Martin Tolich is an Associate Professor in sociology at the University of Otago in New Zealand. For most of his academic career stretching 25 years he has been involved in research ethics in some capacity. He was the Deputy chair of the Massey University human ethics committee for six years and was appointed by they Minister of Health to be the inaugural chairperson of the multi-region health and disability ethics committee based in Wellington. He served in the latter committee role from 2004 until 2008. When he resigned from that committee he joined with other former chairs of the health and disability committees to create a not-for-profit New Zealand ethics committee. This committee [http://www.nzethics.com/] filled a gap in the ethics review system in New Zealand. Researchers from universities and from health organisations are mandated to seek ethics approval. Many researchers from NGOs, community research groups and government departments fall outside of this system. Since 2012 the New Zealand ethics committee has reviewed 50 applicants per year. While initially the review was gratis government departments, contract researchers and NGOs are now expected to pay a nominal fee. Community research organisations and not for profit organisations remain gratis.

A goal of the New Zealand ethics committee was to downplay the power relationship between applicant and ethics committee. The fact that the review is voluntary adds a degree of powerlessness. The mechanism by which they achieved this are documented in two articles written about the committee.


Tolich has been writing about research ethics and research ethics committees for the last 20 years. Essentially research ethics, especially qualitative research ethics have become his his core research interest. Four books include:

- Tolich, Martin (Ed.) (2016) *Qualitative Ethics in Practice* Left Coast Press, Walnut Creek, CA

Additionally, Tolich is co-editing with Ron Iphofen a Sage Handbook on qualitative research ethics. His next book will be a co-authored text published by Bloomsbury on Home Sensor research.

The following articles on various qualitative research techniques (autoethnography, focus groups, narrative research, ethnography) demonstrate a commitment to thinking critically about how qualitative researchers go about their craft.


Other journal articles have focused on research ethics committee policy. He was a signatory of the New Brunswick declaration.


Tolich, Martin and Jonas Hapuka (2009) “Number-eight wire ethics: A New Zealand ethics committee’s response to lengthy international clinical trial information sheets” New Zealand Medical Journal 122:1293


Besides founding the New Zealand ethics committee Tolich created a free resource for novice researchers and postgraduate students. TEAR (the ethics application repository) was an open access archive allowing novice researchers to read complete applications from experienced researchers prior to submitting their own application. The TEAR site has most recently moved to the United Kingdom and is accessible by this link https://tread.tghn.org/ Readers are invited to submit their research ethics application to TREAD (the research ethics application database).

Tolich’s work in progress is a paper to be presented at the British Sociological Association in Manchester April 2017. The abstract reads:

Eradicating Anonymity from the Qualitative Lexicon

The UK Data Archive treats the ethical concept anonymization as if it had a universal malleable practice. It is not. This presentation makes a case for deleting anonymity from the qualitative research lexicon. The UK Data Archive instructions to researchers are misleading claiming audio-visual or textual data can retain maximum content if anonymised by pseudonyms, dissolving any problematic identifying information. Advocates promoting anonymization practices for qualitative
researchers do so by jemmying qualitative research into a biomedical frame. Promises to informants that pseudonyms can anonymise data are false. This presentation first reviews the current literature that places anonymity and confidentiality on a continuum without acknowledging the terms are mutually exclusive. Second, the presentation documents long line sociologists from William Whyte to Carolyn Ellis who have employed the feebleness of pseudonyms. To be ethical qualitative researchers can only offer informants what is realistic; protections are limited to de-identifying data (conjuring less surety than anonymity) and confidentiality in both its external and internal confidentiality forms. For example, attempts to disguise families or small workplaces from “other” occupants or “other” loved ones compromises internal confidentiality. Ethical research requires qualitative researchers to use concepts that protect their informants, not mislead them. The goal of this policy related paper is to rewrite the Data Archive Guideline