

GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR ETHICAL RESEARCH

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Chapter Two

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Topics for discussion

- Ethical principles
- Role of ethical principles
- Key norms for ethical research with human participants

Broad principles of research ethics

- Beneficence and non-maleficence
- Distributive justice (equity)
- Respect for persons (dignity and autonomy)



Beneficence and non-maleficence:

Researchers must maximise benefits and minimise harm.

Research designs should be scientifically sound and ethical.

Researchers have a duty to prevent deliberate harm to participants.

Distributive justice (equity):

There should be a fair distribution of risks and benefits among all stakeholders, including participants and communities.

No individual or group should bear an unfair share of the research burdens or be excluded from its benefits.

Respect for persons (dignity and autonomy):

Individuals capable of making their own decisions should be allowed to do so freely.

People with diminished capacity must be protected from harm.

Research should prioritise the dignity, privacy, confidentiality, and well-being of participants.

Role and importance of ethical principles

1

Ethical principles guide researchers in protecting the interests of human participants.

2

They help promote responsible research conduct and the development of high-quality, beneficial knowledge.

KEY NORMS FOR ETHICAL RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN PARTICIPANTS

1. Relevance and value

- Research should address the needs of the local population and have potential for practical benefits.



2. Scientific integrity



Research should have a sound design and methodology to ensure valid and reliable results.



Poor design can expose participants to unnecessary risks and undermine research objectives.

3. Stakeholder engagement

Researchers should collaborate with stakeholders, including community representatives and governmental bodies, from the early stages of the study to ensure transparency and acceptability.



4. Favourable risk-benefit ratio

The potential benefits of the research should outweigh the risks of harm to participants.

Researchers must justify the inclusion of participants who may face undue risks.

5. Fair selection of participants

- Selection criteria must be just and based on sound ethical and scientific principles, avoiding unfair discrimination.



6. Informed consent

Participation must be voluntary and based on informed choices.

Consent should be a continuing process, not just a one-time agreement.

7. Continuous respect for participants



Researchers must continue to respect participants' autonomy and monitor their well-being throughout the study.



Participants should be informed of any relevant results or findings.

8. Researcher competence and expertise

Researchers should be adequately qualified and experienced.



They must maintain high standards of safety, scientific integrity, and ethical conduct throughout the study.

Conclusion

Ethical considerations are integral at every stage of research, from planning and execution to reporting and dissemination.

Proper ethical conduct includes continuous communication and collaboration with all relevant stakeholders.

THANK YOU!

References:

National Health Research Ethics Council (2024). South African Ethics in Health Research Guidelines: Principles, Processes and Structures, 2024, 3rd ed. National Department of Health of the Republic of South Africa. Pretoria: NDoH.

Available from: <https://www.health.gov.za/nhrec-home/>