The sampling frame was evaluators, industry experts, researchers, and academics as well as those currently working in organisations that have been evaluated. The participants were specifically sourced through the Monitoring and Evaluation Organisations in South Africa;

Research Institutions well as Academic Staff from higher education institutions in South Africa who are subject matter experts.

3.4.3 Sample Size

The sample size is important as it influences the accuracy of the study. As a qualitative approach will be undertaken, the target sample size was between 12 and 15 evaluators, industry experts, researchers, and academics, and those currently working in organisations that have been evaluated were approached. The sample aimed to comprise of four to five evaluators, four to five members who are working in organisations that have been evaluated, and four to five industry experts or academics. Once the relevant target population was approached for interviews, the sample that agreed to be interviewed were nine.

3.4.4 Sampling Method

The sampling method was non-probability using purposive sampling. Purposive sampling, also referred to as judgemental or expert sampling, was used for participant selection as participants from this population were harder to locate or unwilling to participate without encouragement from a source that they trust. Sampling also required specific individuals for participation and hence sourcing respondents was based on being resourceful (Wagner et al., 2012). Moreover, as the target population is already currently limited, this method was the most cost-effective and time-effective. The participants specifically were sourced through Monitoring and Evaluation Organisations in South Africa, Research Institutions as well as Academic Staff from higher education institutions in South Africa who are subject matter experts.

3.4.5 Data Collection Technique

Primary data collection was conducted through individual interviews from evaluators, industry experts, researchers, and academics as well as those currently working in organisations that have been evaluated. They were contacted via email with details of the

research, ethical considerations, and clearance as well as participation consent and a fact sheet. The participants that agreed via email were then scheduled for interviews via Zoom. Participants were verbally informed of their choice to partake, that they would be recorded, and could end the interviews at any point. Participants also verbally agreed to be recorded before the commencement of interviews.

3.4.6 Measurement Instrument

A measurement instrument is a method in which a researcher obtains their data. This research collected data through individual interviews via a digital platform, Zoom. The interviews took approximately 45 minutes each. The meetings were recorded and then transcribed and edited for analysis. In order to ensure anonymity and confidentiality, the names of participants and any company details were removed or changed as previously discussed with participants.

The interviews consisted of the below semi-structured questions (see appendix 1) to determine the influence stakeholders have on informed consent to participants. The questions were structured in accordance with the literature to ensure that the research question and objectives would be answered. The opening questions addressed the demographics of the participants and their roles in Evaluations. Questions one to four, 14, and 15 looked at the nature of evaluations, the role of stakeholders and evaluators as well as how consent is ensured in evaluations. Questions five to 13 looked at the influences of stakeholders on participants and mechanisms of protection for both participants and evaluators.

3.4.7 Data Analysis

Data analysis involves the process of converting raw data collected into valuable information. The data was collected, processed, and analysed using thematic content analysis. As the study is an exploratory one, dependent on the interpretation of the evaluators, the thematic

analysis would be suitable to draw broad insights that may help to understand the phenomenon at hand.

A thematic content analysis was used to analyse the interview data. The themes from the results are in conjunction with the literature as well as the conceptual framework. The analysis procedure consisted of the following steps: transcription, editing, interpretations, and generalisation with theme outlines.

Transcription:

The interviews were conducted via the digital platform Zoom. The platform allowed for recordings. The recordings were then transcribed per question using a transcribing app online as well as playback of recordings for accuracy of words and phrases.

Editing:

The transcribed document was then further edited for grammatical errors and grouped according to responses from the questions. This was then summarised into one document and grouped to highlight the key responses to be analysed further into themes (see appendix 2)

Interpretations and Analysis:

The analysis and interpretations of the responses were based on the previous literature and conceptual framework to obtain similarities and themes.

Themes:

The themes were adapted from the summary, interpretation, and analysis. The themes are also factored in the key points from previous literature. These will then be used for recommendations.

3.5 Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations in research are vital to ensure that the potential respondents or participants are not in any form harmed by the researcher or the research and its findings. Informed consent, anonymity, and confidentiality are crucial to ensure a balanced research outcome. Only participants who were approached and volunteered became part of the research. The participants were informed about the research, its data collection methods, and the intended use of the research (Kongolo, 2015; Wagner et al., 2012). The following ethical components were taken into consideration:

Informed consent

An explanation of the research, what it aims to achieve, and how the findings will be used was clarified to the participants before their participation. Participation was voluntary and participants were welcome to terminate their participation at any time. Consent disclaimers were also emphasized before recordings to confirm understanding of the research and any further ethical implications.

No harm to participants

The researchers ensured that participants will not incur any form of harm from their involvement in the study. Moreover, participants were assured that the information they will be sharing shall remain confidential to protect their positions within society as well as their organisation.

Anonymity and Confidentiality

The participants will not be associated with the responses or the results of the study to ensure anonymity. Both anonymity and confidentiality were maintained by preserving the names and identities of the participants when analysing and collecting data through the use of interviews and when reporting the results of the study.

Deception

Deception is also an important issue in ethical research and researcher will aim to avoid this by presenting themselves as the researcher, and remaining neutral while collecting and analysing data. Moreover, the participants were made aware of the study and the type of data required for the study. This research will also aim to be honest in its findings and reporting, objective, respect for any information or intellectual property obtained from the evaluators, and be non-discriminant in the selection of participants. Moreover, before the research is conducted, ethical measures in this study will follow strict guidelines as indicated by the University to ensure ethical standards have been met.

3.6 Limitations

The main limitation of this study was the sourcing of participants from the target population. Although purposeful sampling is the most suitable method, they may be biases in participant selections due to availabilities and time constraints.

Participants may skew their responses due to their positions or experiences within evaluations, their relationships with stakeholders, or participants. The research instrument aims to be neutral in the manner in which it which the questions will be constructed to reduce or eliminate biases in responses.

While a definition of informed consent was provided to the participants, this term is loaded and may carry connotations that might not align with the operational definition of the study. This may make generalisability difficult.

Qualitative research tends to be more time-consuming as well as having limited interpretations of the data. The research needs to be completed within a certain time frame. The constraints of time would limit the ability to obtain additional resources or conduct a more complex analysis should it be required.

3.7 Feasibility

This section determines whether a study can be conducted. It relates to issues such as time, resources, and availabilities. This research is feasible once permissions and consent have been granted by evaluators to conduct the interviews as well as ethical clearance obtained. There are no inherent costs to conducting interviews and the research time allocation should be sufficient.

3.8 Positionality

Positionality of research refers to associations, networks, or various other ulterior motives that the researcher may have towards the study. The researcher is not in any way affiliated with any of the evaluators nor their organisations nor do they know any of the participants that have worked or been assisted by them. The researcher does not work for any evaluation organisation nor are they affiliated with any evaluation organisation. However, the researcher is currently employed at a higher education institution with access to researchers and academics and works within the ethics space.

Chapter 4: Results

The objective of this chapter is to present the findings from the semi-structured interviews as well as the discussions and data analysis of these findings. A qualitative methodology allows for information to be acquired for investigating, describing, and identifying phenomena. An inductive approach was applied where the literature and data were gathered from the sample in order to find themes that may be applied to the evaluations and informed consent. This will further be analysed using thematic analysis. Each theme will be briefly introduced and the transcribed interview excerpts that best demonstrate each subject are then displayed and indented for easy reference. Major grammatical and typographical problems have been removed from the data.

This chapter will outline the key outcomes from the interviews and their relation to the following primary components of informed consent: Voluntariness; Participants' Capacity and Environments and the Presence of Influences. The summary of findings from the interviews is presented for reference in appendix 2.

Overview of Findings

The participants (interviewees) had a wide variety of evaluations that they had conducted. Many of their evaluations were across various African countries and industry sectors. The types of evaluation work also varied including training and workshops of evaluations; internal and external evaluations; impact, baseline, outcome and formative evaluation studies and private and public sector programme or project evaluations. In addition, the evaluations were conducted to inform, advice or support policy, programme, and framework changes.

Similarly, as with the nature of evaluations, these types of stakeholders were wide-ranging depending on the programmes and projects. However, the majority mentioned the following as stakeholders: Government (in particular parliamentary members), the private sector, Non-Governmental, Non-Profit Organisations and the Civil Society, Academic Institutions, and Funders and Donors.

So a variety of baseline, formative and impact evaluations, and across the different kinds of life cycles of the program or program implementation period. We do both qualitative and quantitative methods, approaches to evaluations. And then in terms of sectors across various sectors, so everything from evaluating youth development programs, early child development programs, child rights, labour, HIV, sexual reproductive health rights, policy influence. - (Participant 5)

The evaluations were either commissioned by the above-mentioned stakeholders and in some cases, the organisations (and individuals within the organisations) were directly approached or asked to perform the evaluation. One participant mentioned that they do approach some of their stakeholders should there be programmes that they deem interesting or would like to work with.

So you make sure that your stakeholders or whoever your client is, are involved in the evaluation process from the beginning. So it's through, like from the design and planning all the way through. And that way sort of gives them a sense of like ownership over the evaluation and facilitates in the end the use of the actual evidence that is generated. It really depends on your approach as well. - (Participant 6)

The participants (interviewees) are given a Term of Reference or memorandum which would outlines the type of work they would need to conduct. This would include the methodologies, participants, and dependent on programmes and projects to be evaluated, the locations and participants or beneficiaries to be involved in the evaluation process. This is also normally discussed and agreed upon with the stakeholders before evaluations can commence. The recruitment of participants was dependent on the stakeholder's involvement. Where evaluations were based on specific locations or working with the government, there would be a need for community introductions and permission letters to conduct the evaluations in those specific areas or communities.

Consent from participants was primarily obtained via written and signed documents. Only in specific cases where participants were not able to sign documents that other forms of consent measures were deployed. There was an overall emphasis on documentation for record-keeping. Most do agree that verbal and other forms of consent are required and often necessary to enforce consent as well as to adapt to the changes in societal contexts. Moreover, having conversations with participants before participation, explaining the need for evaluation as well as other relevant information, was regarded as important to strengthen any further formal consent procedures. In addition, participant 3 noted that there are no formal obligatory requirements to obtain consent in evaluations due to the context of certain evaluations.

> *As you probably know, with most evaluations, consent is not obligatory or mandatory. I do not need to go through an IRB (Institutional Review Board) for the majority of the evaluations that I conduct.* - (Participant 3)

The consensus from the participants is that they would change or at best alter the current consent processes, particularly from paper or document-based to one more suitable and adaptable to the participants and their communities.

> *The first thing is that the paper consent is a bit problematic, especially in the context of working across a number of African countries.* - (Participant 9)

There was a consensus on the importance of being ethical and having ethical principles and guidelines in evaluations. Fairness, autonomy, and equity were mentioned. There were instances where stakeholders breached these ethical principles. In addition, the participants do follow their organisational values and try to conduct evaluations in such a manner that is aligned with their values. The importance of informed consent is undisputed. There are still challenges within evaluation with ensuring informed consent and conducting ethical evaluations. Transparency and information sharing are key. Feedback of results and possible outcomes was highlighted as an issue from stakeholders in evaluations.

4.1 Voluntariness

It is clear from the interviews that voluntary participation must be obtained in order to conduct interviews. However, it is also noted that in some instances there has been pressurized or mandatory participation exerted depending on the type of evaluation. This is seen in cases where the evaluations are being conducted in specific locations such as schools or an organisation. Furthermore, voluntariness is often encouraged by gatekeepers and community leaders such as with evaluations done on medical programmes. Hence, as many evaluators and their field workers aim to have participants who have freely volunteered, this cannot always be guaranteed and provision would be made to make participants more comfortable and free during the evaluations.

4.2 Participants Capacity and Environments

Evaluators always ensure that their participants are able to understand the grounds for the evaluations and are made at ease to the best of their abilities by accommodating through languages, interpreters, and matching the right field workers with the cohort of participants. In addition, there is care and respect when they interact with these communities. It is noted that participants may not always have complete information and thus limiting their capacity to fully consent. This is often at the discretion of the stakeholders.

The nature of evaluations exposes evaluators to different communities at all levels, social and economic backgrounds and thus challenges are expected and often planned for in any line of work. In particular, when working with respondents in evaluations, some of the difficulties are: interacting with the different cultures and being flexible to their environments and backgrounds, unclear or unrelated responses to the studies, and receiving unfiltered, direct feedback. In addition, attendance and securing interviews are a challenge. Furthermore, some have experienced that for evaluations of popular programmes, many others have been to those communities and thus they are more reluctant to participate and are often agitated and uninterested in being studied again.

In general, the interviews revealed that participants had very little to no control over the choice of consent method they preferred. Consent methods are chosen beforehand by evaluators and stakeholders and only adjusted for the extreme marginalized such as the blind, deaf, and those who are not capable of consent through their chosen method. The only other choice presented to participants is the use of their preferred language when necessary as well as acceptance of verbal consent.

The consent form served as the main mechanism of protection for participants in evaluations. There are not enough mechanisms of protection for evaluators and is based on a system of experience and alignment of evaluators to projects and the demographics of participants involved as well as institutional guidelines in place when conducting evaluations. Participant 5 mentioned the offer of counselling for both their respondents and evaluators when sensitive or potentially traumatic evaluations are being conducted. The dominant response was ensuring safety for participants; having transparency and creating an environment where participants feel free to communicate.

> *So, at the level of interviewees, particularly at the community levels, and when the topic is sensitive, like we talking about GBV, HIV, anything that's remotely sensitive, we always have the option to go for debriefing afterward. So then for evaluators, we do pay for counselling and debriefing. I think we have an option of like three sessions but it's not a standard offering, it's more like if you need it, you have to highlight to us that you need it and we are happy to pay for it.* - (Participant 5)

4.3 Presence of Influences

Stakeholders are in control of the information shared with evaluators and thus what information is passed on to participants. In addition, they restrict feedback loops to

participants and may insist on communicating with participants themselves. However, participant 5 has, in some instances, limited sharing some information with participants in order to not overload them for simple reasons.

The interviews revealed that participants are generally not explicitly or fully made aware of changes that might affect them through the evaluations. Some do include that there might be changes as part of the risks associated with participating. Furthermore, others were cautious about alerting participants to possible changes as they felt that to be the responsibility of the stakeholders and not their place to impart such information. Furthermore, it was also noted that findings and feedback from the evaluations are often shared with the decision-makers and stakeholders and do not often reach participants.

Stakeholders are not ethically (and sometimes legally) allowed to have access to participants' personal information. However, depending on the type of evaluation, they may request access to the raw data but this is not common and not all details, as well as specific details of their participation, will be omitted. Where there needs to be follow-up interviews or follow-ups after the evaluation, the data may be provided to the stakeholders.

The power and pressure methods stakeholders have exerted are through the withholding of funding, coerced changes to final reports if not desirable outcomes and recommendations as well as intimidation tactics. Furthermore, the selection of beneficiaries was also observed as a method of exerting power dominance by stakeholders. Participants, from the experience of the evaluators interviewed, have skewed their responses. This may be based on potential benefits, the evaluators that are there as well as the stakeholders involved.

Chapter 5: Discussion of Results

5.1 Introduction

The main objective of this study was to investigate stakeholder influence on informed consent on participants in the evaluation and how power and pressure mechanisms from stakeholders affect informed consent. This section will provide an analysis of the findings based on the interviews from nine individuals working in the evaluation space as well as relate the findings to previous research.

There were five key themes that were prominent from the interviews. All of the themes that arose are interconnected. The key themes that arose are Stakeholder Dominance; Information and Transparency; Feedback of Results and Outcomes; Changes to Consent Procedures and Adapting to Participants; and the Importance of Informed Consent and Ethics.

This chapter will assess the key themes as presented from the interviews and their relation to the following primary components of informed consent: Voluntariness; Participants' Capacity and Environments as well as the Presence of Influences. The results have been analysed using thematic content analysis incorporating the key components of informed consent as well as elements presented in the literature review.

5.2 Components of Informed Consent

Evaluation procedures and relationships are often not linear and subjective depending on the program or project being evaluated, the stakeholders involved and the participants. This inherently produces complexities due to the differences between them. The purpose of informed consent and its procedure is to ultimately reduce the issues that may arise due to these differences as well as give autonomy back to participants. Hence the primary components of informed consent are voluntarism, participants' capacity, the absence of influences, and considerations of participants' environments (Roberts, 2002; Sreenivasan, 2003). These components are also interconnected and are impacted by each other. The

following sections will analyse the findings according to these for areas of informed consent and then further highlight the main themes from the findings.

5.2.1 Voluntariness

Human free will is viewed as the ultimate source of knowledge in voluntarism, as evolved from philosophical traditions (Parsons et al., n.d). Voluntarism also factors in influences that occur through power dynamics from the stakeholders (Fisher, 2013). However, there is a duty to obtain voluntary consent from participants for evaluations. This duty involves providing sufficient details of the evaluation and its entire process as well as taking into account the cultural, social, and economic backgrounds that affect a participant's notion of free will (Joubert et al., 2003; Roberts, 2002; Sreenivasan, 2003).

> *Yeah, it happens all the time. There are actually a few studies about that. If I'm going in there to interview about a health project, they think the more positive they can be, for the most part, the more likely the project will continue and the more money they can get. - (Participant 3)*

The findings suggest that voluntarism is encouraged and enforced through the consent forms by the evaluators as well as explicitly allowing participants to be able to opt-out of participation when necessary and at their digressions. However, it is also noted that this can and is often dependent on communities and programmes being evaluated. You may find that the level of voluntarism is based on incentives to be provided or expected and their perceptions of the stakeholders. This implies that voluntarism is influenced in some instances and not entirely by free will. This is further noted in marginalized communities where the programs being evaluated are directly benefiting these communities and for fear of future access to the benefits they feel compelled to comply and this affects how they would respond. Moreover, this implies that there is an over-reliance on the acceptance of consent forms to imply voluntarism. The changes in global practices and rise in technological adaptation would

be a focal point to observe how it affects voluntarism and the improvements of the current consent process.

5.2.2 Participants Capacity and Environments

A participant's capacity refers to their ability to understand the provided information given their mental and emotional bandwidth at the time. Participants' environments refer to their social, cultural, and economic status and their capacity. This involves taking into account all mental, physical and sociological factors of a participant. Language is the main barrier to participants' capacity to understand. Although this is often considered and adopted through the use of translators, gatekeepers, and commutations via community leaders, it may only be through a single medium such as verbal communication. As many evaluations rely on written consent, other forms of consent mechanisms are not widely implemented. Furthermore, written consent also implies that one is literate in that particular language. Unfortunately, the findings reveal that they are mandated by their stakeholders on how to implement the evaluations and written consent is often required for documentation purposes. Although adaptation of other digital mediums has become prominent, it is not widely used. The most suitable approach for future evaluations on ensuring consent would be to adopt mixed-medium platforms as well as given a choice of consent (Lurvey et al., 1996). The use of digital platforms makes it easier for various methods to be adopted from a single platform such as conversions of digital recordings into written transcriptions and translation services. This would also imply incurred costs from the stakeholders and maybe their reluctance to adopt more suitable methods.

A participant's capacity correlates with their environment and their ability to volunteer. Along with the relevant information provided, without adequate or full comprehension, there is no voluntarism and thus true informed consent cannot be said to be obtained. Furthermore, the interviews observed that often the presence of themselves as evaluators and their relevant stakeholders as being 'superiors' affects their responses and willingness to participate. Thus the presence of even a perceived power dynamic will affect participants' capacity.

5.2.3 Presence of Influences

Influences for the purpose of this study refer to any coercion, power dynamics, and pressures inherent in the nature of evaluations. The presence of influences is to be expected due to the nature of many evaluations. Ideally, during the consent process, it is the responsibility of the evaluators to be aware of any potential coercion and power dynamics as well as aim to prevent such coercion (Kaplan & Bryan, 2009). An alternative consideration for informed consent presented by Kaplan & Bryan (2009) is ensuring that researchers and evaluators have a complete understanding of informed consent (ethically and legally) as part of a respectful relationship with participants rather than procedural checklist activities.

> *So during the consent process, I think whether you are an evaluator or data collector, or field worker, you really need to emphasize your independence from the organizations running the program. So once that is clear, they will know, they will actually give you accurate information because they will know that you will never share the information probably with that local program manager or someone else - (Participant 9)*

Evaluators must find a delicate balance between their goals, stakeholders, and participants' rights when providing information (Wiles et al., 2005). As evaluators are service providers to stakeholders, they may be bound to parameters in which to provide information. They are often also dictated and not provided with complete information. This then creates a ripple effect of information biases that occur from stakeholders to elevators down to participants. In addition, when participant capacity and their backgrounds are considered further issues occur such as when sensitive evaluations are being conducted. The interviews show that it is often difficult to avoid these influences as evaluators themselves may not have the authority to do so nor the information.

> *Well, you know these organisations, am I really going to get them to change their contract to hire me. They will just move on to the next person. If you are focusing on*

ethics and stuff, I think a lot of times, I feel like I've been pushed into doing unethical things. - (Participant 3)

The literature shows that there is currently no consensus on how to obtain informed consent and thus at the discretion of evaluations and limited by local legal requirements. There is a need for new techniques that emphasize two-way dynamic contact between decision-makers and amongst participants (Abelson, Forest, Eyles, Smith, Martin, & Gauvin, 2003). An evolution of the recommended standard set of regulatory frameworks for evaluations that would apply regardless of the type of evaluations is needed, such as in the medical field. This would minimize the type of influences as well as standardise operations and consent procedures. Although not all forms of influences can be eliminated, it would assist and act as a mechanism of protection for both evaluators and participants and aid in accountability for stakeholders.

5.3 Thematic Analysis

5.3.1 Stakeholder Dominance

Stakeholders are the building blocks of evaluations. The nature of evaluations is such that an outcome or recommendation of the programme or project being evaluated results in a decision to be made by the relevant stakeholders. Many evaluations are funded externally (stakeholders) and this can affect participation, procedures as well as overall decision making (Rowe & Frewer, 2000).

Stakeholders range from governments, civil societies, funders, and donors who when commissioned evaluations will set out terms of references, preferred methodologies, and very often the choice of participants to be interviewed. The nature of many evaluations is complex due to the multi-level relationships amongst stakeholders, evaluators, and participants (Wester et al., 2003). Moreover, when the relationship amongst stakeholders are politically affiliated or are formed for mutual benefits and results of evaluations could

affect such relationships (Wester et al., 2003). Additionally, stakeholders can have different goals although they are working together (Chess & Purcell, 1999).

Ideally, once terms of references and scope have been agreed and discussed with evaluators, it is then the evaluators' role to carry out the evaluations to the best of their ability and guidelines. However, stakeholders exert power and pressure on evaluators and participants through monetary restrictions, micromanaging, using intimidation of evaluators and their findings as well as the selection of participants and their communities. Although it is important that stakeholders are involved as they require the evaluation to make future changes in policies, programmes, and projects, their interference over evaluators and participants is often negative and unconducive in obtaining the relevant results.

> *And you remember, policymakers when they give you a project or a study they want to make a political statement.* – (Participant 4)

Participant 4 highlighted this by stating that often stakeholders [policy makers] use the evaluations or the results thereof to make a statement. This implies that there are previous agendas or predetermined outcomes that need to arise from the evaluation and hence any process of the evaluation life cycle that will not come to their desired outcome will be challenged or at minimum attempt to be controlled. This control is seen through the selection of participants or sites (communities), the restriction of findings when outcomes are not desired, and coercion to change results that are not welcomed.

> *The one thing where we have less control over, for example in this instance where we are recruiting people for focus groups discussions and we are relying on implementing partners on the ground to help access participants because they can't give us participants because that's also an ethical issue.* – (Participant 5)

A participant's decision is affected by many factors. Due to this, it is difficult to isolate a single factor of influence to participation decisions (Nelson & Merz, 2002). Assessing the risk potential from both evaluator and participant would be a better indication of influences and power differentials that occur in the nature of the relationship (Nelson & Merz, 2002). Moreover, the power dynamics present often cause evaluators to act unethically as essentially, they are server providers to stakeholders and also have their own risk thereof.

Furthermore, as noted in the literature, the complexities of multiple stakeholders in evaluations bring about differences in goals which may cause conflicts and hence pressures along the way that affect the evaluations as participation. Stakeholders may allow for the autonomy of processes, however, they may still control or deviate from the final results of evaluations (Chess & Purcell, 1999; Rowe & Frewer, 2000).

5.3.2 Information and Transparency

Information is the fundamental component of informed consent and it can be offset by the impact of information selection by stakeholders in evaluations (Gudowsky & Bechtold, 2020). As a result, one of the most important criteria in assessing the participatory processes is access to viable information resources (Gudowsky & Bechtold, 2020). For meaningful outcomes of participatory processes, it is critical to provide accurate information and respect the power of information (Gudowsky & Bechtold, 2020). Information begins with the stakeholders involved in commissioning evaluations. This is then conveyed to participants by evaluators and their field workers. Stakeholders have often deliberately provided insufficient information to obtain a desired result or influence participation.

Omission of information to obtain certain outcomes is debated as it may be useful when honest feedback is required. However, this strategy is often employed by evaluators when they suspect tampering with the participants either through the gatekeepers or the stakeholders. This is due to the limited information also provided to evaluators.

Because we don't understand we don't always understand all of their contexts, we don't understand what resources, the extent of the resources they have at their disposal. – (Participant 7 & 8)

It is imperative to consider the level of knowledge in consent, as well as the rights of patients and their information needs (Beauchamp, 2011). Information has been made more accessible with the use of technology such as cell phones and internet access. Furthermore, information is also readily accessible and participants are privy to any data related to their participation. It is worthy to note that evaluations are also used as learning mechanisms not only to the stakeholders but to the evaluators.

We see the evaluation as a space for reflection and learning. The evaluation process is not just about accountability. So funders are not necessarily the main stakeholders, it's about making sure that at different levels within an organization, our evaluation results can be used and is relevant and in you know, and useful. Learning, it's more about learning orientation type evaluation. – (Participant 5)

The participant's frame of mind when deciding to participate in evaluations can give insights into influences experienced which should be considered when looking at the consent procedures ethically (Fisher, 2013). Thus, the importance of sufficient and accurate information and comprehension is required to achieve informed consent as well as avoid coercion and influences that may be presented (Fisher, 2013).

5.3.3 Feedback of Results and Outcomes

Rowe & Frewer (2000) categorise evaluation criteria into the formation of the methodology and results and analysis thereof. Feedback of evaluations outcomes is not often communicated with participants. This is habitually a deliberate action by stakeholders. Evaluators are not at liberty due to their relationship with the stakeholder and they are ultimately providing a service, limited to the information provided by the stakeholders and their terms of reference. The benefits and risk components of consent documents do not

account for the decisions that are made after evaluations have been concluded. Restrictions through funding and time limits also do not allow them to go back to participants and convey the results. Although participants have the right to access the results, many are not aware of this right and often do not care enough once the evaluation is complete to ask for feedback. This may also be due to the power dynamics, particularly when gatekeepers and community leaders are involved in the recruitment of participants.

> *I think something we are not very good at is giving more feedback on findings to people who participated. And sometimes the commissioning evaluation organization doesn't always want to release those results publically, but I do think that it's important that we need to do that.* – (Participant 2)

> *And what we do say is that, and something that I think we need to become better at is well, findings are often and is becoming an increasing consciousness about it. But while findings are often shared with almost decision-makers. It's not always it doesn't always filter down to the community level.* – (Participant 5)

5.3.4 Changes to Consent Procedures and Adapting to Participants

It is clear that consent procedures need to be updated and adapted to participant cultures, languages, social and economic statuses, and locations. Many of the current consent measures in place have been adapted through medical science research and primarily following western norms. Numerous evaluations conducted are across the African continent with participants from marginalised communities. This entails different languages, cultural and religious practices that need to account for in their communities. The current procedure of documentation, which often requires a form of signature is outdated or at best needs to be adequately updated. Moreover, there is a slow adaptation to global changes such as the rise in the use of technology and its use when obtaining consent.

I don't think it's something that we've ever really looked into to be like, Okay, you do have an option. I think it's, it's always just been like, Okay, and this is how we know that things are done. So we just bring it to them in that way. – (Participant 6)

In addition, consent should not be one process but a continuous process acknowledging changes in participants throughout the cycle of the evolution until outcomes and recommendations are presented. Consent currently only recognised the participation in evaluations and data to be provided whilst ensuring no harm would occur (to the best of their ability). The 'No Harm' includes risk and the potential that changes to programmes may occur after evaluations. As any process of evaluations changes, so should informed consent (Scott, 2013). However, there are no continuous communications once they have ensured consent to participate besides confirming the interview as this is the biggest challenge with participation. Thereafter, any further communication is at a minimum or at the stakeholder's discretion. Particularly when recommendations are not in favour of the communities.

Multiple approaches to consent would be recommended to account for differences and changes in society. The use of different mediums and continuous consent throughout the evolution is required. In addition, participants should have more control over the consent process, they should be more active as opposed to being reactive. A suggested method to combating informed consent in developing nations and specifically when dealing with multiple cultures and languages is decolonising the nature of obtaining consent (Bhattacharya, 2007). The impact from the suggestion would mean changes in research and ethical methodologies, processes, and policies (Bhattacharya, 2007). Moreover, such changes could lead to disruptions in power dynamics specifically, giving more autonomy to participants rather than the researcher (Bhattacharya, 2007).

There needs to be an expansion to how evaluation and studies are conducted to account for the diversities across the world and not subject participants to only western ways of acquiring knowledge (Bhattacharya, 2007; Rosenthal, 2006). As such, the current formal ways of consenting needs to be adjusted and should be used as a guiding principle that is challenged and disputed during the evaluation process (Bhattacharya, 2007).

5.3.5 Importance of Informed Consent and Ethics

There is no doubt about the importance of informed consent. Informed consent is required for participation to be valid and legal. However, there is no current consensus as to how to obtain this in reality, with different organisations, using different methods of ethical and regulatory guidelines (Rowe & Frewer, 2000). In addition, the reliance on current procedures does not inspire changes due to reliance on stakeholders and their mandates.

> *The informed consent form, which is, is really just giving the participants the opportunity, to withdraw their participation during and after the data collection process, and I guess, pass that as well. And also talking about confidentiality and anonymity, depending on what, what the parameters are, in that particular case.* – (Participant 7 & 8)

When ethical problems are framed exclusively in terms of whether or not the incentives to engage are appropriate, they leave out the larger power dynamics that can stifle consent (Fisher, 2013). Although informed consent is highly appraised and deemed necessary, there is a reluctance to comply due to the different methods stakeholders present for evaluations and what is required. Evaluations, essentially offer service and often perform a service to clients (stakeholders) best ability often required methods that do not align with ensuring informed consent and often place evaluators in positions to act unethically.

> *Because we don't have a professional body that is legally regulating, I think it is something that is lacking.* – (Participant 7 & 8)

> *There is a lot of times where I think as evaluators, we want to be ethical, we want to do the right thing and we can't.* – (Participant 3)

Ethics in evaluations are guided by the organisations' guidelines for conducting evaluations and the employees' personal ethical beliefs. There is no set law or standard regulations for conducting evaluations that affect how evolutions are done and each organisation operates differently. Unlike research that has standard rules and regulation as well as ethical committees that monitor research before they are undertaken, this is not the case with evaluations. Moreover, legally, consent is required when conducting studies involving human subjects, it is not informed consent. Likewise, while many of the ethical principles are based on legal undertakings, they are by choice. There needs to be a formality of ethical governance within evaluations as the principles that evaluators abide by either personally or through their organisations differ.

5.4 Conclusions

The primary research question this paper was investigating is: How do stakeholders influence participant informed consent in evaluations? It is evident from the interview findings that the power dominance, pressure, and influences that occur in evaluation can be both implied and explicit.

Evaluations should aim for true informed consent, void of external powers and pressures for participants (Tyldum, 2012). Often, evaluations are faced with long procedures and documentation which further complicates and takes away the need for informed consent (Bhutta, 2004). Moreover, there is no consensus on what constitutes true informed consent or what exactly and what extent should participants be informed within evaluations (Fisher, 2013; Williams, 2014). Rather the focus is more on the protection and privacy of information and data of the evaluations than participants' consent (Beauchamp, 2011; Fisher, 2013; Josephson & Smale, 2020; Williams, 2014). Hence the need for further research and deliberations on informed consent within evaluations (Williams, 2014).

The observed and dominant ways stakeholders influence participant informed consent is through information. Either from the onset of the evaluations by only supplying limited information as well as not allowing for feedback of evaluations results or their control thereof.

Other mechanisms have been monetary by withholding funds and control of results from the evaluations. It is also noteworthy that although evaluators are very much aware of them, they are often not at liberty to change procedures due to the circumstances that stakeholders may put in place to enforce their power.

Chapter 6: Conclusions and Recommendations

6.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the implications of the results as outlined in findings and analysis of the results. Thereafter the theoretical contributions, managerial implications as well as recommendations for future research and limitations are highlighted.

The primary research question this paper was investigating is: How do stakeholders influence participant informed consent in evaluations? It is evident from the interview findings that the power dominance, pressure, and influences that occur in evaluation can be both implied and explicit.

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The observed and dominant ways stakeholders influence participant informed consent is through information. Either from the onset of the evaluations by only supplying limited information as well as not allowing for feedback of evaluations results or their control thereof. Other mechanisms have been monetary withholding funds and control of results from the evaluations. It is also noteworthy that although evaluators are very much aware of them, they are often not at liberty to change procedures due to the circumstances that stakeholders may put in place to enforce their power.

6.2 Theoretical Contributions

This study contributes to the existing literature on the relationship between evaluators, participants, and decision-makers as well as the power dynamics experienced practically within evaluations. Furthermore, this study contributes to the nature of evaluations, the role of evaluators, and the need for better frameworks and ethical guidelines in their line of work.

Specifically, this study expands upon literature regarding true informed consent and its various components. This research highlights the ways in which the power differentials between participants, evaluators, and decision-makers are reinforced, especially by the subjective nature of evaluation procedures. Moreover, this body of work focuses on the principle of voluntary consent. While freedom of choice has an established history in academic inquiry, this study expands upon this notion by adding the element of freedom from consequence. More specifically, the option to opt-out of an evaluation even after consenting to be a participant.

This study also contributes to the literature on the influence of decision-makers which is often unwarranted and inappropriate, even when it is unconscious or well-meaning. Some examples of this include when decision-makers are present during evaluations or even just for the signing of consent forms. This also includes the environment within which these evaluations take place.

Finally, this study serves to advance the literature on the use, and often over-reliance, of consent forms. This content is particularly salient, especially in an African context where barriers such as language, social-economic class, research participation inertia, or past negative experience as well as the overall capacity of participants need to be thoroughly considered.

6.3 Managerial Implications

This study proposes a variety of managerial implications that should be considered in order to improve the way in which evaluations are currently conceptualised. First, the researcher proposes that a more deliberate approach needs to be taken during the conception phase of evaluations. Given the many communities approached, the various industry sectors that these evaluations are carried out for, the types of evaluation work that is carried out (workshops, training, etc.) as well as whether these occur in the backdrop of the private or public sector, it would be remiss not to apply this nuance to the evaluations themselves. Simply put, evaluations are not a "one size fits all" project and should not be carried out as such.

Additionally, current popular practice takes the form of decision-makers commissioning specific evaluations. Alternatively, evaluators approach stakeholders with programs that they deem interesting. This creates a climate where evaluations are special events as opposed to a key strategic tool within an organisation. With this shift, organisations will be able to genuinely add value to the cohort that they wish to serve and ultimately extract value by being able to adequately serve and satisfy these groups.

Another urgent consideration is the over-emphasis of written consent when the concept of true consent is in question. While this practice may serve to protect the entity that has commissioned the evaluation, it has the potential to infringe on true informed consent; especially in communities that are not fluent with the language the written consent form is in or are not adequately educated to be able to read and understand the informed consent form. This ultimately nullifies the point of informed consent. Moreover, this practice then puts the burden on evaluators to capture consent in avenues that are suitable for the given cohort of participants. As such, the author proposes that participants should be offered different avenues and mediums to consent as a standard practice.

Managers should also review the current practices for acquiring volunteers. Punitive measures and undue pressure ultimately influence the insights garnered from evaluations. While it may have its own set of complications, a reward or incentive-based participation

recruitment scheme is advised. It has been noted that reward-centric practices are common in medical-related evaluations but are scarce in other fields.

A further consideration is creating an environment that is not coercive. This is particularly important in places such as firms or schools where those who do not volunteer may be subject to extra labour or singled out in other ways. The presence of decision-makers at any point of the evaluation (even when it is well-meaning) may also be coercive because of the power differential. These considerations should also form part of the evaluation process.

Decision-makers' access to raw data is also another point of contention, as this can infringe on participants' rights to anonymity and confidentiality. Concerns have also been raised about how this makes the entire evaluation vulnerable to intimidation tactics such as the withdrawal of funding or the use of coercion to change the findings if the results are undesirable.

This study also highlights how there is often a lack of a feedback loop for participants of evaluations. Decision-makers are often given priority when it comes to receiving information on the outcome of an evaluation. However, participants rarely get feedback on the results or a thorough understanding of how their insights have informed various outcomes and policies. This oversight has also resulted in participation inertia, especially in communities that are often approached to partake in evaluations. This reluctance, agitation and lack of desire to be studied can be overcome by ensuring that participants are made aware of the importance of their participation by being able to see the fruits of their labour.

Finally, this study proposes an urgent need for aftercare practices for both evaluators and the participants. One avenue may be making the services of counsellors available, especially when evaluations engage with potentially sensitive, triggering, or traumatic content. These practices should be readily available as opposed to being the burden of the evaluator or participant to the source.

6.4 Limitations

Limitations have been identified for the duration of the process of conducting this research. These limitations do not take away from the result of this study and should be considered for future research. There were many possibilities to be interviewed from the target audience and a wider variety would make for even deeper insights. Although semi-structured, interviews generally are time-consuming and with time limits, not all questions can be answered. In addition, due to restrictions of the current pandemic, face-to-face interviews were not possible where a focus group would have been a good option for the study. Furthermore, recruitment was limited to digital communications due to the status of the target population, thereby limiting the snowball recruitment of participants.

This research is informed by the experience of nine experts in the practice of evaluations. Their experiences range from academia as well as the private and public sector. They also have experience in various industries and have carried out different types of evaluations. Due to the fact that many of the participants of this study are from service providers, they have also frequented many communities and countries throughout the continent. Thus their involvement in such varied evaluations has given the researcher insight into an abundance of experiences. However, the vastness of these evaluations provides a foundation that can be built upon as opposed to a prescription that can be immediately applied.

6.5 Recommendations for Future Research

The importance of informed consent will become even more apparent due to the increase in digital use. A model such as the meta-consent model putting the power of consent into participants should be explored further on how it can affect frameworks and policies. A quantitative survey on participants' perception of information and informed closet would also give insights on structuring the informed consent process. In addition, a deeper look into ethics within evaluations as service providers to their stakeholders.

6.6 Summary

The literature and results presented to prove that the consent process is far from being a simple procedure. A wide range of factors needs to be considered when providing information to obtain informed consent (Wiles et al., 2005). Evaluators are faced with the complex task of their relationships with both participants and stakeholders that accommodate both parties ethically and legally.

Stakeholders use various mechanisms of power and pressure on both participants and evaluators. Their primary form of control of evaluators is through funding and control of evaluation results. Comparatively, participants can be pressured through their communities, gatekeepers, and their exploitation of their current social, economic statuses.

Informed consent is an important topic to consider all and any form of activities involving human participants. This is particularly valid with the use of technology and the internet and their use of provided human data. Information is the driving force for informed consent as well as data collection. There needs to be more emphasis on the processing of information through the lifecycle of evaluations and projects or any involvement of human participation whether once off or continuous. Data control policies will become an important factor in the control of information exploitation.

Evaluations are important and aid in decision-making. However, a more rigid governing body to cover essential issues of evaluation frameworks, ethics, and informed consent procedures is needed. Finally, further research looking at participation in evaluation from the lenses of participants is required. This will aid in better-constructing frameworks for evaluations as well as the informed consent process.

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Appendix

1. Semi-Structured Questions

(Interview Dates: 2 – 14 November 2021)

Greetings and Introduction

- A brief overview of the research
- Go over consent, confidentiality, and anonymity
- Demographics
    - Gender
    - How long they have been working in or with evaluations?
    - How many evaluations they have conducted?

Questions:

1. Tell me about the nature of evaluations you or the organisation conducts?
    a. Describe the types of stakeholders involved?

2. Who determines which evaluations (projects) are undertaken?
    a. How active are they in the structure of the evaluations?
    b. How active are they in the recruitment process of participants?

3. Do the people in power have access to the raw information, specifically participant information?

4. How do you ensure consent?
    a. What are the different types of consent methods you have used?
    b. Do participants have a say in how they would like to consent?
    c. Would you change the consent process in your opinion?
        i. If so, how would you change the consent process?

5. When specific decisions needed to be made as a result of evaluations (i.e. policies, changes in organisational structures, etc.) were participants informed of such information?

6. What are some of the ethical principles you or your organisation abide by when conducting evaluations? (Give examples - Fairness, Autonomy, Accountability & Responsibility, Justice for All, Inclusivity, Honesty, Non- Discrimination)
    a. Have you experienced an instant where a superior has breached any of the above-mentioned (if applicable)?

7. What mechanisms of protection are there in place for participants?
8. What mechanisms of protection are there in place for evaluators?

9. What are the ways in which stakeholders have exerted pressure on you as the evaluator? (Give examples)
    a. What are some of the implicit ways in which you have seen pressure exerted?
    b. What are some of the explicit ways in which you have seen pressure exerted?

10. How have stakeholders tried to control the information shared by participants?
    a. Have you or the organisation had to restrict information to participants?
    b. How has information affected participation in some of your work?

11. What interventions do you use to limit stakeholder influence on participant responses?

12. How do you balance informed consent without leading/influencing participants' answers?
13. How would you be able to determine if participants were deliberately skewing their answers?
    a. In your experience is this a result of stakeholder pressure?

14. Is informed consent important in your opinion and why?

15. What is the most challenging aspect about working with participants?

2. Summary of Findings

a) The nature of evaluations:

We write policy briefs to inform because our work is ultimately to inform policy decision-making. - (Participant 1)

Sometimes we provide like consulting services where we provide advice and support. - (Participant 2)

So a variety of baseline, formative and impact evaluations, and across the different kinds of life cycles of the program or program implementation period. We do both qualitative and quantitative methods, approaches to evaluations. And then in terms of sectors across various sectors, so everything from evaluating youth development programs, early child development programs, child rights, labour, HIV, sexual reproductive health rights, policy influence. - (Participant 5)

b) Types of stakeholders involved:

So we do evaluations for government programmes and we do evaluations that are funded by donors and foundations and funders. Sometimes they are commissioned by NGOs, NPOs. Sometimes, we have done a couple for private sector bodies as well. - (Participant 2)

I mean all over the place. Anything from the government to NGOs to the UN, universities, banking sector. - (Participant 3)

The stakeholders that are involved are government or higher living institutions, private organization, or civil organization. So we work with quite a number of stakeholders distributed across the countries across our partner countries. - (Participant 4)

So that's kind of the variety, I think of the evaluations that we conduct and in the stakeholders, obviously, as imagined would also be a variety such as governments, funders, NGOs, Civil Societies and it's actually one of the strengths that we have is that we can actually go to customer groups and policymakers, your funders, to community-based workers, children, you know, because they are all basically participants in our evaluation process. - (Participant 5)

c) Determination of evaluations (projects) undertaken:

So, often it's the government that decides that. So they would discuss with government departments or government departments would put forward programmes that they want evaluated and they would get some funding from ABC. Besides that, I think they would also identify evaluations they want to be done. And then, of course, there are also sometimes funders who require evaluations or funder's commission evaluations. - (Participant 2)

And so we respond to requests that come through to us. So very often an organization or funder, or government department, or NGO might contact us and say, you know, this is kind of something that we want to evaluate. - (Participant 5)

Yeah, so we usually respond to Terms of Reference (TOR), and their TOR is either sent directly to us, as in please would you guys apply, we want to get a quote from you. Or we do cold proposals, you know, if we find TORs on the web. - (Participant 7 & 8)

So in most cases, we don't decide what is to be evaluated, but actually, the what, what I might call the client or the other stakeholder actually decides to say, this is what we want you guys to evaluate. - (Participant 9)

Sometimes, if we see a gap then we sort of come up with a study to fill up that gap. If we see that there's a gap in knowledge or evaluations or sort of, there's something because we while strengthening capacities in evaluations in this country. So if there is a gap there, so then we will come up with a proposal and that will help us understand why there is a gap, but sometimes, like our partner countries they do come up with projects as our stakeholders they do request that we do fund the project, they do fund the project, then we conduct that study for them. - (Participant 4)

d) Stakeholder activity in the structure of the evaluations and the recruitment process of participants:

So I do think it depends. Look often I think, the funders play quite a big role because they know a lot about evaluations and they know how to help ensure that evaluation terms of reference are meaningful and sensible and the questions are and programs are like evaluable. So they would be doing it from that perspective rather than explicitly trying to dictate what gets done. - (Participant 2)

I would say it really depends on the nature of the organisation and it varies within these organisations and the time and amount of money available. And how they are involved is all over the place. - (Participant 3)

So it's guided by the terms of the reference from the stakeholders. - (Participant 4)

So that sort of thing we do collaboratively with the client. - (Participant 5)

So you make sure that your stakeholders or whoever your client is, they are involved in the evaluation process from the beginning. So it's through, like from the design and planning all the way through. And that way sort of gives them a sense of like ownership over the evaluation and facilitates in the end the use of the actual evidence that is generated. It really depends on your approach as well. - (Participant 6)

Okay, so when it comes to when it comes to beneficiaries, I think we actually have some latitude in terms of deciding who was supposed to be what to be part of, of the evaluation. So that's when methodologically we normally put our foot down and say methodologically, we are supposed to do the selection ourselves. - (Participant 9)

In some way, yes, someone is always helping me. Sometimes I actually need, particularly with the government in South Africa or any government, I need a letter of introduction. There is quite a formal process, so there I am a little more bound by ethical and really legal restraints where I can't go into the province without having permissions from national. - (Participant 3)

That's up to us. What maybe they could do, it's sort of to maybe you say, if you want to interview a key informant, then maybe, in that case, they can assist you. But when it comes to interviewing, maybe employees in a policy unit, for example. I mean, they can just give us a frame, a sample frame then we can select whom to interview. - (Participant 4)

It's usually really a thing of just deciding, you know, the selection framework for that, or the selection criteria. - (Participant 7 & 8)

e) Stakeholder access to participant information:

But on request on request, yes, we can provide them with the raw data. I mean, that's available, the raw data, remember, we can keep that for up to five years. So on request, if they want that, then we can provide that to them. - (Participant 4)

We never hand over identifiable data. We just don't. So we often have to hand over, I mean we do hand over the survey data but we remove identifiable information. And sometimes that's because there is going to be a further analysis done after that. There has been I can say an expectation sometimes that we would hand over interview data but I have never handed over interview data because even if you remove the name, I think that interview data can be identifiable. - (Participant 2)

It would vary. It's all negotiated depending on who I'm working with and what their ethics are and mine. But it's definitely a discussion that comes up upfront. - (Participant 3)

As for the report, obviously, we keep them anonymous in and we say in terms of, you know, the whole thing that you've been explaining now, we don't identify any names, but sometimes we do provide a list of respondents at the end of the reports. It's a kind of completely separate list of everyone who's been interviewed in the process. And it is particularly important when, for example, say we're doing a baseline evaluation. And the idea is to follow up with a midline evaluation. And so you want to sample the same participants, a pre and post and that sort of thing. So we do often provide a list. - (Participant 5)

No that's not ethical. We are bound by our ethical requirements. - (Participant 6)

I mean, it depends. I think there have only been one or two instances where we've actually been required in that particular case, we've been required to just to note. - (Participant 7 & 8)

It's not good ethically to do that they're not supposed to know actually. - (Participant 9)

I mean, basically, the output that they want in the report. - (Participant 4)

f) Ensuring informed consent and the types of consent methods used:

I know that the evaluators would normally have them sign a document. Like sort of like an agreement document and what happens to that or in terms of like the information, they would have acquired with the participant. - (Participant 1)

So sometimes they have to sign a consent letter, they have to verbally give consent on the platform on Zoom or Microsoft platform. - (Participant 4)

So you might find that in one evaluation, you might use two or three out approaches. And in some cases, in some cases, you just explain your study to people. - (Participant 9)

It's usually a conversation, that's the best way to have it. We would share information in advance before you set up the interview or whatever research engagement so the person who you are going to be negating with has had an opportunity to read through what it's about and they come to that interview with some understanding. - (Participant 2)

So I try to make a conversation with them in the beginning. - (Participant 3)

But sometimes it's important that it's as when we started, you've explained, you introduce the study. - (Participant 4)

So it obviously depends on who you're getting consent for. And even data depends on who you're going to be interviewing. So really, the kind of general standard is that is a consent form. And, and so there's two things that you usually have to give them the one is the consent form, which they sign, and that kind of explains everything around the purpose of the study, you know, what it's going to be used for, what the potential risks are, with the participation, issues around confidentiality, anonymity, all of that, which they sign and they give back to you. And why I said depends on who you interviewing is, because obviously, people with disabilities are different from somebody at the Department of Health. And so what you've got to make sure is that you have the consent form in the local language is one of the things and if there are any issues around like, psychological disabilities, etc., or low literacy levels, you can ask them to, instead of signing, just put a thumbprint on the form. - (Participant 5)

And what we do with these kinds of electronic engagements is, is we have a PDF that we send out to anyone for spending an hour i.e. kind of data collection strategies or methods or

whatever. And then I, you know, we'd be talked through it and then ask them to provide verbal consent on the basis of that. - (Participant 7 & 8)

As you probably know, with most evaluations, consent is not obligatory or mandatory. I do not need to go through an IRB for the majority of the evaluations that I conduct. - (Participant 3)

g) Participants involved in the choice of consent:

The respondents? No, no, once we get clearance, once we get clearance from the Ethics Committee, then it means that's how the study should go because they need to consent to the processes. - (Participant 4)

It's actually directed more from our side, they don't ever say in terms of what kind of consent they prefer. - (Participant 9)

Maybe something else to say about the consent, if it goes to parents, we do also try and translate into languages that's appropriate and not just sending a letter in English - (Participant 2)

Usually we are flexible about it, you can come way that you want to ideally, yes, written so that there is a record of it. But if they want to just give verbal consent, we might just make a note of that on the consent form. - (Participant 5)

We actually do verbal consent when we're doing focus groups. So we explain everything, and like, so whatever. And yeah, it just depends on who we're doing it with, if it's community people in, you know, wasn't a bit more sensitive to the literacy levels and those kinds of aspects. So then we will have a more verbal approach verbal consent upright, but, you know, if it's people who don't have problems writing or things like that, people usually don't have a problem filling it in, in writing. - (Participant 7 & 8)

h) Change of consent process:

The first thing is that the paper consent is a bit problematic, especially in the context which working across a different number of African countries. - (Participant 9)

I mean I'll always be open to changing it. So I would change my approach to doing consents based on the group I was working with and I would be open to ideas. I think it's very important to be aware of the group you are working with and I would always be open to doing consent in different ways. And I think as evaluators, we have that option because we are not going through an IRB process. Yeah, I would definitely change it based on the culture or timing, or money that I have. - (Participant 3)

i) Decisions as a result of evaluations:

I think from a lot of evaluations I've seen it is not included. Actually, it's not included. We just talk about we want to see the performance of that. But that's not the reason why we do evaluations, it is actually to make a decision. - (Participant 9)

I think it should be part of your consent and confidentiality process. You need to know what you are consenting to and how that information will be used. - (Participant 2)

Yes, in fact, it's in my consent form that I always say I have no control over what happens with the evaluations. - (Participant 3)

No, we don't say anything about that. Yeah, and we're very careful about what we say, because of the expectations that might be created. So we in fact, actually say that nothing much changes because of your inputs. - (Participant 7 & 8)

But while findings are often shared with almost decision-makers. It's not always it doesn't always filter down to the community level. - (Participant 5)

j) Ethical principles in evaluations:

My own personal ethics, I think, as I mentioned, are very much influenced by my own feminist ethics but a little bit more than not just do no harm but consider what can harm who, right. - (Participant 3)

Autonomy is very important. - (Participant 4)

I guess that one of the key things that we tried to do is around differently around equity. Right. And that means that anything, I mean, it might be from a gender perspective, the ability perspective, it might be around marginalized groups having access to not having access to a service or a program. - (Participant 5)

I think we probably follow a developmental approach, to begin with. I would say that we definitely have a blend of feminist ethic evaluation in there and we have a blend where we feel the values cross-section with our values and ethics. - (Participant 7 & 8)

So we have organizational values which include integrity, accountability, and social justice. So those things kind of permeate our work and we actually recruit on the basis of looking for people who share those values but then also have the technical skills and subskills that we looking for. - (Participant 2)

k) Mechanisms of protection for participants and evaluators:

I think the onus is on us as researchers and evaluators to ensure that we really do respect that privacy and confidentiality and there are no data leaks and there is no information that is identifiable in reports or links back to individuals. - (Participant 2)

Just being really clear that your personal safety is more important than any research data. The other thing is also matching and paring, sending people out in groups, being aware of the time that people are sent out. Actually, Covid has made it safer, because we are sitting in the safety of our homes. But just being careful about who I send where and if we are going into local communities, making sure we have a guide and of course, there is always pros and cons of that. - (Participant 3)

So, at the level of interviewees, particularly at the community levels, and when the topic is sensitive, like we talking about GBV, HIV, anything that's remotely sensitive, we always have the option to go for debriefing afterward. So then for evaluators, we do have paid for counselling and debriefing. I think we have an option of like three sessions but it's not a standard offering, it's more like if you need it, you have to highlight to us that you need it and we are happy to pay for it. - (Participant 5)

l) Power and pressure methods among stakeholders (implicit and explicit):

Well, whoever is providing your funding can withhold the next payment if they are unhappy with the report. We have never gotten into a situation where we didn't get paid but we have gotten into some situations where it becomes a bit frustrating where they become micromanaging a bit of what they would like you to include. - (Participant 2)

Oh My Gosh, that can be a whole thesis on its own. I've had X organisation not pay me until I took certain findings out of the report. That has happened a few times. It's quite common, I have a lot of, Y organisations, for example, and they are really big on telling you what you can and cannot write. They will restrict you in terms of your outline, for example, if you add onto it they just knock it off. Not getting questions approved, not being able to ask questions in a certain way, not being able to speak to certain groups. You name it. - (Participant 3)

So if you find that the results, the results are posing opposite to what, what they had in mind, then can tell you that we're not happy about this results. Hence, we are going to hold a certain percentage of the payment until something is fixed. - (Participant 4)

So especially with a qualitative sample, we are not kind of picking people randomly, so we kind of leave it open to them with some guidelines of whom we'd like included. So I think there, there is often space for them to try to influence. And then at the report writing phase, sometimes you find that, because what we often do is give feedback to the client and the funders and whoever the key stakeholders are and we present them with the findings. And then what happens then is that they could try to persuade you to present things in a certain way. They might ask us to say something differently. - (Participant 5)

Using intimidation to kind of draw our attention to certain things and kind of try and whitewash other things. And withholding payments. And also you know, like the kind of, I want to say, what do you call it - gas lighting almost. - (Participant 7 & 8)

So in most cases, it's about the selection of beneficiaries. That's where they prefer to exert their power. It might be the selection of sites or selection of beneficiaries, and also on the issues of findings. - (Participant 9)

m) Stakeholder control and restriction of information:

The organization you are evaluating decides which documents you get to see. - (Participant 2)

Our conduct with the participants is only limited to data collection. And then they say that whatever communication which needs to go to the beneficiaries, they will actually what they will do them themselves. So you'll find out that in some other situations, you do your assembling, you have selected your beneficiaries, they will tell you that you're not supposed to get in touch with them. - (Participant 9)

We might decide not to give a lot of details depending on the stakeholder group because sometimes it's too much information and you want to keep it simple. So we might decide to actually simplify this and they need to know that. - (Participant 5)

n) Interventions to limit stakeholder influence on participant responses:

Ensure that you don't mix people of different hierarchies in the same focus group because then they won't speak freely. Usually, we have them separated. - (Participant 2)

Make sure these things are talked about upfront. A lot of this needs to be negotiated up front or made clear upfront. So when you go into the community, maybe we are not doing the best thing for the community or the participants, but you are clear and transparent about what you can and cannot promise them. - (Participant 3)

So kind of affirming them, reinforcing ethics, building rapport, making them feel safe and of course making sure that the environment is safe for them to share. I think a lot of it boils down to creating that sense of safety. - (Participant 5)

o) Participation and skewing of responses:

I would say yes, if maybe they feel like the study is in their favour, definitely. - (Participant 1)

Yeah, it happens all the time. There are actually a few studies about that. If I'm going in there to interview about a health project, they think the more positive they can be, for the most part, the more likely the project will continue and the more money they can get. - (Participant 3)

Yeah. That you can tell. But remember, your objective is not for you to go and judge them in terms of their responses. - (Participant 4)

p) Challenges of working with participants:

Probably, I think just walking away and not doubting that they really truthfully answered your questions or that they didn't misunderstand anything that you were trying to say. - (Participant 1)

I think from an evaluation perspective it's because people are really grateful for support and interventions and programmes that they receive and that does cover how they report back. So this idea that you must be grateful and not say anything negative can be a challenge. - (Participant 2)

I think it's challenging when dealing with different cultures. Some of the challenges working with participants are that they judge me based on my colour, my age. I find that people tend to talk for 45 minutes and I still don't know what the answer is. It's like they take me on this long journey, which is very interesting, but then we get to the end of the story, I've got to go back and piece it all together to figure out what the actual answer - (Participant 3)

Expectations. It differs, for us who have a close relationship with our stakeholders, people expect immediate change or immediate outcome of the study. - (Participant 4)

Getting them to come to the interviews. - (Participant 5)

I think the most challenging aspect of working with participants is getting a hold of them. - (Participant 9)

q) Importance of informed consent:

It is very important. I think that the participants need to know what they getting themselves into. It is very important so you can get authentic responses from participants. - (Participant 1)

It's one of the fundamental principles of research and evaluations. We really don't want to go back to the dark ages before there were ethical protocols around informed consent in research. - (Participant 2)

So I think informed consent is really important in that people really understand what we doing there and how we going to use their information and how their information may or may not have any influence whatsoever on whether or not the project gets funded or not. - (Participant 3)

Of course, it is. I think somebody should know exactly what they getting themselves into. It's quite scary that in some instances it still doesn't happen. - (Participant 5)

I really think in terms of respecting people's rights, crucial human rights. We know where research started and we know where it's been, so to protect people it's really important. - (Participant 6)

It's one of the critical things of an evaluation. A Cornerstone, if you didn't have informed consent, then why would you? Would you even participate in an evaluation? - (Participant 7 & 8)

It is important, but I don't agree with the way we are doing it, how we actually do it. So the whole issue of ethics, we need to rethink the issue of ethics in evaluations. - (Participant 9)