



## Review Paper

# Ethical Issues in Social Science Research

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## Abstract

*This paper has made an attempt to explain ethical issues in social science research. The enrollment in Indian higher education system has grown quickly. Particularly the Ph.D. enrollments increase almost thrice in last one decade. The coordination and maintenance of standard and quality of research in higher education is a statutory responsibility of University Grant Commission. The University Grant Commission has been taken several initiatives to implement the standard and quality of research in higher education. To conducting any research on social science issue there is an ethical responsibility of the researcher to do the work honestly and with integrity. If research work is not undertaken honestly, then it will be essentially fraudulent. There are number of reasons why it is important to follow to ethical norms in research particularly in social sciences research. The norms promote the aims of research, such as knowledge, truth, and avoidance of error. For example, prohibitions against fabricating, falsifying, or misrepresenting research data promote the truth and minimize error. This research paper is a descriptive in nature. It will discuss the general ethical consideration while conducting a social sciences research. How to promote ethical conduct in social Sciences research? It will also discuss the problem of Obfuscation and plagiarism in social research. This paper is based on the secondary data and literature. The secondary information has been used from web portal for research methodology, UGC reports, research reports, journal articles and magazines etc.*

**Keywords:** Plagiarism, Ethics, Higher Education, Obfuscation, Social Science.

## Introduction

The social science research playing a pivotal role in the human life and work. The Plato had raised the issue of ethics almost twenty-four hundred years ago. But our social scientists are not yet able to settle the issues related to ethics of research. A scientific investigation or inquiry and biasness is the essential requirement of any research. The main objective of any research is to encompass human knowledge beyond what is already known. Many of the problem in the society and economy occurred due to immoral and unlawful practice of conducting the research by the social scientist. Government of India has been uninterruptedly increased funding for conducting quality research but unfortunately none of our university/institution come under the list of top 100 university/institutions at the world level. Government of India had started several fellowship viz, Non-Net fellowship, Junior Research Fellowship (JRF-SRF), Mulana Azad National Fellowship, Rajeev Gandhi National Fellowship, Indian Council for Social Science Research (ICSSR) fellowship, University Grant Commission (UGC) Research Award, Indian Council of Historical Research (ICHR) fellowship, Post-doctoral Fellowship (PDF) for Women, and minor and major research project grant etc. to attract the younger generation to make their carrier in the research field and to promote the quality research in the higher education system. There are various reasons behind the low standard of

research in social sciences, but the most important reason is related with the ethics of research.

This is the prime responsibility of the researcher to maintain the honesty and integrity while conducting research work in the any field on knowledge. If research is not conducted in ethical manner than the purpose of research is not going fulfil. This will apply to all branches of sciences including social science research. Research provide the base for most of policies which have been implemented by the government. The choice of technique for carrying out research can lead to widely varying conclusion. If research has not been conducted in a scientific manner than the results, conclusions and recommendations of the research will have fabricated.

## Concept of Ethics

The ethics is closely related with moral and value, it teaches the society what is wrong and what is right? The most of social scientists are defining "ethics": norms for conduct that distinguish between acceptable and unacceptable behavior in research. Most person learn ethical norms at home (from parents), at school, in church, or in other social settings. Although most people acquire their sense of right and wrong during childhood, moral development occurs throughout life and human beings pass through different stages of growth as they mature. Ethical norms are so universal that one might be

tempted to regard them as simple commonsense. On the other hand, if morality were nothing more than commonsense, then why are there so many ethical disputes and issues in our society<sup>1</sup>?

As researchers we are unable to conduct our research successfully if researcher do not receive the help of other related experts in the area and respondents, because different people have different information and have unique style of reasoning, if we expect them to give up their valuable time to help in our research work. Many people are willing to disclose a lot of personal information during research so it is needed to maintain the secrecy of identity of respondent and to make sure that we treat both the participants and the information they provide with honesty and respect. This is called research ethics<sup>2</sup>.

### Major Ethical Issues in Social Sciences

The major ethical issues in Social sciences related with the research process, data collection, interpretation of data, report writing, publication of paper, confidentiality, obfuscation and plagiarism<sup>3</sup>.

**Issues related to Participant:** The researchers should know that when they are conduction research; it is going to interferes on the respondent's life and work. The benefit of research process directly reached to researcher in form of getting research degree, completing research project or writing research paper etc., those respondents who have been participating in the research process are not getting any type of direct or indirect benefit from the research work until and unless government is going accept the result and recommendations of any research work. There are two type of respondents, first those who cooperate to the researcher and another who did not care about research work and researcher. Some of the respondents who take part in your research may be vulnerable because of their age, social status or position of powerlessness and belong to rural and urban slums. If participants are young, researcher need to make sure a parent or guardian is present. If participants are ill or reaching old age researcher might need to use a proxy and care should be taken to make sure that you do not affect the relationship between the proxy and the participant. If a participants are physically handicap than researcher has to adopt special technique to collect information so that participant should not feel scratchy. Some people may find participation a rewarding process, whereas others will not. The research should not give rise to false hopes or cause unnecessary anxiety. The researcher must try to minimize the disruption to people's lives and if someone has found it an upsetting experience researcher should find out why and try to ensure that the same situation does not occur again.

Sometimes researcher will encounter awkward situations in the field area, but good preparation and self-awareness will help to reduce these. A researcher should conduct a pilot study to get the possible cross questions and doubts of the participants. If

they do happen, researcher should not dwell too long on the negative side – reflect, analyses, learn by mistakes and move on. researcher must do his best to ensure anonymity and confidentiality.

**Issues of Authorship:** The issue of authorship is an another area of concern in the social sciences research. Who should get the first authorship? In this regard the policies of most social sciences journals is that a person should be listed as the author of a person made a direct a substantial intellectual contribution of the design of the research the interpretation of data or the drafting of paper. The acknowledgement section should be used to thanks those who indirectly contributed to the work. Most of cases in the social science research supervisor or mentor always gets listed as first author without significant contribution to the research paper. This is the author principal responsibility to ensure the work is new and original research. The main author should inform to all contributors about the submission of research paper so that multiple submission and publication of paper avoided.

### Code of Ethics

A researcher has to be honest in the field, this the responsibility of the researcher to explain the objective of the study to the participants, why this study is conducting by the researcher? What will be the possible outcome of this researcher? If a researcher is able to explain these question to the respondents than people will participate in the research. It is advised to the researcher they have to explain these question to each respondents just before they participate in the survey.

The Code of Ethics should be provided to them with details about what you intend to do with the information provided by them. It can be mention in the top of the questionnaire or at the end of the questionnaire whatever information provided to the researcher by the responded; it will not be disclosed any personal information and individual identity to anyone. It shows that you intend to treat both them and the information with respect and honesty. It covers the following issues:

**Anonymity:** when researcher is analyzing the data nobody can find out that who was the individual respondents and what was their views on particular issues. In this regards researcher should not use any personal information of respondents i.e. their name and address or contact no and email address writing final report. A researcher need to be very careful while categorizing or storing the primary information in any software. It is the duty of the researcher to assured the respondents how he is going to make sure that it is not easily accessible to anyone to identity their personal information while the research and after the research. To maintain the anonymity researcher can change the name of the respondent, village, town and institution etc...If not, how will you ensure that what someone says cannot be used against them in the future? However, research must be careful not to make any gigantic promises that he cannot possess.

**Confidentiality:** to maintain the confidentiality of data and information is another code of ethics in the social sciences. This is principal responsibility of the research to convince the respondents that whatever information he/she is going to collect from them is not going to be shared directly or indirectly with the third parties. If a researcher is going to record the focus group discussion, then issues of confidentiality should be relevant to all group members, they have to also maintain the confidentiality of the group discussion and they are not going to disclose the information to the third parties. A researcher should not make promises to the respondent which he cannot keep.

**Right to comment:** some of the issues in the social science research need to be consulted with the respondents throughout the research process and if someone is unhappy with the emerging results, findings, conclusion and policy recommendation; they also have the right to comment, provide suggestions to make necessary changes in the reports or cross check the entire process of analysis and interpretation. But it is totally depending on the researcher's preference and principles. If a researcher does not want to discuss findings and results of the research with the respondents, it should be made clear to the participants in the beginning of the research process.

**The final report:** the final report should be written without any biasness by the researcher. It is useful for the respondents to know what will happen with the final report. Are they receiving a copy of the report? Will it be available online on the organization's website so that anyone can download it? If sharing of the entire report is not possible than the major findings of research should be shared with the interested respondents<sup>4</sup>.

## Research Misconduct

Research misconduct means fabrication, falsification or plagiarism (FFP) in proposing, performing or reviewing research or in reporting research results. The fabrication is making up data or results and recording or reporting them without visiting the field area. The falsification is manipulation of research materials, equipment or processes or changing or omitting data or results such that the research is not accurately represented in research. Plagiarism is the appropriation of another person's idea, processes, results or words without giving due credit. The other type of plagiarism is self-plagiarism when copying or reusing one's own research but both types of plagiarism are considered to be unacceptable practices in the social sciences research. Research misconduct does not include honest error or differences of opinion.

## Obfuscation

The obscuring of research findings by the reporting style by the researchers, if the researcher is not highlighting the results that are important or those that do not fit with his ideology. If a researcher is not reporting information that is contradictory to

your conclusions, hiding information, producing a very long-winded report full of very technical, specialized terminology or long paragraphs with long-winded sentences. The obfuscation also includes the display of data graphs. The graph must be given appropriate titles, labeled axes and any transformation used such as classification; the axis must be clear to the reader<sup>5</sup>.

## High Profile case of Plagiarism in India

The publications are research outputs carried out by the faculty in the university to set tones exploring new possibilities about human and societal issues. The non-academic and unacceptable practices against academic leaders in Indian universities. There are few cases where people those who are holding big positions in the academic faces allegations for research misconduct. Allegation of plagiarism in a few research papers against present Vice Chancellor (VC) of University of Hyderabad (The DNA, April 7, 2016). The MHRD has requested the President of India to sack the incumbent VC of Pondicherry University. The fact-finding committee constituted by the government has found that some of the academic records claimed by the VC were not found to be authentic including research plagiarism. (The Indian Express, June 18, 2016). The Vice Chancellor of Delhi University, New Delhi has been jailed for some time to have plagiarized a major section of his book. Prof. B.C. Myrappa, Dept. Sociology, Bangalore University, allegedly allowed one of his students to copy his own Ph.D. thesis. The vice chancellor of Mysore University was accused of plagiarism in an Osmania University research paper published in an Indian Journal in Oct. 2009 and getting the same published in an International Science Journal later. Despite laws, cells and the prerogative to not cheat lies with the individual. *"the highest price must be attached to the loss of reputation"*. Once lost, it is impossible to earn back.

**Things to be Avoided in the Social Sciences research:** i. The paper that routine extension of previous reports and that do not substantially advance fundamental understanding or knowledge in the area to the readers. ii. The research finding should not be reported fragmentary. iii. The violation of ethical guidelines, including plagiarism of any time and questionable research practices. iv. Simultaneous submission of duplicate articles to numerous journals by the same authors. v. Discussing with your colleague's confidential data from a paper/thesis that you are reviewing. vi. Being selective in research design and sampling. vii. Not reporting survey significant response/participation rate. viii. Deliberately biasing the data collection instruments for i.e. asking leading questions in surveys. ix. Using false data or making up data in the close room. x. Falsifying results: to make them fit to your conclusion. xi. Trimming: removing data that do not fit in with your analysis, this may be a legitimate thing to do, but you must make it clear what has been done and why? xii. Biased or inappropriate analysis of primary and secondary data and information. xiii. Using an inappropriate statistical technique in order to enhance the significance of your research. ivx. Overworking or exploiting researcher scholars for our

personal work. xv. Promising a student, a better grade for sexual favors.

Ethical concerns to take into consideration when performing research on human a researcher should never breach a research subject's privacy; misrepresentation: researchers should not hide potential conflicts of interest, or mislead, subjects as to the nature of the research; researchers should not harm or distress (physically or psychologically) their research, throughout their research process they must take all steps necessary to ensure, their personal biases or preconceptions to not influence the conduct or findings of their research; researchers should never ever put their subjects in a compromising position where there is a potential for danger.

The mutual Cooperation and coordination among many different people in different disciplines and institutions, ethical standards promote the values that are essential to collaborative work. Trust, accountability, mutual respect and fairness, guidelines for authorship, copyright and patenting policies, data sharing policies and confidentiality rules in peer review may help improve the standard and quality of research in social sciences in India. The following sept can be helpful to improving the standard and quality of research in higher education Institutions:

### **Larger research base needed**

The UGC's insistence on research qualification for teachers in the universities was considered to be proper and timely. UGC said no contractual/guest/visiting/adjunct faculty should be assigned to supervise doctoral research. The same views have been express by a panel for evaluation of new education policy headed by TSR Subramanian.

**Improving the quality of post-graduate scholar:** The present post-graduate, M.Phil./Ph.D. education and corresponding examination generally do not present an intellectuals challenges to the scholars and provide them no opportunity for creative work. The universities, colleges and institution has shifted from annual examination to semester examination but their method of teaching and learning are more over the same even in entrance examination for M.Phil./Ph.D. only objective type question asked by the university/institutions. These question are not adequate to check students analytical and critical analysis skill though the M.Phil./Ph.D. programme creative and critical analysis skill is primary requirement the objective type questions may judge the student's subjective knowledge but in higher education research the creative and analytical skill must be maintaining quality of higher education research. There is a need for a national test for admission to research<sup>6</sup>.

**Need to change in method teaching and Learning:** Instead of relying entirely on straight lecture and set experiments problem solving exercise, field base study and social management tasks should be provided through assignment, project work, tutorials

and field visit exposures. The assignment and project work can be of varying degree of simplicity or complexity requiring reflection, planning, designing, execution critical evaluation of the primary and secondary data collected from the field. The term paper and seminars are the devices to broaden the base of knowledge, oblige students to read many book, journals, policy papers, listen to invited lectures and discuss the research ideas with supervisor and other experts of the field. The interactive learning would prepare a better student for every activities or field. They might take up later and specially so far research. The audio-visual learning is more attractive method of learning. Students may be taught with these method showing appropriate case study, documentary, movies, story etc.<sup>7</sup>.

**Increase Fellowship and Amenities:** Being aware that the present Non-Net fellowship at Rs. 8000/- per month would not attract bright and talented scholar to a research area. The UGC's should revise it and make it to equal to JRF. It is realized that the amount of the fellowship is not only important factor in attracting people of high merit to research; some provision for proper accommodation with proper mess facility is essential which is also equally important in facilitating the work of a scholar. The university accommodation is primarily for all the students but provide a separate accommodation or separate hostels for M. Phil/Ph.D. research scholar. Also make the proper arrangement of health facilities for the research scholar.

**Improve the quality of supervision:** The quality of supervision and creating a suitable atmosphere for work are crucial to the whole exercise of improving the standard and quality of research. If supervisor is generally lax and it leads to the frustration and unhappiness depression on the part of both the supervisor and the scholar. Recently the UGC (Minimum Standards and Procedure for Award of M.Phil./Ph.D. degree) regulation 2009 and Regulation 2016 has directed all the universities offering M.Phil./Ph.D. programme to adhere strictly to the provision of the regulation that are mandatory in nature and has instructed the higher education institution to ensure compliance in letter and spirit. In addition to eligibility, procedure for selection and restriction of number of candidate to be assigned to each supervisor, the regulations prescribe eligibility criteria for recognition of research supervisors according to which only regular faculty with requisite qualifications, experience and publications are eligible to be recognized as research supervisors. The vacant post in the institutes of higher learning and part time faculty adversely affecting the research quality. Now it is up to the higher education institution how they are implementing these criteria's<sup>8</sup>.

**Assure Employment to Ph.D. scholars:** Generally, scholar pursue Ph.D. research to get research degree and same time hoping that this degree will help them to find out some suitable job in the market. But irresponsible conduct in research make it impossible to achieve a good research. The poor research will not be going the help the students a find a suitable job in the

market. This is the ethical responsibility of supervisors to help scholar to choose a research topic which will helpful to them to get an employment after completion of research degree.

#### **Academic Leadership in Higher Education Institutions:**

Currently, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in India are significantly in need of right leadership for improvement in the standard and quality of research. A survey on the leadership challenges faced by the Indian higher education system in 2013 found that about 81% of the academics interviewed agreed that HEIs suffers from a serious gap between the existing pool of academic leaders and their requirement. Also another cause of the declining performance of higher education in India seems to the inadequate attention given to the process of selecting academic leaders in HEIs. As a result, undeserving, in-capable and mediocratic individuals in growing number are taking over these institutions and dragging the academic standards and quality of research further. Universities are institutions for knowledge creation, diffusion and for undertaking outreach programmes for social welfare. Clearly, academic leaders have to have strong credentials in all these three functional areas of the university. An individual just having strong academic administrative experience with poor publication records should never be consider for the position of Vice Chancellor. This is because such a person will undermine the knowledge creation function of the university and could focus only on teaching or diffusion function. Similarly, an individual having strong administrative as well as publication record but lacking social concerns, integrity and ethics should also not be selected for academic leadership position in HEIs. Academic leaders should have strong publication records, teaching experience, impeccable integrity and ability to be fair to all sections of the society in different situations. All these traits must be aimed at achieving academic excellence in research, teaching and outreach activities of the HEIs<sup>9</sup>. (Pradhan J.P. and Man Singh, 2016).

#### **Conclusion**

After discussion of the above issues related with ethics in social sciences it may be conclude that the formation of such rules of

conduct and ethical inquiries into the communicative use of the computer are still at an early stage of development, there a need to educate the researchers about the research practice and research ethics. At present, the internet is become a major tool of getting information about research area therefore; researchers must be identified the issues of ethics in their respective area. This paper recommended that a paper on "Ethics in Research" must be a part of curriculum at the higher education institution in the social sciences and allied discipline.

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