

Appendix W

**Letter of 1 June 2000 from Acting Chairperson,
Human Research Ethics Committee to Mr Kupka**

Emailed to
HKupka
3pm 1-6-00

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1 June 2000

Mr Hans J Kupka,
24 Montego Drive
Royal Palm Estate
Mt Maunganui

Dear Mr Kupka

I am writing to you as Acting Chairperson of the University of Waikato Human Research Ethics Committee (UWHREC), which met on 24 May 2000 to consider ethical concerns relating to your PhD research project which had been identified by the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences (FASS) Ethics Committee.

UWHREC is a standing committee of the University's Academic Board and is responsible by delegated authority of the Academic Board for policies and procedures that serve to

- safeguard the public from unethical research practices;
- safeguard sound academic research from the negative effects of unacceptable research practice;
- encourage good practice in human research;
- promote the reputation of the University as a responsible research and teaching institution.

A core principle underpinning these policies is *minimisation of risk*; as outlined in the Committee's Procedures:

The researcher should endeavour to minimise any risks – physical, psychological, social or cultural – to individuals or collectivities arising from the research project. The researcher should make every attempt to identify and inform participants of potential risk prior to obtaining informed consent.

Risk includes pain, stress, emotional distress, fatigue, embarrassment, cultural dissonance, and exploitation. Participants should be consulted to ascertain any risks which they may identify or concerns which they may have.

Where, during the course of the research, it becomes apparent to the researcher that the risk of harm is greater than had originally been envisaged, participants should be so informed, and the research should be re-evaluated in terms of [the value of the research].

The FASS Ethics Committee referred your project to UWHREC because of concerns that some of your alleged personal and political beliefs, and the very considerable local and national negative publicity they have recently received, may have increased the risk of harm associated with your project and could impinge on your ability as a researcher to ensure that the benefits of the study outweigh any possible costs to participants. Specifically, these costs are identified as the potential distress which some people might feel at being asked to participate in a project conducted by someone holding these views, even though the project itself does not touch upon such matters.

UWHREC notes that questions have also been raised about your familiarity with the social science research skills required to undertake and analyse questionnaire surveys and about your proposed research project generally. However, these are issues for other University authorities to handle, and the Committee's concerns are solely with ethical aspects of your proposed methodology, as outlined above. Our recommendations are therefore as follows:

- (1) UWHREC supports the suggestion made by the FASS Ethics Committee that you re-evaluate the necessity of collecting data for your project through the use of questionnaires. You may wish to consider, for example, whether some of the statistical data you require could be obtained from existing records.
- (2) However, if you believe that the use of questionnaires remains essential to the project, then UWHREC would require you to undertake some additional checks to help ensure that possible risks to your target populations are minimised.

The Committee understands that you have already identified and approached certain agencies asking them to distribute questionnaires to individuals and families on your behalf. As a research practice, this two-step distribution process normally helps to minimise risk because potential respondents can be confident they remain completely anonymous to the researcher, who will not know who they are or whether they have agreed or declined to participate. However, in the light of the recent publicity, and the possibly increased risk of distress, the Committee has resolved that you should write to these agencies again, explicitly acknowledging this publicity and the heightened risk, and asking them to confirm whether or not they are still willing to distribute questionnaires on your behalf.

By inviting the relevant agencies to reconsider their willingness to cooperate in your research you are ensuring that they are informed about the possible risks to participants, and that they understand how they themselves might become associated with the recent widespread publicity. They will be able to weigh up the possible advantages and disadvantages, both to themselves and to others, of taking part in your project. If they agree to remain involved, you will be in a position to assure UWHREC that their *informed*

consent to provide assistance has been received and we can all have greater confidence that the research can proceed satisfactorily. If they now choose to withdraw, this will provide an indication that the viability of the proposed surveys has indeed been significantly undermined by recent events.

Please would you let me know, having taken these matters into consideration, whether or not you still intend to proceed with the use of questionnaires. If you do, please also confirm that you will write to the agencies through which you intend to distribute the questionnaires in the terms set out in this letter, and undertake to provide full documentation of your correspondence with them, including their responses when you have received them. At that time, UWHREC will confirm whether it is satisfied that any risk involved in your project has been minimised as far as reasonably possible, and that any risk that remains is outweighed by the value of the research.

Please note that no further questionnaires should be distributed until this process has been completed. Questionnaires going directly to businesses should also be withheld until the overall viability of your plans to survey community opinion can be ascertained. However, UWHREC has undertaken to engage and communicate with you on this matter as promptly as possible in order not to cause you undue delay.

I look forward to hearing back from you in the near future. Please address correspondence to me C/- Helen Pridmore in the Vice-Chancellor's Office of the University of Waikato.

Dr Henry Bennett
Acting Chair, Human Research Ethics Committee

Cc Associate Professor Volker Knuefermann
Cc Dr Anna Green, Chairperson, FASS Ethics Committee
Cc Professor M J Selby, Chairperson, Postgraduate Studies Committee
Cc Vice-Chancellor