Ethical Issues of Social Research: A Sociological Interpretation

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Abstract

The term 'ethics' has been derived from the Greek work 'ethos' which means character. When it is used in the context of research or social research, it involves all those moral principles that need to be observed in research. Research is made with several questions, such as, what moral principles are going to guide the research, how the several ethical issues are going to influence the selected research problem, how the varied ethical issues are going to affect the researcher during the course of the research, and what responsibilities the researcher has towards the research subjects.

Research is a serious issue that requires the competence and sensibility of the researcher. Social research involves an active participation of both the researcher and the units of information selected for the purpose. It brings a special responsibility for the researcher to conduct research scientifically in a way that the units of information are allowed sufficiently to make their responses freely and without any pressure. There should be an informed consent of the units of information about their participation in the research project. It is the moral duty of the researcher to benefit all those who participate in the study. During the few last decades research met a horrible deterioration, and it seemed to have lost all those values that are associated with it. Neither the researchers nor the participating units of information were serious for it.

The paper is a theoretical study, and aims at highlighting and discussing certain ethical issues that need to be kept in mind while conducting research for the sake of genuineness of the research.

Keywords: Ethics, Issues, Research, Plagiarism, Researcher, Units of Information, Security, Objectivity, Field Work

Introduction

Self-regulatory guidelines for making decisions and defining profession are known as ethics. Ethical codes are helpful in giving direction when there arise confronting or confusing situations. Ethical codes are adopted in all the walks of life. They are equally required for research, and particularly, in social research which is passing through a chaotic situation these days.

The current scenario of research in the world is undoubtedly dissatisfactory and embarrassing as the researches whether in the form of research papers or thesis reflect the indifference of the researchers. With the exception of very few, most of the studies seem to be just a formality made without serious concern of the researchers, units of information, institutions and universities and publishers. In India University Grants Commission (UGC) keeps amending research policies for the sake of improvement in the research. UGC wants the researchers to be serious about the research projects so that they can turn fruitful to the society.

It is the general observation about the social science research that the researchers undertake the research projects just for the sake of degrees, and are not found serious. Plagiarism is witnessed in them. In India there are several government, deemed and private universities that allow research in several disciplines. To every one's surprise, only very few researches conducted and approved there are ethically sound and genuine. There seems hardly anything that reveals authenticity and innovation.

Obviously, for a genuine and legitimate research, there needs to be a procedure which ensures the ethical fulfillment. Some of the major ethical issues that need to be highlighted and discussed are as follows-

1. Freedom of research

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1. Communication and enforcement of research ethics standards
2. Researchers' responsibility for defining roles clearly
3. Guaranteeing respondents' privacy so that they may participate in the research projects freely without any fear
4. Respect for the individuals in a way that their interests are not clashed
5. Regard for private interests
6. Maximization of the benefits and minimization of harms
7. Ensuring the informed consent in the process of gathering information and collecting data
8. Covert research related issues
9. Role of researcher as a participant observer
10. Objectivity and neutrality of the researcher
11. Vulnerable groups or the mentally problematic people related issues
12. Establishment of Ethics committees
13. Plagiarism related issues
14. Reference and bibliography related issues
15. Researcher and supervisor related issues
16. Library related issues
17. University and institution related issues
18. Interdisciplinary discussions

Charles C. Ragin writes in his Constructing Social Research book that "Social research involved the interaction between ideas and evidence. Ideas help social researchers make sense of evidence, and researchers use evidence to extend, revise and test ideas." Hence, through data collection and analysis, exploration, description, explanation and prediction, it attempts to create theories and principles, which are written in the language of variables describing logical relationship between the variables.

A researcher has several moral duties, responsibilities and liabilities to perform. He has ethical responsibilities to participants or respondents who provide him information about the subject; to the subject that he has selected for research; to the supervisor who guide him to conduct research; to the institutes and universities where the researcher is enrolled; to the people around him who favour and support him; to his friends and colleagues, and to the society at large. He must work on the principle of maximum benefits and minimum harm protecting the welfare of the subjects. It is his duty to inform them about their expected roles in the research projects and about all those risks that may befall in the process. His further duty to them is that he should provide them the complete details including the results of the study after the study is finished. Indeed, he should not conceal and hide anything from them, and should let them know about his intentions and plans relating to research.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To be familiar with the varied trends of research in India
2. To study the moral duties and responsibilities of the researchers
3. To study and develop familiarity with the role of the subjects or respondents
4. To study the causes and effects of deterioration in social science research
5. To be familiar with the role of fake universities and professional guides in the deterioration of research
6. To highlight the role of professional online and offline publishers in the deterioration of research
7. To explore the causes of the indifference of the researchers and the respondents
8. To highlight the ethical codes required for a legitimate research
9. To discuss the importance of ethical codes in social research
10. To provide suggestions

Review of Literature

Julius A. Mollet in Ethical Issues in Social Science Research in Developing Countries: Useful or Symbolic holds the idea that social science research must concern itself with "moral integrity" to ensure that research process and findings are "trustworthy" and valid quoting Biber (2005). According to the author, in developing countries, where societies are often pluralistic, cultural background and security become important issues for social researchers in conducting fieldwork.

T.S. Papola (2010) in the working paper on Social Science Research in Globalising India-Historical Development and Recent Trends writes that Social science research in India has under come serious criticism in recent years for not having met expectations in terms of analysing some basic structural aspects of the economy and society that have emerged, particularly in the wake of the India's quest for globalisation, meeting some internationally set standards of quality and providing inputs for policy and teaching in higher education.

Lokesh P. Nijhawan & others (2013) in their paper Informed consent: Issues and challenges observe that no research activity involving human subjects can be conducted and proceed unless informed consent is completely sought. The responsibility of conducting trial ethically and genuinely lies in the hands of those involved in it. Everyone must understand their obligations and should not misuse their power for own benefit.

Nandana Dutta (2013) in her essay on Research Ethics and English in India comments that ethics codes for research and for research publication from the biosciences, medicine and the social sciences have generally been used as models for those disciplines where such ethics has not yet been articulated. While many of the points raised in ethics guidelines in these areas (enshrined in ethics policies of institutions from around the world) appear to be irrelevant for the humanities disciplines, going back to the core questions from which such ethics has evolved might offer a possible roadmap for the humanities.

Shazia Jamshed (2014) in the study 'Qualitative research method-interviewing and observation' observe that by adopting qualitative methodology, a prospective researcher is going to fine-tune the pre-conceived notions as well as extrapolate the thought process, analyzing and

estimating the issues from an in-depth perspective. This could be carried out by one-to-one interviews or as issue-directed discussions.

Frederic G Reamer & Jayashree Nimmagadda (2015) in their paper entitled Social work ethics in India: A call for the development of indigenized ethical standards observe that various professional associations in social work and regulatory bodies worldwide have engaged in ambitious efforts to draft and implement comprehensive ethics guidelines, standards, and education. For a variety of complex reasons, the social work profession in India has lagged behind developments in many other nations.

Amit S Ray & others (2016) in their working paper entitled Quality of Social Research in India that there is a growing recognition of the importance of academic research in India and is being monitored by public institutions. However the focus in these assessments has remained largely confined to quantity dimensions, completely ignoring the dimension of quality.

K.S.Reddy, EnXie & QingqingTang (2016) in Higher education, high-impact research, and world university rankings: A case of India and comparison with China observe that Indian higher education has long been criticized for several reasons, including the poor quality in course content, shortage of skilled teaching faculty, lack of research interest, inadequate infrastructure facilities, scarce financial support, uneven industry-centric skills, poor international collaborations, lack of motivation to compete internationally, meagre research output and number of citations, reluctance to establish global universities, and so forth. This is because governments (central and state/province) have supreme power over administration, admissions, examinations, recruitment, and assessment, particularly in the public university system.

Manmohan Agarwal, Sunandan Ghosh, Udaya S. Mishra, Upasak Das, Vinoj Abraham, Amit S. Ray & M. Parameswaran (2016) in the paper Quality of Social Science Research in India' hold that the unique attempt to measure the quality of social science research in India in objective quantifiable terms. A precise and relevant index (CDS_Index) of quality of social science research in India is developed, capturing multiple dimensions that are particularly important in the Indian/social science context. The index is a combined measure of an articles index and a journals index, premised on the users' perspective and the producers' perspective on quality.

Hypothesis
1. Research is passing through hard times, and it needs improvement for the sake of keeping its spirit alive
2. The modern social research in India is passing through ethical dilemma
3. The modern social research lacks ethical codes and values that it needs for its enhancement and growth
4. The current measures adopted for research are insufficient
5. Research process, research policy, fake universities and professional publishers etc. are responsible for it
6. Most of the stuff in the research papers and thesis is plagiarized, and lacks authenticity
7. Revision of research policies helps in the development and enhancement of research

Research Methodology
Designed and prepared on the basis of the study and review of a few Indian and foreign studies available on the various internet sites, the research paper is a theoretical study. In addition to the contents served in the selected studies, the paper has its root the authors' own observation of the researches and researchers. A great care was taken while writing the paper. For it, first the title was selected after much consideration keeping in view the appropriateness and relevance of the theme. The objectives were set in order to make the work specific. The internet surfing helped the authors find several helpful sites with a lot of useful stuff on the theme. Of the various studies found available on the internet in the form of research papers, only a few were selected for review making because of the time constraints of the authors. Review of the related literature was made keeping in view the nativity of the authors, titles of the studies, year of publication and name of the publisher, objectives and hypothesis of the study, and major findings. It supplied a sufficient feedback of the theme, and helped the authors be familiar with several aspects of the theme. Hypothesis was formulated for the sake of directional movement and progress of the work. Finally, findings were made keeping in consideration the things mentioned in the studied literature. In order to make the work authentic, zero percent plagiarism policy was adopted. All efforts were made successfully in order to keep up the scientific spirit of work, and all the steps of theoretical studies and research suggested by the eminent social scientists were observed and followed while making the study and preparing the paper.

Findings, Conclusion & Suggestions
New standards need to be set for the social research so that it can be carried scientifically and ethically. No doubt, UGC has been serious about it, it still needs implementation in its previous research policies.
1. The current scenario of research is embarrassing and shocking. The scenario reflects ethical dilemma
2. The modern trends of social research reveal a horrible picture of research which lacks research ethics
3. Most of the stuff in the research papers and thesis is plagiarized, and lacks authenticity
4. Without ethical codes, a real research is impossible
5. A serious concern of the authors, researchers, respondents and universities can help research be authentic, without plagiarism and directional
6. Majority of the researchers fail to fulfill the responsibility which the society and research ethics expect from them

7. Respondents or the units of information have a great role to play in the process of social research, and so, they must be well told about their role to be played
8. Complex ethical issues in such countries need careful justification by social science researchers
9. In many developing countries, there are no such comparable Ethic Committees as are established in developed countries. Hence, Ethic Committees must be established for the sake of monitoring
10. Social research should be essentially culturally sensitive, and it should not violate the cultural values
11. Security to both the researchers and the respondents who make the research possible through the supply of the important information should be ensured
12. The fake universities must be publicized so that fake researches are checked

Research can be made legitimate in all respects only with the mandatorily observance of the ethical codes to be set by the research agencies.

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