

EDITORIAL

RESEARCH ETHICS

Research is defined as any form of a careful consideration of a study concerning a problem that aims to contribute to a body of knowledge or theory by means of scientific methods. Like many other fields research too has its moral principles, known as Research Ethics, which govern the conduct of research from its initiation to completion and publication of results and beyond¹. Medicine is about "Can we?" Ethics is about "Should we? The focus of educational researchers is to expand knowledge and understanding in different, ideally all, regions of educational activity from all possible angles possible such as through educators, learners, policymakers and even the public. Educational researchers should operate within an ethic of respect for any persons involved in the research they are undertaking and should treat individuals with dignity and sensitivity-all within an ethic of respect, which should apply to not only the individuals participating but to the researchers themselves².

Voluntary informed consent is one of the first responsibilities, performed prior to research, in which a participant has to be made understood and agree to participation without coercion. This understanding the participants must attain has to be ensured by researchers through necessary steps like why their participation is necessary³, how it will be used and how and to whom it will be reported. Researchers engaged in action research must consider the extent to which their own respective research impinges on others, for example in the case of the dual role of teacher and researcher and the impact on students and colleagues.

The third responsibility is to provide and inform the rights of every participant, to the participants, to withdraw from the research for any or no reason, and at any time. When it comes to participants such as children who are capable of forming their own views, they should also be granted the right to express their views freely in all matters affecting them and should therefore be

facilitated to give fully informed consent and the guardians (e.g. parents) or as 'responsible others' (i.e. those who have responsibility for their welfare and well-being must also be approach⁴. Elements of informed consent include the title of the study, identification of researcher(s) and credentials, identification of study population, purpose of study, description of study procedures and data collection steps, description of potential risks and potential benefits, assurance of anonymity or confidentiality, assurance given that participation is voluntary, right to refuse to participate or withdraw at any time assured, offer made to answer all questions, means of obtaining study results provided and if signed consent, consent form should have dated signatures of participant and researcher(s). Another responsibility is that researchers must also avoid deception or subterfuge and ensure that their research design specifically requires the data, the appropriate data is collected and that the welfare of the researchers is not put at risk⁵.

In researches such as those which require bureaucratic burden like survey research, the researchers must seek to minimize the impact of their research on the normal working and workloads of participants and should use incentives to encourage participation. The incentives must not contain choices which in themselves have undesirable effects.

Confidential and anonymous treatment of participants' data is considered the norm for the conduct of research and to follow it researchers must comply with the legal requirements in relation to the storage and use of personal data⁶. If in the course of the research the researchers judge that the effect of the agreements they have made with participants, on confidentiality and anonymity, will allow the continuation of illegal behavior, then they must carefully consider making disclosure to the appropriate authorities. In any clinical trial there must be genuine uncertainty as to which treatment arm offers the most benefit, and placebo controls shall not be

used if equally effective standard therapies exist. When doubt exists, researchers shall consult the existing literature and seek the advice of experts in research ethics.

All educational researchers must also protect the integrity and reputation of educational research and must therefore not falsify research evidence or findings, distort findings by selectively publishing some aspects and not others, criticize other researchers in a defamatory or unprofessional manner. They must not exploit situations by undertaking work in which conflict of interest is perceived or where self-interest and commercial interest may possibly compromise the objectivity of the research or work where they are likely to be not competent and instead use the inputs of co-researchers without their consent and also use it for illegal purposes. Photographs of patients should be taken to keep the patient anonymous. If the patient is identifiable, he or she shall be informed about the security, storage and eventual destruction of the record.

The authorship of publications should comprise of a list of everyone who has made substantive and identifiable contribution while considering that academic status or other indicators of perceived seniority must not determine the order in authorship; rather the order of authorship should respect the leadership, relative to and applied in the specific research, and contributions made by the researchers concerned. Educational researchers must aim to communicate their findings, and the practical significance of their research, in a clear, straightforward manner and in a language judged appropriate for the intended audience. Disclosure includes aims of research, methodology to be used, anticipated

risks, benefits, discomfort or inconvenience, participant's right to withdraw from the research at any time without prejudice⁷.

Ethical issues do not merely concern individuals but also concern institutions and so each institute needs to foster an environment to cultivate its ethical culture⁸. This can be achieved through institutional systems and practices which reinforce the seriousness with which ethics issues are viewed. It is important that research practices are continually monitored, audited and evaluated with stringent standards, guidelines and policies to which researchers must adhere.

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Brig Khadija Qamar

Prof. & HOD of Anatomy Department
Army Medical College, Rawalpindi Pakistan
Email: colkhadijaqamar@gmail.com