

# Research Ethics: Meaning and Principles

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**Abstract-** Research means finding answer or solution of something in a systematic way. It is regarded as the development of a certain topic through a scientific approach and ethics are conscience based rules and regulations that help us to justify between right and wrong behavior. Actually, research ethics are the set of principles which influence a researcher to complete his work without doing anything wrong and against policies of research ethics. It includes appropriate data collection while researching through field work, proper referencing while using other's writing and not using false information. Even, it includes the appropriate behavior with the fellow workers and the other persons who are the subject matter of the research. Actually, research ethics refer to the application of basic ethical principles to the research work which include the graph and implementation of research, honorific value for a society and others, use of resources and research outputs and the regulations of research. The Oxford dictionary defines research ethics as, "A set of ethical and moral rules that guide research practice." It is the only way to control the behavior of a researcher during doing a research because law can only control a person externally, but ethics control the internal justification of a person. Ethics in research is mandatory because it lets one discover a new dimension of knowledge. If it is done unethically, it won't be fruitful. The following research is based on logical explanation, introduction to the history of research ethics, compatible data collection, inclusion of figures for pellucid upshifts about the topic.

**Keywords—** Research ethics, Unethical research, Importance of research ethics, Meaning of research ethics, Principles of ethical research.

## I. Introduction

Research is a process of establishing a certain topic or subject which was under the concept of hypothesis. Furthermore, research gives a physical body to what a person just thought or imagined logically. It is concerned with finding the answer of something or changing a concept which is previously established. Ethics means morally appropriate behavior and decision and examining what should be done. Research ethics are the set of ethical guidelines that guide us on how scientific research should be conducted and disseminated. Research ethics govern the standards of conduct for scientific researchers. It is the guideline for responsibly conducting the research. The origin of the term research ethics had become very popular during the Nazi regime where they used to conduct research unethically and they tampered with the codes of research ethics. That's why there was a huge appeal for the establishment of ethical research because the abuse of this term had a total negative influence on the society. So, ethical research can result in the reformation of prejudiced thoughts and practices of a definite society. Unethical research creates misunderstanding of information, hides the true fact and results in chaos. Only ethical principles can impulse a researcher to think from his conscience and do everything for the research in a transparent way. Besides, research ethics also ensure the expected relation between the researchers and also among the people who are related to a certain research. Research ethics is that much essential as the proper education system of a nation. The students or the people who attain higher education, in the long run they have vast influence in the decision making process of a certain country. So, if he or she comes through the path of dishonesty and violence against the rational justifications of the mind ,

they will put a bad image at many sectors of a country. A nation is more enriched and educated when they are influenced by the ethical principles and upholds the actual facts to the people of it's nation through an ethical research. Research ethics encompasses norms of conduct and concomitant discourse pertaining to the delineation of good or acceptable from bad or unacceptable behavior in research. Some norms (e.g., respect for life) are widely regarded as universal, as they cut across different societies (Leonardo and Soonaan, 2015).

## II. Meaning of Research Ethics

### Definition of Research

Research means a systematic finding and study of materials and sources in order to establish facts and reach new results. D. Slesinger and D. Stephensp in the Encyclopedia of Social Sciences define research as "The manipulation of things, concepts or symbols for the purpose of generalizing to extend, correct or verify knowledge, whether that knowledge aids in construction of theory or in the practice of an art". The definition apparently speaks about the methods and scopes of a research which is mostly related to appropriate knowledge creation. The created knowledge can result in as a theory or as a practice and that's why research is known as the origin of innovation. So, research is a systematic inquiry that investigates hypotheses, suggests new interpretations of data or texts, and poses new questions for future research to explore.

### Definition of Ethics

The world ethics is originated from the ancient Greek word "ethos" which means the way of living. Actually, it is a branch

of philosophy which is totally related to the conduct or the character of a definite individual. The practice of ethics or the sense of ethics is quite visible from the era of Socrates. Ethics is a set of concepts and principles that guide us in determining what behavior helps or harms sentient creatures (Richard William Paul and Linda Elder, 2006). In fact, ethics is the determiner of conscience about what to do, when to do and how to do something.

### Research Ethics Together as a Term

According to the Encyclopedia, "Research ethics are 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." Research ethics fundamentally describe the guidelines followed by a researcher while working on the research. It provokes him not to do the research in any immoral way. It makes him to realize the main role of an actual researcher. When there was no application of ethics in a systematic research, the persons used their own interests to conduct the research and have results according to their privileges. A research without the maintenance of ethics is like a ship without a radar because it won't take the result of a research to its real form. Research is the creation of new knowledge and it is incomplete and impractical without the application of ethics. Actually, ethics are the pathway of truth and morality which is much needed in case of researching something because truth comes out in a truthful way. So, research ethics refers to the mental and logical accomplishment through the way of justice and veracity while completing a research. Laws are to control the outside of human behavior forcibly but ethics in research comes from deepest moral justification of a rational mind. Research ethics is most significantly important to ensure the well-being of those people who participate in the research. It will bring a positive light for the betterment of the society and results in illumination. Research ethics are the only way to make a person neutral, rational and righteous because ethics will be hindrance to his thinking of being a researcher for gaining illegal purpose or breaking away towards the path of innovation. In simple words, research ethics are made for restraining one's temptation, not to have hate speech for anyone through research and to soundly foster a research. Furthermore, the researcher's society is becoming rapidly more sophisticated in the manner in which it maintains such ethical policies and there appears to be a growing concern with the ethical dimension of planning and implementing a definite research. Research ethics are not common or general thoughts of mind. As research is a practical concept, so are the ethics regarding this term. It is mostly known as applied ethics. Tom Regan, a scholarly writer, elaborated on the concept of research ethics that, "All is not murky when it comes to research ethics. Every researcher knows that fabricating data, plagiarizing someone else's work, or making unfounded charges about another researcher is unacceptable behavior. No one needs special training in research ethics to know this. Even so, all of us probably can recall situations where we were genuinely uncertain about what we should do and where,

whatever we decided, our decision was controversial." The statement is clear about the definition of research ethics. As research comes from the consciousness, it is not very hard to follow for anyone unless he or she has immoral purpose. It is easy to comprehend and according to the rational directions, one will complete a certain research and it is the main concept of research ethics. So, the actual meaning of research ethics is the embodiment of some principles which comes from the conscience of a researcher. It's simply a set of rules of justice to follow during the research. So, the equation can be like this:

**Research + Ethics = The effectiveness and legitimacy of a certain research.**

The essence of ethics is shown below with a figure:

Figure One: Essence of Ethics



Source: Developed by the author

The figure shows the importance of ethics that it impulses one to do the right things and abstain from the wrong things which is much needed in a research too.

### Principles of Ethical Research

Humans are surrounded with disciplined orders which make them different from the other animals. It's not distinct while completing a research too. As a researcher needs to follow some constitutional norms by a responsible authority, he has to follow some intestinal rules of his conscience too that are known as the ethical principles of research. During the World War II, the world had faced terrible misuse of the ethical codes in a research. For examples: the Tuskegee Syphilis Study from 1932 to 1972, Nazi medical experimentation in the 1930s and 1940s, and research conducted at the Willowbrook

State School in the 1950s and 1960s (JM Sims, 2010). That's why there was the necessity of some sets of rules and regulations to control the ethics in research that were known as the ethical principles of research. The first such ethical code for research was the Nuremberg Code, arising in the aftermath of Nazi research atrocities brought to light in the post-World War II Nuremberg Trials. Later on, that code was developed by the Americans which is known as the Belmont Report. A research can be only successfully implemented when a researcher comprehends the ethical principles inside him because it will impulse him to do everything regarding the research honestly and sincerely. Furthermore, research ethics are the measurements to find out an actual researcher. A good researcher carries these principles in his conscience and applies them for the betterment of a certain society. The Belmont Report contains three basic ethical principles: (1) respect for persons, (2) beneficence, and (3) justice. This term called research ethics was enhanced by scientists and social thinkers of the United States after 1970s. They had made rules, norms and systems to control the internal mind (conscience) for the amplification of a neutral and justified research. But now, with the development of time, social scientists and scholars have improved more rules and determiners on the research ethics. Years had passed and this term had flourished by the reformers, scholars and scientists of various nation and still now it has been developing. Rules and regulations that play a vital role in the transparency of a research known as the principles of ethical research. The principles and their elaborations are given below with a pie-chart:

Figure Two: Principles of Research Ethics



Source : Public Health Notes

### Respect for Others

A person in research must take part voluntarily, free from any coercion or undue influence, and their rights, dignity and autonomy should be respected and appropriately protected. Whatever he writes, it shouldn't go against any community standards. The participants in a particular research are independent and they will make their own decisions according to their sense of justice without any kind of influence and it will be respected and ensured by a researcher himself. If the research requires any sort of material which is not liked by the researcher, he must make up his mind to respect that thing or leave the research. For example: a research includes a group of transgender people which is not comfortable for the researcher. So, he must learn to respect them or he should not do project and find someone else who can respect them.

### Beneficence and non-maleficence

Research should be worthwhile and provide value that outweighs any risk or harm. Researchers should aim to maximize the benefit of the research and minimize potential risk of harm to participants and researchers. All potential risk and harm should be mitigated by robust precautions. Finally, the outcome of the research must be positive and productive for a society. For the greater good, no avoidable harm should be done to the participants. The research must aim at the well-being and betterment of the people of all classes within a society. It will avoid every type of discrimination and animosity. Actually, the main target of a particular research is to gift a prosperous and peaceful society through the illumination of actual knowledge, justice, beneficence and non-maleficence.

### Integrity

A researcher will do everything in an honest and just way. He will be free from any sort of thought of mischief. Research should be designed, checked and undertaken to ensure that the established standards of integrity are met, and quality and transparency are assured. A researcher will be alone accounted to a certain authority for what he will write.

### Informed consent

Informed consent means the researcher will willingly participate in the research and he must admit it with proper information. It also includes that the research staff and participants should be given appropriate information about the research in a comprehensible manner without duress or inappropriate inducement.

### Acknowledgement

Using other's quote from their writing is permitted in research activity. A researcher should use appropriate referencing in case of using other's writing. If it is possible, the researcher must take permission from the writer himself not to have any



copyright issues. He must mention his or her name with proper details to provide a standard and polite acknowledgement. Using other's writing without their consent can result in serious cases regarding copyright infringement.

### Confidentiality

In a research procedure, researchers will consider whether personal data is to be studied, including interviews with participants. Individual research participant and group preferences regarding anonymity should be respected and participant requirements concerning the confidential nature of information and personal data should be respected too.

### Justice

A core principle of justice in relation to research is equal treatment. A researcher should be too much concerned about equality. It is his obligation to provide same amount of benefits and burdens to every participants to ensure neutrality and have a fair result of the research project. He will also avoid the discrimination on the basis of age, sex, race or ethnicity. Justice is the by far most important factor of an ethical research. A research will not be a way to uphold or gain his or her own interests through the research. The researcher will not be influenced by these terms including corruption, nepotism, using fictitious concepts etc. Whatever he does while implementing a research will be in a transparent and just way.

### Object Oriented

A researcher must avoid undue descriptions. Everything that he will write, it will be totally regarding the topic. He shouldn't be biased from the point he is working on. As it is a creation of new knowledge or the innovation of something, an organized, topic related and impactful presentation will be more effective for the readers to uphold bluntly.

### Conclusion

In this rational experiment, there were three major terms including "Research", "Ethics" and "Research Ethics" together as a concept. It has also elaborated the essence and demerit of ethical research and unethical research. For a transparent and apparent understanding, two figures are added. One of them elaborates the significance of ethics in a research and the other one shows the ethical principles of completing a research. It is clear that ethics play an important role in molding one's behaviour which motivates him to do the right and expected activities in the every phrases of life. Ethics are related to the rational justification of our moral judgements. In fact, it tells us what is morally right or wrong. It is nothing but rules and regulations according to the conscience which is relevant to a definite society, time and topic. On the other side, research means a logical and scientific way to find out the outcomes of a specific topic in a

systematic way. Research ethics means the application of logical and fair principles in the all steps of research activities that restrain one to pursue any illegal and immoral way. Research includes a set of activities in which researchers use various structured methods to contribute to the development of knowledge, whether this knowledge is theoretical, fundamental or applied (Drolet & Ruest, 2019). Eight major principles are described to define research ethics. Actually, there are more ethical principles regarding to a research. But, the most influential principle of presenting a research is justice because it has it's influence on all over the principles. The accomplishment of performing a research in an ethical way can lead to the solution of a social problem, reformation of a falsely established matter and creation of new dimensions of knowledge. The importance of research ethics cannot be mentioned briefly because it is related to education which has the most influence on the well-being of a country. Lastly, a research, without the proper application of ethics, is not possible because only internal justification controls the authenticity of a scientific or logical research which is not possible by only implementing effective laws.

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