

REVIEW PAPER

Role of Ethics in Social Research

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ABSTRACT

Ethics are extremely important for setting boundaries in research to determine what science can and cannot do, and the difference between right and wrong. Research is the key to progress in science. However, the steps taken during research must be carefully considered for its ethical methodologies and also implications. Ethics in social research are a set of principles or guidelines that will assist the researcher in planning research decisions. This paper is prepared by the review method from widely available literature and guidance documents published by funding bodies, researchers, learned societies and professional organisations. This paper is designed to give practical advice on integrating ethics into the planned research by providing, wherever possible, checklists for points at which a pause is needed to reflect and plan the action to be taken. While this paper focuses on more formal aspects of research ethics compliance associated with social science research, it also draws attention to ethics in research practice and day-to-day research work, and identifies ways to integrate ethical conduct in the research. Hence, it highlights the two ethical dimensions of social science. These are the board principles of ethics and guiding principles of ethics use in social science. This paper is aim to proving ethical principles to the researchers so the they can able to focus their research for the good of mankind and for expanding the frontiers of scientific knowledge, while enjoying the freedom of thought and expression, and the freedom to identify methods by which problems are solved, according to recognized ethical principles and practices. Indeed, perhaps more than any other professionals, academic researchers enjoy great freedom to explore their professional interests, investigate a wide range of phenomena and set their own research agenda.

Key words: *Ethics; Social science; Research; Ethical characteristics;*

Research is a systematic, socially organized quest for new and better insight. Scientific knowledge is of value in and of itself. Many research results can also be useful for improving social conditions. The ultimate responsibility of research is to seek the truth. Accordingly, scientific integrity is a key aspect of research ethics. Research means to verify the old facts and at the same time to find unknown facts working behind social phenomena which lead to the discovery of many uniform laws underlying human behaviour. Research involves Planning, data collection and analysis (Kapila, 2001). Research is considered to be the more formal, systematic, intensive process of carrying on the scientific method of analysis. It involves a more

systematic structure of investigation usually resulting in some sort of formal record of procedures and a report of results or conclusions (J.W.Best, 1977). According to Travers, (1978) Educational research is that activity which is directed towards development of a science of behaviour of a science of behaviour in educational institution. Social research is the scientific study of society which examines society's attitudes, assumptions, beliefs, trends and rules. Social research also determines the relationship between one or two variables (Valek, 2011). Ethics in social research are a set of principles or guidelines that will assist the researcher in planning research decisions. It is the application of moral rules and professional codes of conduct to the collection,

analysis, reporting, and publication of information about research subjects, in particular active acceptance of subjects' right to privacy, confidentiality, and informed consent (Marshall, 1998). Ethics are a system of moral principles and a branch of philosophy which defines what is good for individuals and society (BBC, 2005). Ethics are norms and standards of behaviour that guide moral choices about behaviour and relationships with others. The main goal of ethics is to ensure that no one is harmed from research activities. The ethics is not a individual exercise, the ethical of our decisions and actions is defined socially, not individually. (Hundekar et al 2005, Navran 2010)

The term ethics refers to accepted principles of right or wrong that govern the conduct of a person, the members of a profession or the actions of an organization. Ethical decisions are those that are in accordance with those accepted principles of right and wrong whereas an unethical decision is one that violates accepted principles. (Hill and Shane, 2008). The social scientist is supposed to be objective. The researcher while doing research protects the outside world from his personal values. A general maxim of science is that the more control the scientist has over subjects in his study, the more applicable are his findings (Smith, 1975). Ethics are about making choices that may not always feel good or seem like they benefit you but are the 'right' choices to make. They are the choices that are examples of 'model citizen' and are the examples of 'golden rules' like don't hurt, don't steal, don't be honest and don't lie. (Srivastava, 2011).

Importance of ethics in social research: The main objective of ethics in social research is to remind researchers that the research should strive to protect the participants. All researchers should be familiar with the basic ethical principles and have up-to-date knowledge about procedures designed to ensure the

safety of research. If one part of research is conducted unethically, the integrity of the entire research is vanished. Ethical norms promote the aims of research such as knowledge, truth and avoidance of error. E.g prohibitions against fabricating research data promote the truth and avoid error. Since research involve great deal of cooperation and coordination among many people, ethical standards promote the values that are essential for collaborative work such as trust, accountability, mutual respect and fairness. Many ethical norms in research such as guidelines for authorship, copyright and patenting polices, data sharing policies and confidentiality rules are designed to protect *intellectual property* of participants. Ethical norms in research also help to build public support for research. People likely to *fund research* project if they can trust the quality and integrity of research (Resnik, 2010).

Concepts related to ethics : Ethics and morality are terms often used interchangeably. Ethics comes from the Greek word *ethos*- moral character or custom. Morality comes from the Latin word *moralis*- custom or manner, character, proper behaviour. Both words deal with the customs or the manner in which people do things. In simple terms, Morals define personal character, while ethics stress social systems in which those morals are applied. Ethics is the set of guidelines by which we intend to conduct our lives... morality is a measure of how well we manage to live up to that aim. The ethical researcher knows he shouldn't cheat his respondents whereas the moral researcher actually wouldn't (Perle 2004).

The terms ethics and values are not interchangeable. Ethics is concerned with how a moral person should behave whereas values are the inner judgments that determine how a person actually behaves. So values provide the basis for judgments about what is important for the researcher to succeed in its research objective. Values are what we judge to be right.

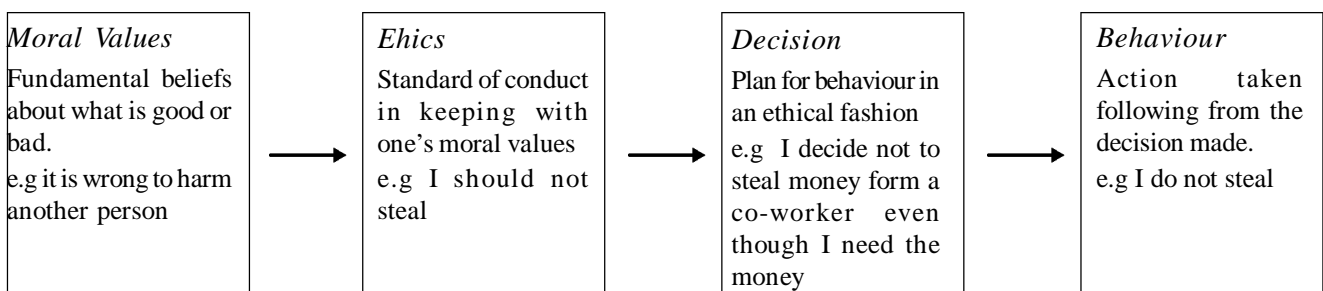


Fig 1. Moral values versus ethics (Greenberg and Baron,2009)

Individually or organizationally, values determine what is right and what is wrong and doing what is right or wrong is what we mean by ethics. To behave ethically is to behave in a manner consistent with what is right or moral (*Garvin 1953*).

Moral values (which provide the basis for ethics and ethics which are standard of behaviour that can be regulated by organization. Ethical standard influence our decisions and behaviour.

The terms code and guidelines are often used loosely. Guidelines raise a set of ethical issues which inform researchers about the type of considerations they need to operate by. Codes are more directive, generally providing a set of 'do's and don'ts' as well as highlighting the range of ethical issues. For example honesty governs the human behaviour in the form of principles such as tell the truth, don't deceive, be candid, don't cheat. In this way, ethical codes give rise to principles in the form of specific 'dos' and 'don'ts.' (*Dench and Iphofen 2004*). *Areas that ethical codes include:* Honesty, Objectivity, Integrity, Carefulness, Openness, Respect for intellectual property, Confidentiality, Responsible publications, Responsible mentoring, Respect for colleagues, Social responsibility, Non-discrimination Competence, Legality and Human subjects protection.

Social responsibility is defined as a mode of ethics that implores us to act in a way "to benefit society." Social responsibility, then, is a subcategory of ethics that dictates how we should make decisions and/or live our lives. Those who adhere to the principles of social responsibility make decisions based on the principle that the best decision is the one that will do the most for society at large, even if that means sacrificing their own personal wants and/or needs (*Landy, 2009*).

Types of ethics in social research :

Meta-ethics: Meta-ethics is a field within ethics that seeks to understand the nature of moral judgment. The focus of meta-ethics is on how individual understand, know about and what he mean when he talk about what is right and what is wrong.

Normative ethics: Normative ethics is concerned with the content of moral judgments and the criteria for what is right or wrong. So normative ethics is the study of what makes action right and wrong. Normative ethics believes that if an action results in a good outcome, then the action is moral. Individuals should make choices based on the end results.

Applied ethics: Applied ethics studies the specific problems or issues with the use or application of moral ideas investigated in normative ethics and based on the lessons of meta-ethics. e.g. the issue of abortion can be seen as an applied ethical topic since it involves a specific type of controversial behaviour as if is right for an individual to have an abortion. But it can also depend on more general normative principles such as possible rights of self-rule and right to life, which is often, determines the morality of that procedure. The issue also resets on meta-ethical issues such as, where do rights come from? And what kind of beings has rights? (*Newall , 2005*)

Broad principles of ethics to be applied in extension research : American Sociological Association (2002) gave general five principles to which extension researchers should adhere(*Smith 2003, Guthrie 2010*): *Professional competence:* Maintain and improve professional competence through education and learning, adherence to the highest possible technical standards, avoidance of plagiarism, correct representation of your own expertise, no discrimination, exploitation or harassment. *Integrity:* Keep your promises and agreements, act with sincerity, and strive for consistency of thought and action. *Professional responsibility:* It is responsibility of researchers to serve clients and user groups whose needs, incentives and goal may be in conflict. Researchers are responsible not only for their content but also for integrity in explaining both these opinions and their bases. It is responsibility of researchers not to undertake secret research.

Respect for people's rights: Maintain participant's dignity, protect the information, seeking informed consent, and protect them from physical, psychological and social harm.

Social responsibility: Strive to promote social good and prevent harms through research. Researchers must show respect for the values and views of research subjects, even if they differ from those generally accepted by society at large. Researchers should not ascribe irrational or unworthy motives to anyone without providing convincing arguments for doing so.

Guiding principles of ethics to be applied in extension research are :

Permissions in research: Permission in research apply in two main areas. One is where approval is needed from authorities to carry out the project or research.

The other is obtaining informed consent from participants. Approval of research is usually required by academic institution. Each institution will have different rules for approving research. Find out what they are and discuss them with supervisor or course lecturer.

If the project/research is approved, you might need subsequent agreement from particular authorities to carry out work in places for which they are responsible. These authorities might be senior managers of organizations in which you want to collect data, community leaders or heads of households where you want to interview. E.g Department of Education might often have educational researchers wanting a research in its schools. School principals complain that too much research is interrupting classes, so the department sets up procedures to examination requests. The primary responsibility of the department is to ensure that children's education is not interrupted unnecessarily (Guthrie 2010).

Ethics related to Institutions: Institutions have a responsibility to respect the autonomy of researchers and the ethical guidelines for research. Institutions should create and maintain an environment with adequate support systems to enable researchers to follow ethical guidelines. Institutions have a responsibility to take appropriate and adequate steps for protection against pressures harmful in following ethical guidelines for research. Research policy institutions ought to give priority to research efforts so that they, directly or indirectly, in the short or the long term, can benefit society and culture. It is incumbent upon institutions and individual researchers to develop and maintain good research practice. Institutions are to have procedures to enforce breaches of research ethics standards. (Jesani and Barai 2005)

Ethical characteristics of a social researcher :

Giving of one's best : The first and foremost distinguishing feature of an ethical personality is *the spirit of service itself*. It basically comprises seven ingredients:-

- Excellence is the state or quality of excelling. Achieving a little more than what is strictly expected.
- Sensitivity is the quality of sensing intensely, instinctively and instantly the feelings, emotions and reactions of other human beings and avoiding anything that will disaffect people and going out of

the way to anticipate and help.

- Integrity is consistency of actions, values, methods, measures, principles, expectations and outcomes. As a holistic concept, it judges the quality of a system in terms of its ability to achieve its own goals.
- Responsiveness is being receptive to ideas, suggestions and requests in a positive way and with 'will do' spirit.
- Vigour is being energetic, tireless and dynamic in performance.
- Commitment is being passionately dedicated to cause or task and total identification with it.
- Empathy is the capability to share and understand another's emotions and feelings. It is often characterised as the ability to 'put oneself into another's shoes.'

Loyalty to team associate: Second important characteristic is building up the self esteem, competence and capabilities of one's associates. The first and foremost aim of everyone in any field of endeavour is to an inspiration and an exemplar. No one who aspires to lead or manage can afford to lose sight of the fact that human beings are the most precious assets of any organization. Harmonious team work, strict discipline and total involvement are the mainsprings of achievement.

Loyalty to Participants: It is prime responsibility of researcher to be loyal for all participants. Mahatma Gandhi defined the ethical imperative very concisely. His tribute to the greatness of the customer/ participant is quoted: "A participant/customer is the most important visitor on our premises. He is not dependent on us. We are dependent on him. Sensitivity makes for loyal customers who help enlarge the market share by attractive new ones by their endorsement of the quality of the product or service.

Social responsibility: This distinguishes a human being or organization from animals. The justification for this rests on a number of important considerations. Tangibly, social responsibility is essential pathway to develop good relations with participants (Srivastava, 2011).

CONCLUSION

All good research paper must have adhered values or code of ethics. The ethics is very important in social science research. From this paper we can conclude that

the researcher should make use of the ethical principles like beneficence, privacy, integrity, honesty etc for fruitful research and take complete responsibility for the actions that research does not harm the participants. Most researchers want to receive credit for their contributions and do not want to have their ideas stolen or disclosed prematurely. Many of the ethical norms help to ensure that researchers can be held accountable and useful to the public. For instance, federal policies on research misconduct, conflicts of interest, the human subject's protections, and animal care and use are necessary in order to make sure that researchers who are funded by public money can be held accountable to the public. They should make their data available to their

professional peers so that they may verify the accuracy of the results. Information gathering and documentation must be done in a manner that presents least risk to respondents, is methodologically sound and builds on current experience and good practice. The safety and security of all those involved in research is of paramount concern and confidentiality of respondents who provide information must be protected at all times. They give appropriate credit to those who aided them in their investigation, participated in the data analysis or contributed to the preparation of the research report. We should avoid falsification, fabrication and plagiarism so that results of the study is published in reputed journals and contributed to rural community as a whole.

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