

# Ethical & Moral Concerns in Social Science Research

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As a concept, 'research ethics' refers to a complex set of values, standards and institutional schemes that help to constitute and regulate scientific activity. Ultimately, research ethics is a codification of ethics of science in practice.



Social science investigates complex issues which involve cultural, legal, economic, and political phenomena (Freed-Taylor, 1994). This complexity means that social science research must concern itself with "moral integrity" to ensure that research process and findings are "trustworthy" and valid (Biber, 2005).

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- **Research, Society & Ethics**
  - **Respect for Individuals**
  - **Respect for Groups & Institutions**
  - **Research Community**
  - **Commissioned Research**
  - **Dissemination of Research**

# Research, Society & Ethics

## 1. Norms and values of research

Researchers are obliged to comply with recognized norms of research ethics.

## 2. Freedom of research

Both researchers and research institutions are responsible for preserving the freedom and independence of research, especially when the topic is controversial or when strategic or commercial considerations impose pressure and constraints on research.



### 3. **Responsibility of Research**

Responsible research requires freedom from control and constraints, while trust in research requires the exercise of responsibility by both researchers and research institutions.

### 4. **Responsibility of institutions**



Research institutions must guarantee that research is good and responsible by preventing misconduct and promoting the guidelines for research ethics.

# Respect for Individuals

## 1. Human dignity

Researchers must base their work on a fundamental respect for human dignity.

## 2. Privacy

Researchers must respect the participants' autonomy, integrity, freedom and right of co-determination.

## 3. Duty to inform

Researchers must provide participants with adequate information about the field of research, the purpose of the research, who has funded the project, who will receive access to the information, the intended use of the results, and the consequences of participation in the research project.

## 4. **Consent and obligation to notify**

When a research project deals with personal data, researchers are obliged to inform the participants or subjects of research and to obtain their consent. The consent must be freely given, informed, and in an explicit form.

## 5. **Confidentiality**

Generally, researchers must process data acquired about personal matters confidentially. Personal data must normally be de-identified, while publication and dissemination of the research material must normally be anonymised. In certain situations, researchers must nonetheless balance confidentiality and the obligation to notify.

## 6. **Limited re-use**

Identifiable personal data collected for a specific research purpose cannot automatically be used for other research.

## 7. **Storage of personal data**

Data related to identifiable individuals must be stored responsibly. Such data must not be stored any longer than what is necessary to achieve the objective for which it was collected.

## 8. **Responsibility for avoiding harm**

Researchers are responsible for ensuring that participants are not exposed to serious physical harm or other severe or unreasonable strain as result of the research.

## 9. **Respect for third parties**

Researchers should consider and anticipate effects on third parties that are not directly included in the research.

## 10. **Protection of children**

Children and adolescents who take part in research are particularly entitled to protection.

## 11. **Respect for the values and motives of others**

Researchers must not ascribe irrational or unworthy motives to participants without providing convincing documentation and justification. Researchers must show respect for the values and views of research participants, not least when they differ from those generally accepted by society at large.

## **12. Respect for privacy and family life**

Researchers must respect individuals' privacy and family life. Participants are entitled to check whether confidential information about them is made available to others.

## **13. Respect for posthumous reputations**

It is important to act with care when conducting research on deceased persons.

## **14. Defining roles and responsibilities**

Researchers are responsible for explaining to the participants the limitations, expectations and requirements associated with their role as researchers.

# Respect for Groups & Institutions

## 1. Respect for private interests

Researchers must respect the legitimate reasons that private companies, interest organizations etc. may have for not wanting information about themselves, their members or their plans to be published.

## 2. Respect for public administration

Public bodies should make themselves available for research into their activities.

## 3. Respect for vulnerable groups

Researchers have a special responsibility to respect the interests of vulnerable groups throughout the entire research process.



#### **4. Preservation of cultural monuments and remains**

Researchers must respect the need to preserve all types of cultural monuments and remains.

#### **5. Research on other cultures**

A particular requirement of research on other cultures is that there ought to be dialogue with representatives of the culture being studied.

#### **6. Limits on cultural recognition**



Researchers must strike a balance between recognizing cultural differences and recognizing other fundamental values and general human rights.

# Research Community

## 1. Co-authorship

Researchers must observe good publication practice, respect the contributions of other researchers, and observe recognized standards of authorship and cooperation.

## 2. Good citation practice

All researchers and students are obliged to follow good citation practice. This is a Pre-requisite for critical examination and important for enabling further research.

## 3. Plagiarism

Plagiarism is unacceptable and constitutes a serious breach of recognized norms of research ethics.



#### 4. **Scientific integrity**

Both researchers and research institutions must promote norms for good scientific practice.

#### 5. **Data sharing**

Research material should be made available to other researchers for secondary analysis and further use.

#### 6. **Impartiality**

Both researchers and research institutions are obliged to report and consider possible conflicts of interest and of roles.



## 7. **Relations with colleagues**

Research should be conducted in compliance with norms of research ethics, for example with regard to openness, fairness and (self-criticism, thereby contributing to research cultures that promote good research.

## 8. **Student-supervisor relationship**

Supervisors are obliged to act in the students' best interests and not to take advantage of their dependence. This applies to academic results and personal matters.

## 9. **Responsibilities of supervisors and project managers**

Supervisors and project managers must assume responsibility for the research ethics problems faced by students or project team members.

# Commissioned Research

## 1. Different types of research

Both researchers and research institutions must ensure that the funding and organization of research is not in conflict with the norms of open, reliable and independent research.

## 2. Commissioned research

Both public and private commissioners have a legitimate right to set the parameters for research assignments, as long as those parameters does not conflict with the other requirements made with regard to the research. However, that does not exempt researchers and research institutions from their share of the responsibility for the agreements they sign with commissioners.

### **3. Responsibility of researchers in large projects**

Researchers who take part in large research projects have a shared responsibility for those projects. It should be clear how an individual researcher has contributed to a research project.

### **4. Independence and conflict of interests**

Both researchers and research institutions should maintain their independence in relation to their principals.

### **5. Transparency in research funding**

Both researchers and commissioners have a duty to make it publicly known who is funding the research.

## 6. **Presentation and use of results**

Both researchers and commissioners have a responsibility to prevent research results from being presented in a misleading manner. It is unethical to delimit the subject of the research with a view to producing particularly desirable results, or to present research results in an intentionally skewed manner.

## 7. **Right and duty to publish**

Knowledge is a collective good, and as a general rule, all results should be published. This is also important to enable the results to be critically examined or re-used.

# Dissemination of Research

## 1. Dissemination as an academic responsibility

Researchers and research institutions are obliged to disseminate scientific knowledge to a broader audience outside the research community.

## 2. Requirements for individuals and institutions

Research institutions must create conditions for extensive and broad dissemination of research characterized by high quality and relevance.

## 3. Interdisciplinary discourse and public deliberation

An important part of dissemination of research in a modern society emerges from the interaction between specialists in various academic disciplines and the public discourse.

#### **4. Participation in public debate**

Researchers should contribute scientific arguments to the public debate. Researchers should express themselves fairly and clearly in order to avoid tendentious interpretations of research results.

#### **5. Accountability in dissemination**

The requirement of accountability is equally stringent in dissemination as in publication.

#### **6. Reporting results to participants**

Researchers have a special obligation to report results back to the participants in a comprehensible and acceptable manner.

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