

Ethics in Social Research and Its Impact on Policy Implication, Pragmatic Planning and Development

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Abstract: This paper is an attempt to discuss how ethics is related to social research in connection with the collection of authentic and reliable data, use of appropriate data process and impartial data analysis for preparing an acceptable research report. Ethics is closely related to moral integrity, and values associated with appropriate methods and techniques applied for collection of reliable and authentic information that ensure the trust worthy research findings. This paper is based on secondary data collected through reviewing the relevant literatures. Main focus of this paper is to examine to what extent the research findings contribute to the knowledge of planners and policy makers in formulating the appropriate policy, pragmatic planning and finally thus may affects on development.

Keywords: Ethics, social research, policy, planning, Development

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Introduction: Research is common parlance refers to search for knowledge. It is an art of scientific investigation. Advanced Learners Dictionary of current English lays down the meaning of research as “a careful investigation or enquiry especially through search for new facts in any branch of knowledge”. The main thrust of research is to discover new information and modify the old one. More specifically, research is a process of searching, discovering and investigating information as well as collecting, editing, processing, evaluating, analyzing and interpretation of information to find answer to question¹. On the other hand, ethics is rooted in the ancient Greek philosophical inquiry of moral life. Ethics refers to a system of principles which can critically change

previous consideration about choices and actions². Theoretically, ethics is a branch of philosophy which deals with the dynamics of decision making concerning what is right and what is wrong. What we should do and what we should not. Under the circumstances, the scientific research along with all human activities is governed by ethics across the East and the West. Ethics in research involve requirements on daily work, the protection of dignity of subjects and the publication of the information. However, the ethical attitudes of social researchers drawn the interest of society only after 1940's because of human exploitation in several cases. Professional codes and laws were introduced since then in order to prevent abuses of human lives³ has always been part

and parcel of social research in order to get authentic and reliable information as well as quality of research report⁴. On the other hand, research is a process which involves a lot of resources, ideas, human interaction, challenges, rules and regulations that govern all the activities done. Each and every time when human participants are involved in a primary research, the researcher must take ethical issues into account. All the way through history, numerous studies benefited from participants as sources of data, but in some cases causing death, physical trauma and mental trauma. As a result of this, every researcher who wants to conduct primary research nowadays has an obligation to follow certain research ethics to avert such damages from recurring.

It is very vital for researchers to familiarize themselves with the basic ethical principles and up-to-date knowledge on policies around ethics and research to ensure that the research participants' safety is guaranteed and to avert finding themselves on the wrong side of the law and ethical guidelines. The advent of technology that is, the shift from digital photography and audio-and video-recording to the analysis of virtual materials from the internet has made life easier for people to exchange information including data collection by researchers. Therefore, this gave rise to need for researchers to stick to certain rules and regulations that govern aspects such as from who, where, why, how and when they get information in their thirst for knowledge through research. Hence this paper aims to bring to light the issues and obligations that researchers have to bear and consider when carrying out research, with particular focus on social research. Ethics in social research is started at the very

beginning of the selection of the topic of the research whether the topic is ethically sound and it may not creates problems for the normal functioning of the people either at the individual or family or community or societal level. Appropriate methods and techniques applied for collection of data that may not be harmful for the informants. The main focus of this paper is to examine to what extent ethics is closely related to moral integrity, and values associated with appropriate methods and techniques applied for collection of reliable and authentic information that ensure the trust worthy research findings for policy, planning and development.

Research Methodology: This is study based on secondary and tertiary data. The authors carefully reviewed the relevant research reports of the different scholars who have already done research on ethical issue in social science research. The researchers have had access to a few research works conducted by the scholars on ethical consideration in social science research across the East and the West. The researcher is not able to incorporate sufficient data both quantitative and qualitative due to paucity of research work on this subject. In this research paper emphasis has been given on qualitative analysis. The new dimension of this research paper is to explore the impact on policy, planning and development of ethics in social research.

Philosophical Approaches to Ethics: The catchphrase 'social research ethics' means the set of ethical doctrines that should be justified when doing social research or the set of ethical ideologies believed by social researchers universally. According to

Welman et al. ethical behavior and ethical considerations are very rigorous when doing research in the field of human under takings⁵. Ethical considerations in research are concerned with minimizing harm to all participants while in turn boosts benefits in research⁶. In undertaking research, the researchers get data from respondents who are usually not part of the inquiry process, so it is vital to consider their wellness in the research process. There are three types of ethics according to ⁷which are: (1) Meta-ethics- which deals with scrutinizing the linguistic and logic of proper intellectual, (2) normative ethics- which study what is honorably or morally acceptable and why they are acceptable and why are they intolerable and (3) descriptive ethics- which describes or elucidate the ethical practice of particular groups⁷. It is very important when a researcher is conducting research, to be mindful of ethical and data protection issues. It is unethical for a researcher to deliberately make use of a technique or practice the researcher knows to be unsuitable to prove or disprove something that you want for instance, using invalid instrument or by drawing wrong conclusions⁸. There are some philosophical approaches to ethics which can help researchers to have deeper understanding of ethics and they are elaborated below. The theoretical discipline of ethics is the study of how we should conduct ourselves, or how to govern the right thing to do in our relations with others. Ethics can be understood as the study of good conduct for constructing judgments around what is good behavior⁹. The philosophies that come from ethical studies afford a guide to inspecting ethical circumstances and to articulating desired customs of living and conducting yourself as a researcher. As our

sympathetic of the world, the nature of human behavior and social interactions has improved or transformed, ideologies advanced it is crucial to keep an eye on how these changes shape our lives as researchers. One crucial alteration in the numerous methods to ethical judgment making has to do with the target of the action, aimed at what or on behalf of whom are we interested in doing the right thing, is it for ourselves, a co-worker, certain individual, a household, a government, a communal, a country, or the universal.

Regrettably, what might appear for one person to be the right thing to do or group possibly will not be the right thing for the next person or society. Under the circumstances, which are branded by contradictory rights or responsibilities are known as an ethical dilemma. The circumstances turn out to be more multifaceted when we endeavor to evaluate individual moralities and rights alongside assessments of what is paramount for a bigger group. Horn proposes those considerations that contest in our careful ethical propensities and our ethical decision processes consist of justice in dissemination, the participant's wellbeing level, or contentment, the participant's aspirations, and the societal role of the participant¹⁰. One approach to increasing competence in dealing with ethical matters is to begin with clarification of your own values and identifying and understanding the values by which other people live¹¹. There are three broad types of ethical approaches or theories which are as follow: consequentiality theories, non-consequentiality theories and agent-centered theories¹².

Consequentiality Theories: Utilitarian Theories: Doing the right thing for the more people- philosophers of this approach cited John Stuart Mill (1806-1873) who viewed ethics as the action that makes the majority of people to be happy and causes the least harm to the fewest people. For them the most vital thing is not about your good will towards others, but instead they were concerned with the consequences which come from your deeds. Defining which action to take necessitates that all conceivable actions in the circumstances and the impending results of each be scrutinized for all people or cluster that may be included. Subsequently diverse results are evaluated and equated the action that resulting in the finest conclusion for the utmost general public is carefully chosen because what is good varies across cultures^{13,14}.

The Egoistic Approach: In this approach, an individual frequently utilizes practical crafty to yield the paramount aggregate of good for him or herself. Primordial Greek Sophists for instance, Thrasymachus (459-400 BCE), who legendarily claimed that might makes right and the (1588-1679) philosophers such as Thomas Hobbes could be considered as the harbingers of the egoistic approach. One of the utmost modern powerful advocates of ethical egoism was the Russian-American philosopher Ayn Rand (1905-1982), who in the book "The Virtue of Selfishness" (1964), argues that self-interest is a prerequisite to self-respect and to respect others. There are several counterparts between ethical egoism and laissez-faire economic theories, in which the tracking down of self-interest is viewed as leading to the assistance of the society, even though the advantage of the public is perceived only as the auspicious by-product

as a result of individual self-interest, not its aim.

Non-consequentiality theories: The Duty-Based Approach: It is concerned with balancing rights and obligations- this was propounded by Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), who was of the view that whether an action is ethical is influenced by the action itself and essentially by the original motive for the action. He further suggested that the foundation for our main philosophy of deontological ethics in his endeavor to express a rational for ethical behavior is grounded on wholesome motive, instead of the tradition or imposing assertion. For Kant, individuals start their own moral rules grounded on the benchmark that the all-encompassing purpose of their actions could relate to every person that is it could turn out to be a law¹¹.

The Right -based Approach or Principle Ethics: This approach views ethics as a set of beliefs advanced by cautious intellectual and it includes ideas about "who has what kinds of rights and which rights or responsibilities have priority over other rights and obligations"¹⁵. This can be traced back to works of John Locke (1632-1704) who was a British empiricist philosopher who believed that the best action is that which protects the ethical rights of those who are affected by the action. Locke further asserts that all humans have a right to dignity. He was also supported by Kant's categorical imperative that says: "Act in such a way that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of another, always at the same time as an end and never simply as a means to an end." This gave birth to some debatable ethical rights in research where many are arguing that even

non-humans and other animals including robots have rights as well.

The Fairness of Justice Approach: The Law Code of Hammurabi in Primeval Mesopotamia (1750 BCE), was of the view that all unrestricted men should be treated the same, just as all slaves should be treated similarly. Once joint with the generality of the rights methodology, the justice method can be used to all human subjects. The work of American thinker John Rawls (1921-2002), is seen as the greatest influential description of this approach today who maintained, along Kantian outlines, that just ethical doctrines are those that would be selected by free and normal people in a first condition of impartiality. This theoretical agreement is considered impartial or unbiased because it affords a process for what sums as a rational action and does not distress itself with the aftermath of such actions. Justice of initial opinion is the standard for what is regarded as fair and ethical. In the same manner, all research participants should be treated equally without any biasness.

The Divine Command Approach: As its name proposes views what is right as the similar as what God commands and ethical principles are the foundation of God's will. Doing God's will is understood as the very delineation of what is ethical. Since God is seen as unstoppable and controller of free will, God can change what is now deliberated as ethical and God is not limited by any principle of right or wrong tiny rational ambiguity. The most dominant intellectual in this tradition was William of Ockham (1285-1349) who was the Medieval Christian philosopher and his writings aided as a guide

for Protestant Reformers such as Martin Luther (1483-1855) and Jean Calvin (1509-1564). The Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard (1813-1855), in praising the biblical Patriarch Abraham's preparedness to slaughter his son Isaac at God's command, demanded that truthfully right action must eventually go further than ordinary morality to what he termed the "teleological suspension of the ethical," once more signifying to a certain degree questionable connection concerning religion and ethics stated previously.

Given the above, it is crucial for researchers to know the type or religious background of the society in which they want to conduct their studies so as to avoid acting in an unethical way. For example in South Asia the population is categorized based on the religious affiliation, caste, sect, etc. each of these groups have diverse cultural, linguistic and religious beliefs¹⁶. The reason being that, different societies uphold diverse religious beliefs and cultures, so some things which are considered ethically as right, might be considered ethically wrong in some societies.

Agent-centered Theories: Virtue Ethics: Aristotle was of the view that, the eventual aim of life is to attain satisfaction, which emanates from brilliance of thinking. For him, the significant characteristic of brilliance of thinking is fineness of selecting virtuous action-the "golden mean". A righteous deed is ethical only when it is executed from an inspiration of doing the correct thing¹⁵. Good action, for those of noble personality is knowledgeable as time passes by and it is followed by righteous actions. The application of moral principles and rules is viewed as less ethical behavior,

than as the researcher adopting ethical standards¹³. Virtues are somewhat distinguished from seeing cases of continuous exemplary behavior by prototypes. Furthermore, Beauchamp and Childress came up with four types of virtues they deliberate as crucial to research ethics and these are as follows¹⁶:

- **Compassion:** It is an idea linked to kindness, comprises of being distressed for others and a mindfulness of their discomfort or sorrow. It contains robust emotional mechanisms attached between the researcher and the researched or human subjects who are involved in the study.
- **Discernment:** It is the ability to take a decisive action grounded on perception as a result of a history of pure judgment plus sympathetic. This is a situation whereby one is able to make ethical decision without being overly prejudiced by other specific, personal biasness or political influences. When conducting a research this is very vital, the researcher's personal biasness or interests should not divert the research objectives as this will affect the findings. The researcher has to avert ethical weakness or mistake generally acknowledged as "conflict of interest". Thus, a discerning person should be in a position to comprehend what should to be executed, in which manner, and where, when dealing with ethical considerations matters.
- **Trustworthiness:** It is a personality that offers other folks assurance that an single person may reliably do the correct thing for ethical motives. This is the most influential factor in research which can motivate

participants to give you honest response. Integrity- researchers should not compromise their ethical principles; they must maintain core values and beliefs of research to avert moral distress which may lead to people not accepting your researching findings. It is for this reason that researchers should always uphold the beliefs and values of research so that other people can trust their work.

The Feminist Approach-This approach to ethics has been developed and used as supplement to the virtue approach in recent years. The feminist approach is of the few that women and other marginalized group's experience should be included when deliberating on ethical issues in research¹⁵. This approach is more concerned about the involvement of vulnerable group in research and this was further discussed in one of the sections of this work. It can be construed that, all these theories together with the medical experiments of the German physicians during World War 2 the Nuremberg Code, the Helsinki Declaration, the Belmont Report of 1979 and the cumulative advancement in the use of technology in research gave birth to ethical considerations which all researchers are encouraged to be mindful when conducting any research that involve human subjects as sources of data.

Principle of Ethics in Social Research: The important starting point for this treatise is to clarify the relations, connections, and variances concerning morals, ethics, ethical approaches, ethical bases, ethical regulations and legal regulations which researchers normally come across on their journey of conducting social research which involves human subjects. However, there is also

secondary research which exclusively depends on the use of data gathered for a different research usually do not need to undergo formal ethics review given that no identifiable information is generated in the process¹⁷. Whether it is primary data or secondary, every researcher should know what is ethical and not pertaining to their research and they believe that they can uphold ethical standards, but history unfortunately, keeps a reminder that not all researchers conduct research responsibly¹⁰. The inception of current research ethics is instigated by a desire to safeguard human subjects intricate in research projects and it can be traced back to the 1930s and 1940s. The social researchers need to keep in their mind set to apply the following principles at the time of conducting research.

- In any study participants must willingly consent to partake.
- The aims of the research ought to work for the good of the society.
- Research must be grounded on comprehensive theory and before used for human beings it must be tested on animals in case of experimental research.
- Unnecessary mental and physical suffering must be avoided in research.
- Where serious injury and or death are potential outcomes those research projects must be terminated immediately.
- The extent of danger or hazard considered with research participants should not surpass expected benefits of results.
- Research should be conducted in a suitable atmosphere which safeguards participants.
- Only scientifically qualified personnel should conduct experiments with human subjects.
- Human subjects must be permitted to withdraw their participation any time they feels to do so.
- If there is a reason to believe that prolongation will be dangerous or end in injury or death, scientists must be ready to stop the experiment.
- Reduction of harm, researchers should not deliberately disenchant or hurt the research subjects, irrespective of whether they volunteered to take part in the study or not,
- In research there is voluntary participation which denotes that, participants are free to exercise their will in determining whether to participate or not to participate in a research action¹⁸.
- Non-published are not included in the results because they do not support the desired outcome. Such data may be considered as bad data, but bad data ought to be recognized during gathering process or during analysis.
- Fabrication of data is when the researcher makes up either data or results then records or reports them, whereas falsification is when the researcher manipulates materials, process, equipment or changes or omits data such that the research is not represented accurately.

- Finding data from a participant whom the researcher is aware that this participant does not meet the requirement of your primary research is unethical.
- There is need for the justification of benefits to the participants, their community and or the broader society at large. It is at times problematic to foresee the risks or harm when crafting a proposition particularly in qualitative research.
- Publish in order to advance research and scholarship, not to advance just your own career. Avoid wasteful and duplicative publication¹⁹.

Theoretical Framework: Ethics is a topic that covers questions relating to what kinds of lives people should lead, what counts as a good society, what actions are right and wrong, what qualities of character they should develop and what responsibilities of humans have for each other and the ecosystem. In the context of social research, ethics as a subject area traditionally covers topics such as the overall harms and benefits of research, the rights of participants to information, privacy, anonymity, and the responsibilities of researchers to act with integrity. An ‘ethical principle’ is a general standard or norm that promotes what is regarded as worthy or valuable for the flourishing of humans and the whole ecosystem. In social science research, the researchers need to be neutral in data collection, data processing, data analyzing, report writing along with drawing conclusions. It should be noted most of the ethical issues have to do with the scientist's obligations and the limits on permissible

scientific activity. Perspectives on these issues are informed by ideas drawn from a variety of intellectual traditions, including philosophical, legal, and religious. Political views and cultural values also influence the interpretation of researcher conduct. Ethical questions about scientific activity are considered external to the research endeavor.

Ethics in Social Research: There are several meanings that are attached to the word ethics as was elude by

²⁰. They defined ethics as a field of study that has to do with examining what is good or right in the eyes of the community and how people should govern this. On this

understanding, social research ethics denote the study of what the researchers must do or not do and how this should be considered. Ethics talk about a set of values that symbolize or demonstrate what is good or right or permit people to classify what is bad or wrong. The social science research concerns with the social structure in terms of individuals, family, kinship, marriage, community, and society and its economic and political situation that affects the way of life of the people. It also deals with the culture of the people in terms of customs, beliefs and value system in which they born, brought up and die. In social science research different methods and techniques have applied to collect authentic and reliable information. These are survey using schedule or

Fig. -1: Model on Ethics in Social Research



questionnaire, observation, case study, FGD, use of key informants, etc. At the time of data collection, the emphasis should be given on following ethical issues so that the respondents should not be subjected to harm in any way.

- Respect for the dignity of research participants should be prioritized.
- Full consent should be obtained from the participants prior to the study.
- The protection of the privacy of research respondents has to be ensured.
- Adequate level of confidentiality of the research data should be ensured.
- Anonymity of individuals and organizations participating in the research has to be ensured.
- Any deception or exaggeration about the aims and objectives of the research must be avoided.
- Affiliations in any forms, sources of funding, as well as any possible conflicts of interests have to be declared.
- Any type of communication in relation to the research should be done with honesty and transparency.
- Any type of misleading information, as well as representation of primary data findings in a biased way must be avoided.

Challenges to Ethical Considerations:

Research ethics takes a particular interest in analyzing the aspect of what is right or wrong in carrying out social research. It is vital for researchers to be aware of all the ethical

considerations pertaining to social research as they have impact on the integrity of whatever research project. De Vos states that every researcher must have knowledge of what is right and what is wrong when doing research, and hence must Endeavour to observe all those aspects laid out by the research community²¹. However, in so doing researchers often face numerous challenges.

- Firstly factor in the issue of social researchers facing problems because the issue of ethics is being mostly derived from the biomedical sciences. Social research has its own different, but very important issues and obligations for researchers. Ethical considerations are designed to play a preventative and guiding function in research. They provide information about what researchers must or must not do in order to produce responsible research.
- In as much as there are codes and ethical guides for research conduct, it still boils down to the researchers' decision making because in some instances of social research, guidelines and codes become contradictory. For instance conflicting rules such as giving informed consent where the researcher cannot disclose the true intentions of the research or of the researcher needs to do an observation without alerting subjects of that fact for the untainted results. Howard purports that often researchers are faced with difficult decisions and ethical challenges throughout their research process²².

- Sometimes they are faced with ethical dilemmas to decide on what constitutes right and wrong in some situations. Hesse-Biber states that some researchers fail to fully disclose all the risks and full extent of consequences of participating of participating in a study to their participants because of fear of losing their participants²³. Also for trying to avoid the hurdle of going back and forth to the Institutional Review Committees whenever there is a change in the collection of data. The extent to which a research is deemed ethical is dependent on the continuous effort to ensure that the rights of subjects are protected at all times.
- Ethical issues in social research are usually less serious than those faced in medical research; however that does not mean that social researchers can neglect such issues, they still need to uphold them. Research with vulnerable groups poses some serious ethical issues, however the agreement within the research community is that research with these groups is needed in social research²⁴. Extra care just has to be given when dealing with these groups. Kirk argues that the most ethical issues to be looked out for in these groups are informed consent, confidentiality and power relations²⁵.

Impact of Social Research: The findings of the research in social science laid the groundwork implementing policy, planning and development for the wellbeing of the people in order to improve their quality of life. To uphold ethics in social research which involves human subjects but its impact is universal (Jones, 1994)? Research is an activity that relies on the support of the society, the public; hence it is very vital for researchers to obey ethical principles so as to win the heart and minds of the public backup and having faith in the research. The public needs to be able to trust research, its methods and results, hold it in high esteem for the potential that it will contribute to take appropriate policy on the particular problems of the general people. The appropriate policy on any problem is contributing factor for effective planning and thus affect development.

Fig. -2: Model on Impact of Research



Impact of Research on Policy: In contrast to the academic perspective of research impact, practitioners hold a very different view. For example, Young claims that for research to have any impact, the results must inform and shape policies and programs and be adopted into practice²⁶. Researchers wishing to maximize the impact of their work have to attract the interest of policymakers and practitioners and then convince them that a new policy or different approach is valuable and then foster the behavioral changes that are necessary to put them into practice (ibid). According to

Sumner et al. impact is multilayered and refers to use i.e. consideration or actual outcome of social change²⁷. It can be visible or invisible, progressive or regressive, intended or unintended and immediate or long term. The Research Council of the UK acknowledges academic impact as the demonstrable contribution that excellent research makes to academic advances but it also emphasizes the need for economic and societal impacts as the demonstrable contribution that excellent research makes to society and the economy by, among other things, increasing the effectiveness of public services and policy.

Impact of Research on Planning: Planning is very important for successfulness and the effective performance of an organization. It is not only for organizations but also for individuals. It is the most basic of all the managerial functions. It involves selecting missions and objectives and the actions to achieve them. Therefore, every organization or individual gives a greater emphasis on planning. Without research, it is not possible for pragmatic planning on any issue either at the individual or family or community or organizational or societal level. On the other hand, ethical consideration is important to get authentic result of the research for formulation of effective planning. Because planning as a process involves the determination of future course of action, that is why an action, what action, how to take action, and when to take action. These are related with different aspects of planning process.

Impact of Research on Development

The term research and development is widely linked to find out truth or to investigate the fact that may contribute to take appropriate

decision to solve problems. Under the circumstances, ethics may contribute to find out the required results through proper investigation that also helps to development to reach goals. Research also helps for innovation both in the corporate and government world or the public and private sectors. Research findings on any issue are prerequisite for development. Research result allows a company to stay on top of its competition. Without research an organization or a company may not survive on its own and may have to rely on other ways to innovate such as engaging in mergers and acquisitions or partnerships. Through research, companies can design new

Concluding Remarks: Ethics ensure that the research produces knowledge by ensuring that research is not being repetitive. Every research must produce some new knowledge, promote truth and minimize error. Research ethics create some prohibitions to behaviors such as falsifying data, incorrect reporting and misrepresentation of data. Ethical behavior is similarly essential for cooperative work since it inspires an atmosphere of trust, answerability and reciprocal admiration amongst researchers²⁸. This is important particularly when bearing in mind matters linked to data allotment, joint-authorship, exclusive rights, guiding principle, confidentiality, privacy, reduction of harm, benefits and rewards, vulnerable groups and so on. Ethics, research, policy, planning and development are inter-locked each other in writing this paper. Without ethics, it is very difficult to get authentic and reliable data as well as findings or results of the research. If the results are not reliable then it creates impediment to take an appropriate policy as well as it affects to chalk out meaningful

planning and all together create problem for development.

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