

Ethics in Research: A Special Focus on Academic Research

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Abstract: Ethics refers to a person's obligation to act by a consistent set of moral principles, regardless of the circumstances in which they find themselves. To work ethically requires performing the appropriate actions at the correct times. The focus of research ethics studies is on the ethical guidelines that researchers in a particular field must follow. In academic research, making ethical decisions prioritizes maximizing the benefits to the study subjects. Applying ethical principles in research is, without a doubt, one of the essential things that can be done to protect the investigation's validity. This study aims to highlight the ethical importance of academic research, issues, and necessary steps to be taken. For the researcher to carry out the research study, they must maintain high moral standards and act ethically. In addition, when the research questions or surveys are being distributed, researchers must ensure that they do not coerce, misuse, or disclose the private information of the respondents for their benefit or without the respondents' concern. Therefore, it is strongly recommended that the researchers conduct themselves ethically and adopt a more responsible attitude regarding the research project.

Keywords: Ethics, Academic, Qualitative, Quantitative, Best Practices

1. Introduction

The concept of ethics has been debated for centuries in various academic disciplines (Meyer & Norman, 2020)^[11]. The idea of ethics can be understood quite differently depending on whom you ask. Some view ethics as rules determining right and wrong (Mondal, 2022)^[12]. According to Srinivasa (2012), ethics generally refers to a "system of moral principles – as a sense of right and wrong and their motives and consequences." ^[14]Research on ethics can be found in various fields, including business and commerce, the social sciences, medicine, and the financial sector. There is also the concept of ethics in business. According to Samouel (2003)'s definition of business ethics, the subject "as a field of study, deals with the application of moral principles and ethical standards to human actions within the exchange process." Because of this, it is typically implemented in the business world to ensure trust between the various parties operating in the market. Ethical considerations also need to be considered during certain stages of a research project, beginning with formulating the problem and continuing through data interpretation and publication of the study's results.

Therefore, like other researchers, business researchers are subject to the same responsibilities, including social, market, legal, and ethical obligations. According to Samouel (2003), social responsibilities involve being concerned about the actions that affect society. On the other hand, market responsibilities are concerned with producing goods and services to customers' requirements at prices that are considered fair. Questions of fairness, potential conflicts of interest, responsibility issues, power imbalances, and honesty concerns can lead to ethical conundrums. According to Hair et al. (2009)^[6], the research process presents many opportunities for ethical and unethical behaviors. Interactions between the following three key groups are the most important contributors to the emergence of moral conundrums in business research:

The first one is the person who uses the information obtained from research. The user might be a decision maker, a client who sponsors the project, a management team, or a practitioner.

The second one is the provider of information for conducting research. It could be a researcher, a research organization, a project supervisor, an employee, or a representative from the researcher's staff.

The third component consists of the individuals chosen to participate in the survey and could either be subjects or objects of the investigation.

2. Ethics in Different Types of Research

2.1 Ethics in Applied Research

This type of research is more concerned with practical aspects of the world rather than obtaining additional skills or knowledge (Isbell et al., 2022)^[7]. Its primary goal is to improve the well-being of the conditions of society through solving and examining social and natural life dilemmas. This kind of research is typically sponsored by financial institutions or agencies, such as the government itself, banks, and public companies, because it is expensive and is conducted on a large scale (Guest et al., 2013)^[4]. It was stated that applied research is discovering how scientific knowledge can be utilized to resolve practical issues. Another way to describe this type of research is as one that is problem-oriented or problem-solving in nature. Because this research aims to discover solutions to current issues, researchers should conduct themselves ethically (Abbott & McKinney, 2013)^[1].

2.2 Ethics in Survey

A researcher may engage in unethical behavior while collecting data by surveying participants (Teitcher et al., 2015)^[17]. In contrast to other kinds of research, social research involves prying into people's private lives and requires participants to reveal sensitive information about themselves (David & Sutton, 2011)^[2]. Most of the time, researchers will ask the participants questions about their personal information, beliefs, or actions (Richards & Schwartz, 2002)^[16]. Respondents have complete control over their right to privacy and decide who may view their personal information. The vast majority of the time, participants will voluntarily disclose such information if they are asked appropriately or if trust is established with them through an explanation of what the study is all about, its purpose, and an assurance that the information they provide will be kept confidential (Neuman, 2006)^[13]. The researcher might explain the implications of their answers to the proposed area and how it might progress.

The use of surveys, or "pseudo surveys," as a marketing tool is the third problem. Most researchers abused the findings and led people astray with their interpretations. "When someone uses the survey format in an attempt to persuade someone to do something and has little or no real interest in learning information from a respondent," is how Neuman (2006) defines a "pseudo survey." The consequences may hurt society. Poorly designed surveys can create policies or rules that waste people's time and cause unnecessary suffering (Neuman, 2006)^[13].

2.3 Ethics in Field Research

Many ethical questions may arise when a researcher has a direct personal involvement in a field study (Rainer & Wohlin, 2022)^[15]. It is especially true in situations where the researcher is working alone and has a limited amount of time to complete the task. The researcher may already be familiar with some of the broad ethical concerns that might come up during the study. In Neuman's (2006) words, "there are five ethical issues that could be raised in this type of research, and they will be briefly discussed in the later part of this paper."^[13] This research could bring up any one of these five ethical issues.

2.4 Ethics in Qualitative research

When conducting any research, ethical problems can arise. The conduct of ethics in qualitative research is distinct from that of quantitative research in its nature and scope. Qualitative research raises some thorny ethical questions concerning how a researcher gains access to the group being studied (Lofland et al., 2022)^[10]. The qualitative research method primarily concentrates on investigating, analyzing, and describing people and the settings in which they live. The respondents' participation in the research study should be voluntary, and they should be willing to share their experiences with others. The ethical principles that govern qualitative research are strikingly similar to those that govern other research studies, which will be covered in the following sections. In qualitative research, participants must get informed consent to balance providing too much information and not providing enough (Kvale, 1996).

2.5 Ethics in Quantitative research

Research studies that fall under the category of quantitative research are those in which the data is compiled and analyzed in numerical form. In this kind of research, human behavior, the distinction between right and wrong answers, and various other measures will all be counted and quantified. In addition, it deals with and incorporates both experimental and non-experimental research, and ethical concerns will be brought up in both types. They take place when the researcher does not make inappropriate use of the conditions or attempt to manipulate them. Ethical considerations in this designed research are complex and potentially more harmful than experimental studies. Therefore, the researcher must be aware of safeguarding the participants and not revealing any information supplied to them without their permission (Isbell et al., 2022; Islam, 2022; Ethical consideration in qualitative and quantitative research, 1997)^{[3][7][8]}.

3. The Foundational Ethical Principles

According to Neuman (2006)^[13], the following are a few of the principles in social research:

- The researcher is the one who bears the ethical responsibility for his/her study
- Teachers or researchers should not use their subjects or students for their benefit.
- There should be a concern for information in research that is implemented
- The researcher is responsible for protecting the confidentiality and anonymity of any information shared with them.
- It is not appropriate to make subjects feel ashamed.
- The research methods used should be selected appropriately by the research topic.
- Unwanted outcomes for the people who participated in the research should be eliminated.
- If the comparative analysis is carried out, the researchers involved should collaborate with the nations being studied.
- Along with the study's findings, the research's specifics should also be made public.
- With the assistance of the data, the results should be analyzed and inferences drawn from them.
- Be sure everything is accurate and follow rigorous methodological guidelines.
- It is inappropriate to carry out research under the cover of anonymity.

3.1 Ethical Obligations

3.1.1 The ethical responsibilities involved in research

An ethical obligation is the bare minimum of behavior expected of someone, typically within the context of their chosen profession. In the field of research, each participant in the research process has specific responsibilities, first and foremost, towards themselves but also toward the other people involved. In this part of the article, we will discuss the ethical obligations that researchers and research participants have.

3.1.2 Ethical obligations of the researcher

During a research endeavor, scientists are typically required to engage in ethical reflection and may be put in ethically challenging situations (Hair et al., 2003)^[5]. They might face these challenges as they interact with their grant providers, supervisors, and respondents, as well as in their capacities. The following is a discussion of the ethical obligations placed on the researcher at different stages of his or her research.

3.1.3 Before the beginning of the research

The time immediately prior to the beginning of a research project is likely to be the most critical stage throughout the entirety of the research process. The researcher is required, at some point in the process, to obtain an understanding of the project objectives by starting with a "researchable" proposition. After the idea for the study has been conceived, the researchers need to honestly assess their capabilities and determine whether or not they have the knowledge, experience, and resources necessary to see the project

through to its conclusion. In addition to this, the researcher needs to be able to convey precisely what the research will be able to accomplish, also known as the "project deliverables." To put it another way, the researchers need to ensure that the research will be able to answer the research questions. In an ideal world, the research project should only get underway once the researcher has complete confidence.

3.1.4 Both during and after the course of the research

The researcher has a professional and ethical responsibility to have in-depth knowledge of the analytical and statistical tools required to finish the research project. For instance, researchers should only use a methodology in which they have a sufficient level of expertise. There are times when researchers are drawn toward a more complicated tool possibly to accomplish two goals: the first goal is to appear more knowledgeable, and the second is to increase the perceived value of the research (Hair et al., 2003)^[5].

3.1.5 Obligations toward research participants

Researchers also have responsibilities toward the people who participate in their research. If they did not participate in the study, it would not be possible to continue. Since participation in most research projects is voluntary, the researcher will not be able to collect the data necessary to carry out the study successfully. They are respecting the people who take part in the research in any way, whether as interviewees or survey respondents, is one of the fundamental considerations to keep in mind. The researcher needs to provide the participants with a comprehensive and comprehensible explanation of the nature and level of their participation requirements. The researcher should also estimate the time needed to complete a particular research task.

There are a few ethical concerns that are especially pertinent in experimental design, and they are privacy, coercion in participation, and the potential for either physical or psychological harm.

3.2 Ethical Obligations of the Research Participants

The discussion of ethical responsibilities is almost always centered on researchers; however, research participants also have their fair share of responsibilities to fulfill throughout a study. Therefore, research participants who are either consumers, industry players, or in some cases, even regulators should be involved severely and as sincerely as possible. Research participants are usually volunteers, but once they agree to take part in a study, they need to be aware of the following things before they do so: Faithful participation, honest responses, and privacy.

3.2.1 Faithful participation

After deciding to participate in the research, the participant in the study has a responsibility to remain committed to the endeavor and work cooperatively with the researcher. The first thing that participants need to do is ensure they follow all of the instructions to the best of their ability because if they do not, it could lead to errors that end up distorting the study's results. There may be times when the participant becomes exhausted and begins to respond without giving his full attention to the activity. The effect may manifest as an unusually high number of "neutral" responses. As a result of the random nature of such mechanical responses, it may require more work for the researcher to establish a pattern.

3.2.2 Honest responses

Unquestionably, participants are required to be truthful; however, accomplishing this goal can be challenging. There are situations where a person may feel torn between giving honest feedback regarding the viability of a particular process or role and responding in a manner that will not threaten his livelihood. It may be the case when the individual is faced with whether or not to give honest feedback. The researchers could win over the participants in their studies if they take the time to explain the precautions they will take to keep the participants' responses confidential. Alternatively, if the potential participant cannot be appeased in any way, he should withdraw from the study entirely.

3.2.3 Privacy

Concerns about personal privacy are not exclusive to the research community; other parties also need to consider them. A researcher can request of his research participants that they do not disclose specifics of the research to others, including interview or survey questions as well as particular research procedures, for the fear that doing so could contaminate later participants. If a subject reveals too much information, other subjects may be able to anticipate what factors are being manipulated, which could increase demand characteristics. As a result, people who participate in research have an obligation to the people conducting

the study to maintain confidentiality regarding certain aspects of the study.

3.3 Implications of Unethical Actions

If dependability during the research process is compromised, the conclusion that is reached may be founded on information that is not reliable. For instance, businesses that are dependent on the results may inadvertently make poor strategic business decisions, which may have the potential to damage the company's credibility or financial performance. Customers, employers, and shareholders all stand to lose when actions of this kind are taken. Customers may be given access to banking or financial products they dislike. Workers may end up working in conditions that could have been more favorable than they were, while shareholders could see their portfolios remain flat or even decline.

4. Ethical Issues - Data

According to Neuman (2006), scientific misconduct occurs when a researcher "falsifies or distorts the data or the methods of data collection or plagiarises the work of others." It takes into account "significant departures" from the recommended best practices of the general research community for all phases within the research process, including the stage of proposing the research, the stage of performing the research, the stage of reviewing the research, and the stage at which the results are reported. The concept of "scientific misconduct" is equivalent to that of "academic misconduct" or "research misconduct."^[13]

4.1 Areas of scientific misconduct

There are several areas of scientific misconduct present in research, namely;

Plagiarism

Non-publication of data

Fabrication and falsification

Faulty data-gathering procedures

Poor data storage and retention

Sneaky publication practices

Misleading authorship

Plagiarism is one of the most widespread forms of unethical behavior in the scientific community. The act of "stealing and passing off the ideas or words of another as one's own without crediting the source" is what is meant when people use the term "literary theft." Another definition of the term is "to commit literary theft" and present an existing idea or product as new and original. According to the definition provided, plagiarising is equivalent to stealing.

5. Ethical Issues - Participants

5.1 Harm to Participants

Most people believe that unethical research must exclude any studies with a risk of harming participants. The term "harm" can refer to several things, including physical harm, damage to the participants' development or sense of self-esteem, stress, and adverse effects on the participants' future career prospects.

People who are asked to recall traumatic experiences during an interview for a survey, for instance, may experience feelings of anxiety and discomfort. The researcher needs to be aware of the potential risks to the participants and consider how to minimize them.

5.2 Deception

A deliberate misrepresentation of facts concerning an investigation's nature, purpose, or consequences constitutes research deception. It causes the investigation to appear to be something that it

is not. During the researcher's interaction with the participant, this occurs whenever there is a missing or added piece of information. [Cause and effect] When a researcher fails to disclose relevant information about an aspect of their study, this is an example of omission deception. Consequently, participants need to be made aware that a study is being conducted on them or that they are only informed about a subset of the study.

5.3 Informed consent

The concept of "informed consent" originates from the participants' inherent right to be briefed on the specifics of the research in which they are being asked to take part before giving their agreement to participate. It is a matter of fundamental human rights designed to protect participants from any physical or mental harm resulting from their participation in the activity. Subjects are required to be briefed on several critical aspects of the research project before they can give their permission to take part. It includes an explanation of the purpose of the study, the potential drawbacks and advantages associated with it, how the findings will be utilized, and how they will contribute to the project's overall objective. In essence, informed consent ensures that the subject's participation is entirely voluntary and that they know everything going on during the experiment. In addition, the participant can quit the study at any time, and the confidentiality of his or her identity will be maintained throughout the process.

5.4 Anonymity and confidentiality

Subjects are considered anonymous when they maintain their anonymity and their identities are either concealed from public view or unknown. For example, an anonymous response can be obtained through a random phone survey or by having an organization distribute surveys on behalf of the researcher to all the staff or customers of that organization. Suppose respondents are not guaranteed to remain anonymous. In that case, the researchers may conceal the identities of the people who participated in the study as quickly as possible, referring to them only by a code number rather than their names or addresses.

In contrast to anonymity, confidentiality means that information may have names attached; however, this information must be kept a secret from the general public and maintained in strict confidence at all times. Because of this, their names are not permitted to be mentioned in any of the written materials or conversations about the research project. The researcher is the only person who should be able to access the interview materials, so they need to be kept in a secure location.

6. Potential Consequences

6.1 Implications of Research Misconduct

As was covered in great detail in the sections before this one, research misconduct is a serious crime that should never be taken lightly. Misconduct in research can also have disastrous effects, as it can have severe repercussions and even more troubling implications. The following is an explanation of several of the negative repercussions:

6.1.1 Loss of funding and research grants; reduction in the amount of support for research

Many attractive corporate and individual bodies are eager to sponsor research projects in their respective areas of relevant interest. The provision of financial and non-monetary support can be sponsorship of an event. No matter how the sponsorship is handled, such contributions must be made to guarantee that the research projects have sufficient resources to see them through from the beginning to the end.

6.1.2 Social Isolation and the Use of Blacklists

If someone is found guilty of conducting unethical research, they may be excluded from the field or blocked. Blocklisting someone can sometimes create a permanent record that will impact the guilty party's future.

6.1.3 Lawsuits and Other Forms of Litigation

Inappropriate conduct in research can lead to the production of false results, which can be uncovered immediately or years later. The results can be used in other ways by relevant stakeholders or users of the result. For example, false results regarding the efficacy of a drug may cause investors to invest millions of dollars in commercializing the production of the drugs on a large scale. When it is ultimately

determined what happened, all investments will be rendered worthless. It can result in losses, both monetary and non-monetary, which, in turn, can lead to lawsuits and other forms of legal action.

6.1.4 Termination

Those who are found to have engaged in improper conduct may be subject to dismissal, which would make it impossible for them to obtain employment anywhere else.

6.1.5 Tarnished the Reputation of the parties involved in the event

Suppose fraudulent research leads to releasing a product or process whose actual risks may have been hidden or covered up by the fraudulent or false results. In that case, there will be damage to the economy, as well as to individuals and society as a whole. The erroneous findings may cause other people to unknowingly follow in their footsteps, for example, by conducting additional research, which will waste time, resources, and effort. It may be many years before erroneous findings are discovered.

6.2 The Steps That Need to Be Taken

Because of the severe consequences of research misconduct, specific steps need to be taken as soon as it is identified or even suspected that misconduct has occurred. We append below the recommendation on actions to be taken by The National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), a federally funded independent agency established in 1965. In the United States, the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) is one of the largest funders of humanities programs. It begins with filing a report or allegation (for instance, by a whistle-blower). The next three steps are as follows:

(1) An inquiry is a review that determines whether or not the allegation is credible and whether or not it is necessary to conduct an investigation.

(2) The investigation is the fact-finding stage, the examination of factual records and evidence (which may include the questioning of witnesses), and the stage that leads to conclusive findings.

(3) Adjudication: Recommendations are evaluated, and appropriate corrective actions are determined based on the findings.

6.3 Preventive Measures

By the well-known proverb "Prevention is Better Than Cure," there are actions that can be carried out as preventative measures to lessen the likelihood of research misconduct occurring. If the appropriate procedures and checks are implemented, there will be less of a chance that research misconduct will occur. It will serve as a deterrent.

An article by Jane A. Steinberg identifies several preventive measures that can be implemented quickly and easily^[9]. These measures include the following:

(1) If it is reasonable and appropriate for the study, ask participants if you can contact them again for quality control.

(2) If they give their permission to be contacted again, each recruiter or data collector should call a few of them to verify the information.

(3) Inquire of them whether or not the data collector met with them, whether or not they satisfy the eligibility requirements, whether or not they were familiar with the recruiter/collector prior to the study, whether or not the study lasted for the appropriate amount of time, or whether or not all aspects of consent were covered.

7. Conclusion

To summarize, ethics plays a significant role in the research process and every other aspect of life. We have discussed the significance of ethics, how it relates to the research that is being proposed, and the implications that it will have for the country if the results are tampered with. In order to carry out the research study, the researcher must be morally upstanding and ethical in their behavior. In addition, when the research questions or surveys are being distributed, he or she must not coerce or misuse or disclose the private information of the respondents for his or her benefit or without the respondents' concern. Additionally, he is not permitted to use the data analysis's findings, as this would put the entire country in danger of being misled. Therefore, institutions ought to educate human resources not only by what is

based on theories but also in a more practical manner while bearing the code of ethics in mind. They should also be instructed on their respective educational and working roles and told the consequences of exploiting their roles. In addition, they should be instructed on their respective roles in the educational and working sectors. As a result, it is strongly recommended that the researcher ethically conduct themselves and take a more responsible attitude toward their research project.

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