

## ETHICS AND PRINCIPLES OF RESEARCH - AN OVERVIEW

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### ABSTRACT

In Practice the ethical principles mean that as a researcher, you need to obtain informed consent from potential research participants, minimise the risk of harm to participants, protect their anonymity and confidentiality, avoid using deceptive practices and give participants the right to withdraw from your research. The basic principles of research ethics is important not only for ethical reasons, but also practical ones, since a failure may lead to your research being criticised, rejected by your supervisor or Ethics Committee, costing you valuable time. Therefore, when planning how you will tackle ethical issues and challenges in your dissertation, consider the research strategy that you have adopted and the impact this will have on these ethical issues and challenges.

**Key Words:** *Ethics of research, Plagiarism, Principle of justice.*

### About the Author:



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## INTRODUCTION

- Ethics are the act of the moral principles which the researcher has to follow while conducting nursing research to ensure the rights and welfare of persons of communities which are the subject of his/her study.
- The Nazi medical experiments of the 1930s and 1940s are the famous examples of recent disregard for the ethical conduct. In response to human rights violations, code of ethics has been developed.
- The Nuremberg code was the first set of guidelines developed to protect the rights of research subjects.
- In practice the ethical principles mean that as a researcher, you need to obtain informed consent from potential research participants, minimise the risk of harm to participants, protect their anonymity and confidentiality, avoid using deceptive practices and give participants the right to withdraw from your research.
- The basic principles of research ethics is important not only for ethical reasons, but also practical ones, since a failure may lead to your research being criticised, rejected by your supervisor or Ethics Committee, costing you valuable time.

## CODE OF ETHICS

The Belmont Report articulated following primary ethical principles on which standards of ethical conduct in research are based.

- **PRINCIPLE OF BENEFICENCE**
- **THE PRINCIPLE OF JUSTICE**
- \*. **PRINCIPLE OF BENEFICENCE**
  - **Freedom from Harm:** - Exposing research participants to experience that in serious or permanent harm is unacceptable. Research should be conducted only by qualified people.
  - **Freedom from Exploitation:**- Participant's needs to be assured that their participation or the information they might provide to the researcher will not be used against them in any way.
  - **Benefits from research:**-The researcher must carefully assess risks and benefits that individual participants might experience. The assessment should be shared with them so that they can evaluate it in their best interest.
  - **The right to full Disclosure:** -The principle of respect for human dignity encompasses people's right to make informed voluntary decision with full disclosures.
- \*. **THE PRINCIPLE OF JUSTICE**

This principle in the Belmont report concerns justice. It includes the participant's right to fair treatment and their right to privacy.

  - **The right of privacy:** - Researchers need to ensure that the participant's privacy is maintained throughout the study. Study participants have the right to expect that any information collected during the course of study will be kept in strict confidence.
  - **Informed consent:** -The informed consent means participants have adequate information regarding the research and have the power of free choice for consent or to decline participation in the research.
  - They should not be pressured or coerced in any way to try and stop them from withdrawing. Research ethics is not 'a one size fits all' approach.

## RESEARCH STRATEGY AND RESEARCH ETHICS

- Research ethics is not a 'one size fits all' approach.

- The research should adhere to the basic ethical principles of doing good (i.e., beneficence) and doing no harm (i.e., malfeasance), this does not mean that the approach you take towards research ethics will be the same as that of other students.

In Research Strategy, the major components include

- **Research paradigms**
- **Research designs,**
- **Research methods**
- **Sampling strategies**
- **Data analysis techniques.**

### **Research paradigms**

- A paradigm is a world view, a general Perspective on the complexities of the world.
- Disciplinary inquiry in nursing has been conducted with mainly two broad paradigms:-
  - Positivism
  - Constructivism.

### **Research Design and Research Ethics**

- The approach to research ethics that you adopt in your dissertation should be consistent with your chosen research strategy.

### **Quantitative Research Design**

- Each type of research design that you can use to guide your dissertation has unique ethical challenges.
- In the case of non-experimental research, you may only have to convince your supervisor that you have addressed any potential ethical challenges you expect to face.

### **Qualitative research design**

- Qualitative research designs tend to be more evolutionary in nature when compared with quantitative research designs.
- For example, data collected during the research process can influence the choice of research methods in subsequent phases of a qualitative research design.

### **Research Methods and Research Ethics**

The potential ethical issues raised by different research methods not only differ from one type of research method to the next, but also the way in which a research method is used. To illustrate some of the different ethical issues following are some surveys and structured interviews, observation and informal and in-depth interviews.

#### **Survey and Structured Interview**

1. These two types of research method typically use closed questions
2. From an ethical perspective, this makes it easier to get informed consent from respondents because most aspects of the survey and structured interview process are fairly certain.

### **Observation**

- Observation faces additional ethical considerations when compared with the use of surveys and structured interviews.
- Observation, where participants are unaware that you are conducting research, raises particular ethical issues.

### **Types of Observation**

1. **Overt observation:** The research participants will be aware that you are observing them and should know what you are observing
2. **Covert observation:** Covert observation can be viewed as ethically problematic because it is a form of deceptive practice. Not only are respondents not giving you informed consent, but you may also be keeping the observation covert because you feel that respondents would be otherwise unwilling to take part in your research.
3. **Informal and in-depth interviews**
  - Informal and in-depth interviews cannot be pre-planned in the same way that structured interviews can.
  - It is possible to know some of the initial questions you may ask research participants at the outset of the interview.
  - The majority of questions asked are likely to arise during the interview process.
  - In the case of in-depth interviews, in particular, greater disclosure and self-expression often take place during the interview process since in-depth interviews tend to be more personal in nature.

## **SAMPLING STRATEGIES AND RESEARCH ETHICS**

- Choosing a sample to investigate can raise a number of ethical issues that must be understood and overcome.
- It needs to take into account:
  - a) Sampling techniques
  - b) Sample size

### **Sampling techniques**

- Sampling techniques act as a guide to select the population.
- Probability sampling techniques require a list of the population from which you select units for your sample.
- This raises potential data protection and confidentiality issues. When using non-probability sampling, you need to ask yourself whether you are including or excluding units for theoretical or practical reasons.
- **Convenience sampling** will influence the selection process

### **Sample size**

- Whether you are using a probability sampling or non-probability sampling technique, to help create sample your sample size becomes an ethical issue for two reasons:
  - **Over-sized samples:** An over-sized sample is considered to be an ethical issue because it potentially exposes an excessive number of people.
  - **Under-sized samples:** A sample is under-sized when you are unable to achieve your goals.
- If no conclusions can be made or the findings are not statistically significant because the sample size was too small, the effort, and potential distress and harm that these volunteers put themselves through was all in vein (i.e., completely wasted).
- This is where an under-sized sample can become an ethical issue.

### **Gatekeepers**

- Gatekeepers can often control access to the participants we are interested in.
- This has ethical implications because of the power that such gatekeepers can exercise over those individuals.

### **Data Analysis**

- During the data analysis and reporting phases of dissertation research issues about participant confidentiality and data privacy come to the fore.
- The use of **quantitative data analysis techniques** and **qualitative data analysis** techniques, both present their own ethical challenges.

### **Quantitative data analysis Techniques**

- For the most part, the aggregation of data (i.e., the summarising of data) when using quantitative data analysis techniques helps to protect the anonymity of respondents.

### **Qualitative data analysis techniques**

- The greater richness of qualitative data and the way that qualitative data is often presented creates potential ethical challenges.
- There is the desire, especially amongst researchers following a qualitative research design to present qualitative data in all its richness.
- Failure to do so can not only limit the descriptive and explanatory power that is one of the advantages of using qualitative research designs, but also leads to criticisms of poor research quality.

### **CONCLUSION**

- The ethical dimension of the human research is complex.
- But high ethical standards can be maintained, if the nurse researcher and all nurses ensure that the conduct of nursing research fulfils the requirements embodied in the ethical principles that apply to all human research.
- However in research the nurse has a responsibility to protect and uphold the patient's rights.
- Research ethics should not be an afterthought. Instead, ethics should be built into the dissertation process.
- Therefore, when planning how you will tackle ethical issues and challenges in your dissertation, consider the research strategy that you have adopted and the impact this will have on these ethical issues and challenges.

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