

Doing Ethnographic Drugs Research: Ethical and Moral Dilemmas

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An Ethnographic Study of the Private Policing of UK Music Festivals

1

- To contribute to existing knowledge regarding contemporary drug and crime issues

2

- To increase knowledge and improve standards of private policing in recreational spaces

3

- To reduce harm and increase safety amongst staff and customers at UK music festivals



Researcher Role

Complete
observer?

Complete
participant?

Observer as
participant?

Complete
membership
role?

Participant as
observer?

Active-
membership-
role?



Covert observation?

Benefits:

- ◆ Naturalistic inquiry
- ◆ Minimal intrusion
- ◆ Prevents researcher noise
- ◆ Eliminates the risk of altering behaviour and collecting invalid data
- ◆ Collects accurate data
- ◆ Exposes social harms

Costs :

- ◆ Disregards the individual rights to informed consent
- ◆ Invasion of privacy
- ◆ Could lead to harm to the participant and the researcher

Are covert methods ethical? Could covert methodology cause harm to the participant, researcher and the research field?



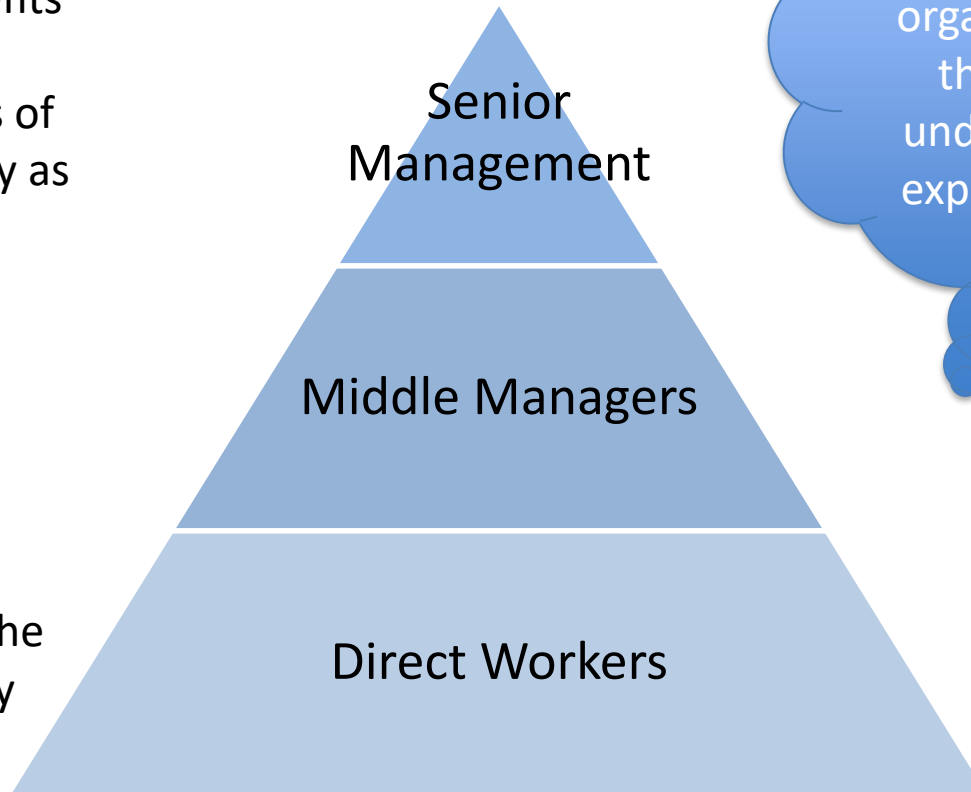
Semi-Covert?

Benefits:

- ◆ Preserves the benefits of covert methods
- ◆ Eases ethical issues of consent and privacy as consent has been granted by the organisation

Costs:

- ◆ Invasion of privacy
- ◆ Dishonest representation of the researchers identity and interests
- ◆ Use of deception through befriending participants
- ◆ Betrayal of trust



Despite informed consent from an organisation, could the employees under observation experience harm ?

Overt Observations?

Is it possible to gain voluntary informed consent from all potential participants prior to entering the field?



Could an 'opt out' approach work?

Can you gain voluntary informed consent from all participants in the field?

How can harm be mitigated when using an opt out approach?

Observations of Unprofessionalism, Deviance or Criminality?

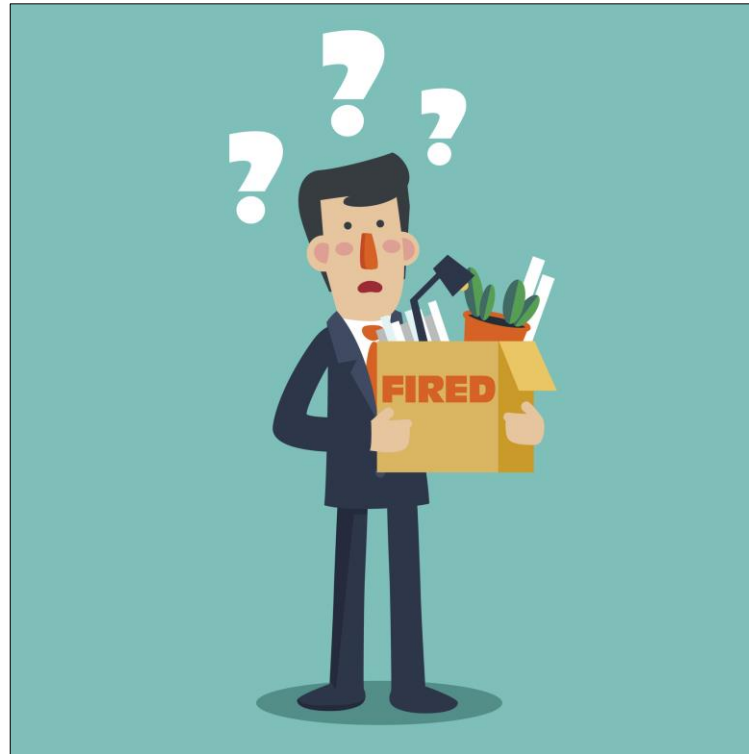
Lackadaisical
behaviour

Use of
illicit
substances

Excessive
use of force

Supply of
illicit
substances

Theft



Collusion
with
organised
criminals