

CRISIS RE-THICS. Research and ethical practices in social sciences during social crises - the cases of the 1997 and 2010 floods, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the war in Ukraine

Popular scientific summary

Conducting social research in social crises, for example during a pandemic, war or flood, is both very important and very difficult. On the one hand, the public wants and has the right to know what is happening: how other people perceive the situation, what is happening to them, how decisions are made. On the other hand, it is a very stressful situation and sometimes the last thing we think about is taking part in research. In addition, certain groups of people are particularly vulnerable to harsh experiences, for example emergency services or people supporting forced migrants in NGOs.

Social research practitioners have to take such a complex situation into account and decide whether to continue existing research projects and whether to start new ones. Crisis situations therefore necessarily affect what social research looks like. For example, during the pandemic, research practitioners suspended some projects, resigned from some, and continued some with smaller or larger changes. There were also completely new projects concerning the pandemic itself, such as helping or remote education. The research community also communicated with each other in the context of the effects of the war in the Ukraine being felt in Poland and made ethical recommendations for the study of, for example, forced migrants exposed to secondary trauma in research.

As seen above, social crises create a research context conducive to change. These can be permanent. In the case of the pandemic, for example, remote interviews have entered standard, rather than exceptional, research practice. We are interested in how other crises change social research permanently. Therefore, we decided to study three types of crises - the floods of 1997 and 2010, the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine - in order to describe these changes, compare them and formulate a catalogue of good research-ethical practices that may be useful in the environment for future crises.

In our project, we are using a sophisticated qualitative methodology to collect cross-sectional and in-depth data. We will be interviewing individual researchers, but also those responsible for university governance or members of ethics committees. We are also planning group interviews with entire research teams, which will show how a crisis situation is handled by the entire research group. We have also planned innovative methodological solutions in the project. In the research workshops we will discuss our analyses and interpretations with the researchers themselves, and in collaborative autoethnography we will analyse our own way of working in this project.