

# Is It Culturally Ethical?

*Human Rights Challenges  
In  
International Survey Research*

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# International Survey Research

- **Environment and legal framework**
- Budgets
- Local capacity
- Accessibility
- **Awareness level of local population of their rights**
- **Diversity (culture, language, traditions, religions)**
- Quality concerns
- Overlapping donors activities
- ,, and much more

# Ethics

- Ways of thinking about ethics
  - Descriptive: Describe how people behave and moral standards they claim to follow
  - Normative: Moral standards and reasonable behavior
  - Analytical (meta-ethics): Reasoning about pre-suppositions behind the moral systems
  - Applied ethics: How moral outcomes can be achieved in a specific situation

# Research Ethics

- Belmont Ethical Principles
  - **Respect for persons**
  - Beneficence (non-maleficence)
  - Justice
- Advantages of understanding research ethics
  - Supports and remind researchers to protect human subjects
  - Provide workable definitions of benefits and risks of the study
  - Sets up a structure for analysis and decision making

# Research Ethics

- Advance science to enhance the future of society
- Protect the rights and welfare of individual research subjects
- Avoid exploitation of resource-scarce countries
- Minimal risk and vulnerability from which point of view
- Differences by research area
  - Medical research
  - Physical sciences
  - ***Social and behavioral sciences***
  - Geospatial



# Cultural Ethics

- Religions, traditions, and values
- Gender issues
- Age and adulthood
- Languages and dialects



# Cultural Ethics

- Rural versus urban populations and level of civility
- Minorities
- Sensitivity of the topic
- Economic disparity



# Cultural Ethics

- Political environment (repression versus expression)
- Cross-cultural definitions
- Social cognition





# Informed Consent & Voluntary Participation

- Purposes of informed consent and voluntary participation
  - Show respect to research subjects
  - Allow human subjects to protect themselves
  - Provide human subjects with ALL information needed to reach a decision regarding participations in a research study



# Informed Consent & Voluntary Participation

- Handicapped by
  - Illiteracy
  - Poor awareness of rights or lack of rights
  - Hierarchical tendency to obey and trust experts
  - Paternalistic attitudes about rights of women
  - Vulnerable populations, lacking basic needs, are easy to coerce especially with incentives
  - Population vulnerability

# Confidentiality, Privacy, & Disclosure

- Deficient legal framework regulating research and protecting human rights
- Misunderstanding of local regulations and customs
- Communal Participation – privacy issues
- Chain of trust



# Confidentiality, Privacy, & Disclosure

- Difficulty to assess burden and benefit
- Trade-off between privacy and language barrier
- What is considered personal and confidential is different between cultures (illness, salary, sexual and reproductive information, etc.)



# Vulnerable Research Participants

- Pre-identified groups
  - Children, Senior citizens, Persons with disabilities (Physical and mental), Prisoners, Patients
- But why not
  - Poor, Illiterate, Affected by natural disaster or war
  - Others?



# Ethics Committees

- Ethical and scientific review of research on human subjects
- Research Ethics Committees (REC) or Institutional Review Boards (IRB)
- Review free from political, institutional, professional, and economic influences



# Ethics Committees

- Compliance with local requirements as well as researcher/donor's own country requirements
- Professional standards and protection against research abuse
- Do they even exist in some countries?!



# Survey Research Organizations

- Code of ethics and guidelines
- Examples:
  - Association for Public Opinion Research (AAPOR)
  - World Association for Public Opinion Research (WAPOR)
  - European Society for Market Research (ESOMAR)





## Next Steps

- Ethical Principles are the same everywhere but the procedures for applying these principles may differ in different parts of the world resulting from the difference in culture, religion and traditions
- Need for systematic and coherent framework for evaluating the ethics of human subject survey research that incorporates all relevant ethical considerations



## Next Steps

- Enhance general awareness that Research Ethics Committees (REC) are not established to hinder research, but inform investigators that the decisions of RECs are meant to enhance the ethical and scientific conduct of the research.
- Cross-cultural communications and resolutions in case of inconsistencies between national and international laws



## Next Steps

- Setting up standards and monitoring adherence, who's responsibility?
- How to adapt to cultural changes?



Thank you

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