

**Ethical issues: Implications for
social science studies**
Equal opportunities training
An introduction

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What is ethics and why is it so important?

1. The social embedding of research – ethical concerns and political factors
 - Increasing concern with ethical practices in general → legislation e.g. on human rights
 - Research as the driver of social change → impact on the whole and on the studied
 - Multidisciplinarity and changing methodologies
 - Research and power – the relations of the funder/client, the contractor and of the researcher →
2. Codes of ethics – sets of norms and values accepted by a group and conditioning their practices

Researchers' multiple embedding

Social relations of researchers and their actions:

- The wider political context: being a citizen
- The institutional context: being an employee; being a student; being part of (formalised) academic communities
- The everyday: being a team member
- The networks: being part of various academic, professional and civil organisations

The principles of ethical research

1. Integrity:

- Unbiased attitude and openness
- Concepts must not determine the results
- No manipulation of information
- Truthful and precise interpretation and report of results
- Clear and consequent use of communication tools (language)

2. Transparency

- The problem of value-free and objective social science – research must be transparent and difference made btw. facts/opinions/interpretation/hypothesis/theories etc.

The principles of ethical research

3. Efficiency

- Compliance with the proposal;
- Quality vs. cost efficiency → a realistic plan needed
- Critical approach to established knowledge and authorities → political conflicts

4. Appropriate qualification and competence

- Must be aware of capacities and limits of the institute and of researchers
- Quality management – definition of standards (inst)
- Keeping deadlines (individ.)

The principles of ethical research

5. Intellectual properties

- Authorship – should rest on real contribution
- Joint publications
- Using others' results

6. Data protection

- Legally well-defined field – EU and national laws
- Respect for respondents' rights: the informed consent; right of withdrawal;
- Avoiding ANY harm during the research (incl. e.g. emotional)
- Rules of data management – confidentiality vs. transparency?
- Using and transferring personal data

The principles of ethical research

7. Interaction with colleagues, respondents, trainees

- Equality and mutual respect
- No discrimination
- Being aware of power relations/dependencies (hierarchies; research-related ties)
- Language – a source of discrimination

8. Infrastructure

- Adequate conditions of research – institutional responsibility

The principles of ethical research

9. Links to clients and contractors

- Sound research plan – considering professional standards; consulting with the clients
- Transparency in the use of funds
- Should not give up norms while research!

10. Making the results public

- Publication: contribution to the evolution of science
- Appropriate form
- Ownership

11. Scientific evaluation

- No personal bias
- Devoting appropriate time and energy
- Respecting authors' intellectual property

Positionalities

(towards moral responsibility and political attachment of researchers)


1. 'view their role as voyeurs, objectively and neutrally studying society'
2. 'recognise their own subjectivity and positionality in relation to a researched group' (however, it is not the researcher's duty to seek societal change and influence political decision making)
3. 'recognise the need for change but seek alternative futures through implicit means such as raising consciousness' (they identify discourse with action, and consider publishing and teaching as mediums capable of altering world views)
4. 'recognise the power imbalances in their own research and seek research strategies that will empower their research subjects either to be able to seek justice themselves or to seek justice through research'
5. 'recognise the need for change and who explicitly seek change through their own political and social actions' (Kitchin, 1999: 225)



Different views on research ethics

Equal opportunity

„Treat people as equals!“

Whom?  Who starts with a disadvantage

Why?

- damage to human rights
- exclusion from decision-making
- economic dependence
- risk of access to knowledge and information
- curtailing the right to health
- lack of commanding resources

How?  **EU political aim**

- treaty of Rome (1957) (equal pay for equal work)
- anti-discrimination -- equal treatment (from 1975: community welfare policies, special programs /for women-men/)
- 1993 : in Structural Fund (European Regional Development Fund)
- 1990s: *gender mainstreaming*
- treaty of Amsterdam (1997): in anti-segregation „fight“ (*gender, race, ethnicity, religion, age, disability, sexual orientation*)