

PRACTICING ETHICS IN RESEARCH



Plate- One of the research laboratories, Department of Zoology

ii. Research is not individualistic. It involves cooperation and coordination among many different people in different disciplines and institutions, and hence ethical standards promote the values that are essential to collaborative work, such as trust, accountability, mutual respect, and fairness. The different sets of ethical guidelines for research, for example, guidelines for authorship, copyright and patenting policies, data sharing, confidentiality rules in peer review, etc, are designed to protect intellectual property interests, and at the same time encourage collaboration.

iii. Ethical practices help to ensure that researchers can be held accountable to the public.

iv. Practicing ethics helps to build public support for research. People are more likely to fund research projects if they can trust the quality and integrity of research, and finally,

v. Many of the norms of research promote other important moral and social values, such as social responsibility, human rights, animal welfare, compliance with the law, and health and safety.

A set of guidelines thus become imperative. Research misconduct could be defined as fabrication, falsification, or plagiarism in proposing, performing, or reviewing research, or in reporting research results. (i) Fabrication is defined as making up data or results; (ii) Falsification is manipulating research materials, equipment, or processes, or changing or omitting data or manipulating results such that the research is not accurately represented in the research record, and finally (iii) Plagiarism is defined as the deliberate and conscious appropriation of another person's ideas, processes, results, or words without giving appropriate credit. What, in general, is conceived as unethical practices for the research scholars are the following:

- i. Publishing the same paper in two different journals without telling the editors
- ii. Not informing a collaborator of your intent to file a patent to make sure that you are the sole inventor
- iii. Including a colleague as an author on a paper in return for a favour even though the colleague did not make a serious contribution to the paper
- iv. Submitting the same paper and getting it published, with the only change reflected in the title, which is very often suitably moulded
- v. Theses submitted, similarly with the data manipulated, and the title again suitably modified as if the field site was different
- vi. Using an inappropriate statistical technique to enhance the significance of your research
- vii. Bypassing the peer review process.
- viii. Conducting a review of the literature that fails to acknowledge the contributions of other people in the field or relevant prior work, and the list goes on.
- ix. By-passing the anti-plagiarism software available (or even mandated for) to get the theses approved.

Ethical guidelines to be practiced while conducting the fieldwork

i. Honesty, impartiality, and willingness to accept that no one is infallible

- a. The ultimate responsibility of research is to seek the truth. Accordingly, **scientific integrity** is a key aspect of research ethics, and hence, honest documentation and consistent reasoning are an absolute must.
- b. **Empathy**, **sensitivity**, and **interpretation** are prerequisites for the research process, and lastly,
- c. **Impartial** discussion of conflicting opinions, and insight into one's fallibility.

It is very important to remember that- what is being pursued, i.e research, is in the greater interest of the society, at large, and not for self-gain *per se*.

ii. Conducting independent research

- a. The institutions or the research guides, in particular, must ensure that research that complies with scholarly quality requirements **is not suppressed** because a topic is controversial.
- c. Research must be safeguarded against control from the inside or the outside that interferes with well-founded problems for discussion that are at loggerheads with particular financial, political, social, cultural, or religious interests and traditions.
- d. Nor should any non-research constraints dictate the results to which research should lead.

iii. *The obligation to respect human dignity*

A research scholar while conducting field research should always keep in mind the following facts-

- i. He/she shall work based on a basic respect for human dignity.
- ii. that you are not as brilliant as you perceive yourself to be.
- ii. Every problem or event you come across in the field remains multi-faceted, and hence requires an all-encompassing knowledge base to tackle. Again your knowledge base is limiting.
- iii. As in relationships- respect and appreciate the other's view.

iv. *The obligation to respect the culture, and individual dignity of the stakeholder*

Any research scholar conducting his or her study in the field of say, sociology or anthropology will tend to deride or offend the institution for its backwardness vis-à-vis his or her modern lifestyle led; in gross negligence of the following facts or reasons one should instead strive for—

- a. Why such institutions come into existence in the first place
- b. Is there any resemblances of such institution elsewhere, and if yes, then in what type of societies
- c. What are the roles played by such institutions, instead of the ONLY, you tend to highlight
- d. If, what you believe to be the right conclusion (as per your observation and limited knowledge), then is it right to showcase the perceived wrong-side of the institution, in complete disregard to the feelings of the inhabitants?

The rule remains that you cannot derive conclusions with your limited field of knowledge. The ethical concerns that one should practice thus, are the following;

- a. Have respect for the stakeholders or the participants taking part in your research
- b. Appreciate the cultural aspects of life being led by these people
- c. Do not exploit the knowledge-gain for your cause, for the fact remains that the research output remains for societal gain and NOT for self.

v. *The obligation to respect integrity, freedom of the individual and his/her, and right to participate in your research*

You cannot justify your research by compelling others to be part of it. The participation of the subject of interest remains voluntary. And hence, one must practice the following

- a. Due concurrence and willingness of the stakeholder should be sought
- b. Details of the objectives, the very purpose of conduction of research, and knowledge related to the research being conducted; as also the likely consequences of their participation, should be priorly shared with the stakeholder.
- c. He or She, i.e., the stakeholders be told at the very start that the information being shared with you is likely to be published and thus will be in the public domain.
- d. Where language becomes the barrier, help should be sought from a candidate who can play the role of interpreter. Nonetheless, the questionnaire must be prepared bilingually, i.e., in the language which is understood and apprehended by the subjects or the inhabitants.
- e. At times it might be necessary that one conducts research by making use of the accessories like a camera, tape-recorder, or videos. One should thus seek permission for such from the subjects.

f. The registration of behaviour using technical equipment (camera, video, tape recorders, etc.) implies that the observation material will be stored, and thus possibly serve as the basis for a personal data register. For such registration, people must generally be informed that recordings are being made, how long the material will be stored, and who will be using it. Regard for the self-determination and freedom of such people nevertheless, entails that they should be informed about the purpose of the research when they participate as an informant. In short, EXERCISE TRANSPARENCY.

Remember

- a. **Free consent** means that the consent has been obtained without outside pressure or constraints on individual freedom of action. The consent requirement is intended to prevent invasions of personal integrity.
- b. **Being informed** means that the informant is given information about his or her participation in the research project. The information must be given in a form that can be understood by the informant.
- c. Participants must be given genuine opportunities to reserve themselves from participating in the research without encountering inappropriate pressure or disadvantages.

It is only after such obligations are met, and the stakeholder completely agrees to be interviewed and be observed that one should start with the task at hand.

vi. Regard for the third party

- a. Researchers should consider and anticipate effects on third parties that are not directly included in the research. Interviews, archival studies, and observations often result in the scientist gaining access to information about far more individuals than those who are the focus of the study in question, or who are participating in the exercise. And thus,
- b. The research may have an impact on the privacy and close relationships of individuals not included in the research, but who are drawn in as parties closely related to the informants.

Hence, the researcher should be aware of the potential unintended consequences of their research. If this is the case then, one should reconsider his or her decision to undertake the exercise vis-à-vis the research's critical function and an overall quest for the truth.

vii. The obligation to restrict re-use

- a. Identifiable personal data collected for one particular research purpose cannot automatically be used for another research. Such **data must not be used** for commercial or administrative purposes.
- b. *Re-use of personally identifiable data usually requires the consent of the research subjects.* This does not apply to data that has been anonymized. Anonymized data implies that names, personal identification numbers, and other uniquely identifiable characteristics are removed so that the data can no longer be traced to an individual

viii. Respect for vulnerable groups

Researchers bear a special responsibility for protecting the interests of vulnerable groups throughout their research process. Vulnerability means that the

- a. Vulnerable and disadvantaged individuals and groups will not always be equipped to defend their interests in respect of researchers. Accordingly, researchers cannot take

it for granted that ordinary procedures for eliciting information and consent will ensure individuals' self-determination or protect them from unreasonable suffering.

- b. Furthermore, vulnerable groups may not want to be subject to research for fear of being viewed by the general public in an unfavourable light. In such cases, the requirements concerning information and consent are particularly important. On the other hand, society has a legitimate interest in surveying living conditions, for instance, to gauge the effectiveness of social welfare schemes, and to learn more about the ways in and out of destructive and anti-social behaviour.
- c. Protecting a vulnerable group can sometimes be counter-productive. In reality, such efforts may serve to protect society at large from gaining insight into processes that lead to discrimination and rejection.
- d. Researchers who collect information about the characteristics and behaviour of individuals and groups should avoid using classifications or designations that give rise to unreasonable generalisation, resulting in practice in the stigmatisation of particular social groups.

ix. Be sensitive to the ethos, and belief system of the local community

One simple example here- the perception of the clothes you wear does have a very profound effect on the commoners. For example, a Bermuda you are wearing out of comfort might just be construed as another form of Underwear, and thus despised by the womenfolk, or the elders! And they may just be right!

Drafted by-
(C S Negi)