Ethical issues are issues because there is a conflict between the needs of the researcher (to understand and produce knowledge to benefit society) and the rights of the individual (right to withdraw and being treated fairly).

**Benefits To Society**

There have been many important findings in psychological research that offer benefits to society.

**Bowlby “44 Juvenile Thieves”** – Bowlby’s research on separation and attachments showed the importance of emotional care in early childhood development to avoid negative effects in later life. He made changes to the foster care, adoption processes and maternity/paternity leave to ensure children do not face deprivation.

**Watson and Rayner “Little Albert”** – Helped our understanding of learned behaviour which has led to positive applications. For example, developing therapies (i.e. SD) to help treat phobias or the use of conditioned to shape child behaviours in school and at homes. The behavioural treatments also lack the side effects of drug therapies.

**Milgram “Behavioural Study of Obedience”** - Research showed that when given instructions from an authority figure, individuals are likely to follow orders even if it is hurting someone. This was particularly of interest as to why Nazi officers blindly trusted Adolf Hitler despite the horrendous things he was going, giving “holocaust” a potential explanation of social situation pressures. This can be used to explain why individuals perform wrong acts under the influence of peer or status pressure.

**Addiction** – Research on psychoactive drugs is very important in the treatment of mental health. McCrone (2008) commented on the use of drugs vs. psychotherapies saying “people receiving medication provides a much greater economic gain than therapies” – evidence-based research on effective drug therapies is important in reducing costs and helping people return to work.

**Potentially Negative Consequences For Society**

Some areas of research have a more social impact than others. These areas of research are sometimes referred to as social sensitive research.

**Individual Participants**

The welfare of individuals is worthy of equal consideration to the potential benefits of wider society.

Watson and Rayner “Little Albert” – They concluded that “they could do him relatively little harm”. We do not know the full extent of the cost as Albert was removed from the study before being debriefed (the mother had a right to withdraw). This could have led to a long-term phobia. Watson and Rayner also made the experience worse removing his thumb from his mouth (a form of comfort).

Also, there was a lack of confidentiality as the researchers gave information about Albert’s mother (she was a wet nurse) and images were shown of Albert’s reactions (also had his first name and second name initials were shown) – can be identifiable.

**Milgram “Behavioural Study of Obedience”** – His findings have had an enormous impact on our views of obedience – people are shocked at how far an individual will go to harm others. The participants faced psychological harm as they thought they electrocuted someone “no one can take away from you the knowledge of how you acted” (Slater, 2004). Participants also faced “seizures” and “panic attacks”.

However, some participants said that participation in this study had taught them an important lesson in life. For example, one man said his participation caused him to re-evaluate his whole life and he realised how vulnerable when they had been to authority – gave him the confidence to come out as a gay man. (84% were glad to have taken part and 74% learnt something).

**Placebo Drug Trials** – When conducting research on the effectiveness of a drug, placebo trials are done. This requires participants to come off medication making their conditions worse, especially for a schizophrenic (can cause self-harm or harm to others). Also, there is a deception as participants thought that they were getting treatment but actually weren’t.

**Risk Management Techniques Used By Psychologists**

Psychologists have a professional responsibility to manage ethical risks in their research.

In Britain. Psychologists are bound by the guidelines of the British Psychological Society (BPS) – the code of Ethics and Conduct. This identified 4 core principle: