

Lesson 1: Research Ethics

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Introduction

- Social Research has globalized today increasing the intensity of research in developing countries. Are these research professionally standards, produced valid results, beneficial or burden to the society ?
- Can research ethics address above concerns?
- This lecture focuses the research ethics, their values to correct research process, minimize harm to researched and challenges related to ethics.

What are Research Ethics?

Research ethics are the moral obligations, duties and responsibilities that a researcher should comply within the research process. They include:

- **Honesty:** honestly report data, results, methods and procedures, and publication. This denies fabrication, or misrepresentation of data. Also, it includes not deceiving colleagues, granting agencies, or the public (Rosnik, D.B:2011)
- **Soundness:** academic relevancy as well as practical values
- **Wholeness (unity):** completeness of the work enabling to form significant conclusions
- **To minimize harm to researched**

Values of Adhering to Research Ethics

- **Promote the aims of research: Knowledge, trust, avoidance of error**
- **Promote values that are essential to collaborate works: trust, accountability, mutual respect, fairness**
- **Help to ensure that researcher can be held accountable to the public**
- **Build public support for research**

(Rasnik, 2011)

Research Ethics- Developed Vs Developing countries

- Most of the universities, research institutions in developed countries have established Institutional review boards by today. They have formed codes of ethics, Eg., British Sociological Association-www.bristsoc.co.uk, American Sociological Association-www.asanet.org/members/ecoderev.html.
- Research ethics are less institutionalized in developing countries. Some foreign funded projects may be exceptional. In many universities, it is not mandatory, but it is generally expected that researchers are followed them as a good practice.

Why Developing Countries should institutionalize ethics?

1. To produce valid results contributing the society “Social science research must concern itself with “moral integrity” to ensure that research process and findings are “trustworthy” and valid (Biber, 2005). In some instances selection of research topic, data manipulation, methodological problems can harm to society:

- Re-invention of wheel?
- Recommendation of industrialization as only way to develop developing countries
- Among many others, feminism research has contributed a lot for the societies in third world countries during last decades.

2. To minimize the harm to people: Researcher should avoid harming participants, physically or mentally. This can happen due to the power differences of researcher and researched.
 - Research have become a burden to people in third world countries: “We have been researched to the death” (Aboriginal member in Alberta) Castallano (2004).
 - Top down approach in the research have distorted the reality in some of the societies

3.To secure public support (most of the research are carried out by using public money)

- Subject has to be protected from the scandals rising owing to manipulation of data (Flick, 2009).
- Participants' values and decisions should be respected and kept confidentially
- Unless people are benefited from research their support for research can decline

Some critical concerns on research ethics in developing countries



- Greater power difference between researcher and researched (Brown and et al, 2004). This can happen in foreign funded project which can lead to undermine the researched and collaborators. Funding agencies priorities may come in to front at some occasions (Brown, 2004).

- Some cultural conditions can hinder in implementing ethical codes accepted by developed countries- Taking the consent by signing a paper is unaccepted by many traditional communities (Mollet,2011). Some people even may be illiterate
- Methodological problems: Some research methodologies, such as covert research and participant observations intrude the privacy of researched.
- Political pressure can hinder revealing truth: International pressure on Iraq, North Korea leads less research. Politicians and other powerful people can even exert pressure to researchers within the country, Eg.,

“A faculty member in the Faculty of Economics at Chulalongkorn University in Thailand did research on corruption in the country, part of which included survey of opinion of public sample about their perception of politicians involved in corruption. The media reported on the findings. Politicians including head of a political party in the coalition government were furious. The party leader gave an interview with threat to cut the university’s budget which would soon be considered by the parliament”.

(http://www.slideshare.net/guni_rmies/social-contribution-of-research-in-developing-countries-charas-suwanwela)

- Lapses in transferring benefits of research to researched
 - Research reports are in English
 - They are published in international journals, access to them involve a cost
 - Lack of research findings taken into consideration for policy making

For position paper 1

Proctor, James D (1997) Ethics in Geography: Giving Moral value form to the Geographical Imagination

For complementary reading

**Research Ethics Timeline (1932-Present)
by David B. Resnik, J.D.**

Nata, Pierson R.T and Biruk, Chystal (2009) The Challenges of Doing Gender Research in Developing Countries: Focus on Malawi

- **References**

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