

Understanding and practicing research ethics: A survey of academics

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ABSTRACT

In today's world, it is not enough to perform research; it must adhere to all the ethical standards set forth by various authorities. This research aims to assess how well informed the public is about research ethics and to identify the specific codes of behaviour held in the highest regard by the research community. The study's results back up the assumption that academics are ethically conscious and that each discipline has its preferred code of conduct.

Keywords: Research ethics; Research practicing; Research community; Academics scholar, Pakistan.

1. INTRODUCTION

Research ethics refers to the standards of conduct that should be upheld by a person conducting an inquiry into a matter of right and wrong. The term "research ethics" refers to a set of criteria about moral principles or values that researchers must follow. In the same vein, the most important research ethic is the correctness or dependability of data, as using fabricated data or faulty data can undermine the respectability and morality of the research process (Dar & Shaigjoiri, 2022). One of research ethics' most severe violations is using someone else's ideas without proper attribution. Plagiarism is a significant problem in the academic community, and it is rising among aspiring researchers and those already working in the field. Lack of knowledge of research ethics worry about being found out, self-assurance that nothing will be revealed, and an overburdening of work all play a role in encouraging researchers to plagiarise (Raj et al., 2022). Therefore, research ethics play an essential role throughout the study process. Scientists must adhere to research ethics and provide mitigating protocols (Samuel & Richie, 2022).

Ethical research reduces the potential for errors and poses no threats to human society; hence it can be summarized as beneficial for the society in all respects (Andronic, 2022). Sticking to rigorous guidelines on study ethics might go either way. There may be benefits and drawbacks to this. First, the clinical trials presented to the research ethics boards revealed how frequently inadequate study methods were developed in a rush. A lack of time prevented the designers from carefully considering all aspects of the research, and they were compelled to disregard several basic ethical norms. There are now two possible results.

Researchers can complete the assignment on time if willing to deviate slightly from the norm. Only the most efficient methods will do when time is of the essence, such as in a medical emergency. Moreover, not having enough time is a valid reason for ignoring research ethics. Research ethics is a potential drawback, as adhering to them may cause us to waste time. Ethically sound research, on the other hand, can be widely shared and utilized without qualms. By following the proper protocols, a researcher can ensure that their findings will not hurt anyone's feelings if they are implemented. One advantage of research ethics is that it allows researchers to have complete confidence in their findings when all ethical requirements are followed (Bahans et al., 2021).

Governments have enacted reforms in the rules and regulations that regulate scientific and research ethics in both industrialized and developing nations to ensure that research is conducted ethically and responsibly, regardless of whether or not it involves human beings. The Responsible Conduct of Research, which was published in 2007; the Singapore Declaration on Research Integrity, which was published in 2010; the Code of Practice for Research, which was published in 2009; the Australian Policy on Research Integrity and Misconduct, which was published in 2015, and the Montreal Declaration on Research Integrity, which was published in 2013, are some examples of government participation in the responsible conduct of research (Abbas et al., 2021). The National Bioethics Committee (NBC) is Pakistan's official body regulating and enforcing ethical practices in the country's health research community. Prior permission from either an institutional review board or a regional research ethics council is required for each study conducted within an established institution. Both the local Institutional Review Boards (IRBs) and the NBC must approve national and international research collaborations. The NBC has a Research Ethical Committee that holds periodic training for IRBs and provides guidelines for ethics evaluations. Since there is not yet a governing body in Pakistan responsible for registering or accrediting IRBs, these organizations can function in line with their methods (Asif, 2021).

2. THE SEARCH FOR THE SCHOLARLY ARTIFACTS

All research should adhere to relevant ethical guidelines aimed at protecting human participants. Because of the comprehensive character of a qualitative investigation, ethical questions take on added weight (Arifin, 2018). The purpose of Aguilera et al., (2022)'s study is to examine the steps taken in Latin American and Caribbean countries to ensure that research is conducted ethically. The results reveal that most nations adhere to ethical research policies, while some fail to meet the Pan American Health Organization. For this reason, nations should implement laws and guidelines to ensure the integrity of scientific research. Bock hold et al., (2022) determined the prevalence of research ethics training and knowledge in Europe. Findings from this study indicate that researchers and students in Europe agree that an emphasis on ethical considerations is necessary throughout the research process. Research ethics during the COVID-19 pandemic is addressed by Surmiak et al., (2022). Results indicate that researchers in the social sciences still place a premium on ethical research practices during a pandemic but that these practices are altered in some way due to developments in the field of ethics. According to Taplin et al., (2022), the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) is interested in learning more about the involvement of children in social research initiatives. As a result, the study concluded that researchers and HREC members require more extensive ethical training before working with young participants.

Ethical principles for research are necessary for the fields of engineering science and computer and information science, as pointed out by Barey et al., (2022). Findings demonstrate that scientists present vital ethical challenges that necessitate ethical standards and moral norms for progress in research. Mental health research ethics were the primary subject of Lim and Paik's (2022) study. A recent study confirmed that ethical research helps mitigate the effects of disasters on mental health. Therefore, ethics are necessary for study techniques to lessen potential harm the study by Barata et al., (2022) aims to learn how members of research ethics committees are affected by ethical concerns. The findings demonstrate that members of research committees face severe moral and ethical dilemmas that require actionable solutions. In-depth studies of research misconduct, other infractions of research ethics and research integrity, and other forms of questionable behaviour have been conducted by Armond et al., (2021). According to the data, the most common problems stem from patient safety, fabrication, and falsification issues. The predominance of fabrication and falsification instances may detract attention from essential but less evident transgressions and new sorts of wrongdoing within the academic community. Conway, (2021) looked at the effects of two primary ethical issues related to using human subjects in the cyber terrorism and extremism study research. The ethics of social scientific research are based on the ethics of medical research, which place tremendous value on the safety of research participants. Here, it is advised that researchers' physical, mental, and online well being be given increased protection. As a result, this article also discusses the pros and cons of using deception and waiving consent in online extremism and terrorism research and the associated issue of protecting study subjects from harm.

Oates et al., (2021) conducted research to aid psychologists in proactively identifying, evaluating and resolving the wide range of ethical dilemmas relevant to their studies. Therefore, this Code also seeks to encourage a mindset that will give researchers the

tools they need to conduct their research ethically. This Code also details the Society's expectations for performing ethics review, assuring participants that their participation in research has been subjected to rigorous scrutiny. Mc Cradden et al., (2022) proposed a comprehensive framework for research ethics, which can be utilized to perform systematic analyses of machine learning research throughout all stages of its development. They established connections between the literature and ethical justification, proposed adjustments to established paradigms to accommodate machine learning while upholding moral discipline and safeguarding people and discussed three stages: (1) exploratory, hypothesis-generating data access; (2) silent period evaluation; and (3) prospective clinical evaluation. The study by Solbakk et al., (2021) was done to back the critical need to maintain fundamental human rights commitments and essential ethical standards, reflected in research regulations and guidelines that have been painstakingly crafted over time. In closing, we reflect on the significance of the knowledge gained from past wrongdoings justified by academic inquiry. According to Ashley, (2021), research fatigue negatively impacts patients' health and willingness to participate in future studies. Opportunity costs and selection bias are two further unfavourable outcomes of researcher fatigue that weigh down the entire scientific enterprise. Miggelbrink et al., (2021) advocated for the following principles of research ethics in their study. Research ethics ensures the safety of study participants guides their work and forces them to consider the ethical consequences of their research.

Al Omari et al., (2022) examine the challenges faced by research ethics committees and assess their organizational structures. They reasoned that policymakers have to reassess the current composition of Research Ethics Committees and the obstacles members experience to improve the quality of research generally and guarantee that it complies with international standards. Takano, (2021) conducted a study to assess the worth of research ethics in the healthcare sector. According to the research, medical professionals must have high ethical standards to think ahead and make judgments against the grain when necessary. This is because problems arise that are sometimes impossible to solve by simply adhering to the present legislation. The norms can be better understood if the historical and cultural background they emerged exhibit. Yang et al., (2022) conducted a study with the overarching purpose of learning more about the future of research ethics and the expected development of interest areas related to issues that have lately gained social significance. The implication is that a rule based, fundamentalist understanding of ethics is sufficient for fostering a culture of ethics.

Topics that fall under the umbrella of "ethics" include concerns like human safety and adhering to a code of conduct while doing research. Educational researchers often refer to the philosophical tenets of ethical decision-making in social contract theory, morality or virtue theory. According to act utilitarianism or moral philosophy, researchers should weigh the benefits of their work against the costs to determine how to best use their resources (Zawacki-Richter et al., 2020).

3. FIELD SETTING

Every profession has its own unique set of ethical challenges. When conducting studies in the social sciences and other academic fields, researchers often face moral dilemmas. Academic review boards have led to greater standardization of research integrity and ethical conduct norms. However, there is still considerable variation in how researchers in different fields and cultures see the moral implications of standard research procedures (Vaclay et al., 2013). Researchers nowadays have a responsibility to act ethically while pursuing their scientific goals. However, learning the necessary significant ethical norms might seem like an overwhelming effort. A survey is taken to gauge the level of comprehension of research ethics among academics, and the information comes from Master's and Doctorate of Philosophy students in Pakistan. Everyone has a research ethics viewpoint regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation, or academic discipline.

4. EXPERIENCED SURVEY

After engaging a substantial number of research scholars from various academic departments, the study presented the central finding of the survey. PhD scholars of the Agriculture Department confirmed that:

- I) Research ethics is all about uniqueness in work;
- II) Do not violate ethical norms; report the information, procedures, and results with integrity;
- III) Do not manufacture or overlook existing data; exchange information, outputs, resources, and materials; and
- IV) Be open to critique and innovative thinking.

Research ethics, according to medical students, include:

- I) Collecting one's patient samples and
- II) Being forthright in one's data reporting.

Research ethics, as defined by Master and Doctorate of Philosophy students in the Economics Department, include:

- I) Do not plagiarize other people's work and not try to cut corners and
- II) Never steal any other researcher's idea since the fundamental notion underlying every researcher's work.

As the discipline of psychology puts a premium on the objectivity of facts, an advocate for this view argues that:

- I) Researchers should not make conclusions based on their subjective impressions of the people they are studying and
- II) Interactions between the researcher and respondents should be treated with the highest seriousness.

Findings from the poll indicate that educators in the social sciences have a solid grasp of research ethics. The results boil down to the following:

- I. Students know more about the relevance of research ethics in their final dissertation report than they did at the beginning of the semester.
- II. Many students lack enough knowledge of the interaction between their supervisors and research assistants. The intimate interactions paved the way for the termination of the supervisor's position and the student's withdrawal.
- III. Students sometimes fail to properly cite their sources or paraphrase their work, resulting in plagiarism, which is often regarded as the worst kind of scientific misconduct.
- IV. The researcher and the funding agency must formally work on the project's remaining tasks.
- V. Research participants' confidentiality must be protected at all times.
- VI. The researcher's priority should be to ensure the child's safety and prevent accidents.
- VII. To share the study's results at local and international symposia and
- VIII. Abide by all guidelines for research ethics and stay away from any instances of deliberate scientific misconduct.

Respecting participants' privacy is the most critical ethical value in the study process and subjects' sensitivities should never be offended, as social scientists believe. Data fabrication is the most severe research problem and should be avoided at all costs. The amount of plagiarized material should not exceed 10 per cent, or whatever level is allowed by the institution where the researcher is affiliated. Further, the research must not have been done before and all information must have been obtained transparently and honestly.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The study aims to assess the general awareness of research students about research ethics in Pakistan. Researchers in the medical sciences regard data collecting and sample originality as the most critical research ethics, whereas social scientists emphasise the research's central thesis. The importance of subjectivity free facts in psychology is that conclusions should not be drawn from theoretical considerations alone. It is also crucial that researchers act professionally while interacting with participants. Overall, studies that adhere to research ethics are more robust in validity, reliability and ease of implementation.

6. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Policy recommendations for making research students more aware of research ethics are as follows:

- I. The fundamental principles of research ethics may be better grasped if students are exposed to real-world research experiences early in their academic careers.
- II. The observed learning outcomes aid consideration of qualitative data on students' comprehension of research ethics.
- III. More ethical research leads to excellent quality data; hence, universities must provide training in research ethics for students doing research in the pure sciences.
- IV. Promote understanding amongst students of the gravity of the issue of plagiarism.
- V. Research ethics committees should take action to bolster ethical principles and highlight moral ideals in research activities to ensure that the research process as a whole is treated with respect and dignity.
- VI. The positionality of the researcher and the subject are vital parts of analysis in qualitative research because they provide insight into how knowledge and experience are situated, co-constructed, and factually and generally placed. The need for researchers to practice a care ethic for their subjects and the qualitative research process directly results from the methodological requirement for reflexivity. It does more than make data more complete.

- VII. Research methods that are both ethical and effective in improving young people's health should consider the unique circumstances of each community they serve and
- VIII. Respondents highlight the need for responsive evaluation that considers the specifics of catastrophe situations and disaster research. Independent reviewers and careful consideration of any ethical concerns raised by the study were also related to careful assessments.

Moral and practical considerations are crucial to contemporary research, both for the study's participants and the study's investigators. Therefore, Institutional Ethics Boards should be consulted for guidance on particular moral issues. Study malpractice includes the exploitation of research participants, and forgery and dishonesty are also forms of unethical conduct. Adequate attempts should have been made to identify a competent legal authority to provide permission.

Ethical approval

Not applicable.

Informed consent

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Conflicts of interests

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interests.

Data and materials availability

All data associated with this study are present in the paper.

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