

General guidelines for research ethics

Research is of great importance – to individuals, to society and to global development. Research also exercises considerable power at all these levels. For both these reasons, it is essential that research is undertaken in ways that are ethically sound.

PRINCIPLES

- **Respect.** People who participate in research, as informants or otherwise, shall be treated with respect.
- **Good consequences.** Researchers shall seek to ensure that their activities produce good consequences and that any adverse consequences are within the limits of acceptability.
- **Fairness.** All research projects shall be designed and implemented fairly.
- **Integrity.** Researchers shall comply with recognized norms and to behave responsibly, openly and honestly towards their colleagues and the public.

1 Quest for truth. Research activity is a quest for new knowledge, with critical and systematic verification and peer review. Honesty, openness, systematicness and documentation are fundamental preconditions for achieving this goal.

2 Academic freedom. Research institutions shall assist in ensuring the researchers' freedom in their choice of topic and methodology, implementation of research and publication of results. In commissioned research, the commissioning agency has the right to define the topic, research questions and scope of the research assignment in cooperation with the person or institution undertaking the assignment. The commissioning agency should not seek to unduly influence choice of methodology, implementation or publication.

3 Quality. Research should be of high academic quality. The researcher and institution are required to possess the necessary competence, design relevant research questions, undertake suitable choices of methodology and ensure sound and appropriate project implementation in terms of data collection, data processing and safekeeping/storage of the material.

4 Voluntary informed consent. Consent is the main rule in research on individuals or on information and material that can be linked to individuals. This consent should be informed, explicit, voluntary and documentable. Consent presupposes the capacity to give such consent. To ensure real voluntariness, vigilance must be exercised in cases where the participant is in a dependency relationship to the researcher or in a situation of restricted freedom.

5 Confidentiality. As a general principle, those who are made the subjects of research are entitled to have their personal information treated confidentially. The

researcher must prevent any use and communication of information that might inflict damage on individuals who are the subjects of research. Irrespective of the duty of confidentiality, researchers have a legal obligation to avoid punishable offences. The researcher must decide when and in what way the participant should be informed about limitations of the duty of confidentiality.

6 Impartiality. Impartiality means avoidance of confusing roles and relationships in a way that may give rise to reasonable doubt concerning conflicts of interest. Openness regarding relevant roles and relationships that the researcher is involved in must be maintained in relation to colleagues, research participants, sources of finance and other relevant parties.

7 Integrity. The researcher is responsible for the trustworthiness of his or her own research. Fabrication, falsification, plagiarism and similar serious violations of good academic practice are incommensurate with such trustworthiness.

8 Good reference practice. Researchers must adhere to good reference practices, which fulfil requirements for verifiability and form the basis for further research.

9 Collegiality. Researchers must show each other respect. They must agree on and comply with good practices for data ownership and sharing, authorship, publication, peer review and cooperation in general.

10 Institutional responsibility. The responsibility for ethical conduct rests not only with the individual researcher, but also with the research institution. The institution is responsible for ensuring compliance with good academic practice and for establishing mechanisms that can address cases of suspected violations of ethical research norms.

11 Availability of results. As a main rule, research results should be made available. Openness regarding research findings is essential for ensuring verifiability, for returning some benefit to the research participants and society in general, and for ensuring a dialogue with the public. Such communication is also a function of democracy.

12 Social responsibility. Researchers have an independent responsibility to ensure that their research will be of benefit to research participants, relevant groups or society in general, and for preventing it from causing harm. Research decisions must take into account any knowledge that the development of a research area may entail ethically unacceptable consequences for individuals, animals, society or the environment. It is absolutely essential that when participating in public debate, the researcher clearly distinguishes between professional comments made in his or her capacity as an expert on the one hand and statements of personal opinion on the other, and refrains from abusing his or her authority.

13 Global responsibility. Research institutions and researchers have a responsibility to communicate relevant knowledge to regions that are otherwise excluded for reasons of economic disadvantage. Research should help counteract global injustice and preserve biological diversity.

14 Laws and regulations. In the field of research, there are national laws and regulations as well as applicable international conventions and agreements, and researchers and research institutions must abide by these.