

Ethical Issues in Social Research on Health care

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Ethics pertain to the conduct of human beings and scientific activities by the social scientists are conducted with the participation of human beings and have an impact on human beings or on the wider society and environment. Thus, it is highly essential that scientists/researchers understand ethical issues as well as the implications of their scientific work and act accordingly. For making ethical judgement, the scientists/researchers rely on various standards of ethics, which could be universal or specific to the culture or localities. It is imperative that researchers share and discuss the ethical issues in their work and evolve collective standards of their own.

In spite of importance of ethical issues in social research on health issues, not much awareness is generated about the same and there is paucity of data about the extent of adherence to the same. In view of this, this paper makes an attempt to understand the ethical issues to be taken care of while undertaking social research on health issues, through review of the documents on this available at national and international levels such as ICMR, WHO et al.

The paper covers self-regulation and ethics, gender considerations/gender sensitive research, reproductive health involving adolescents, adolescent sexual health, studies on HIV/AIDS, data management and statistical procedures, establishment of scientific and ethical review bodies, and guidelines for obtaining informed consent for procurement and use of human tissues, cells and fluids in research. The efforts made by international professional associations, universities and the mechanism in place for ensuring and monitoring adherence to the ethical guidelines are also discussed.

The ethical guidelines adopted in some of the studies such as NFHS, HIV BSS and IBBA are also discussed as some of these studies involve bio markers and collection of blood sample.

The review indicates that the issue of ethics in social sciences on health issues, unlike in medical research, has been given less prominence in India. Although social scientists have paid attention to the appropriate conduct of research and set best practices in place, they are often not discussed as ethics and no efforts are made to formalise some guidelines based on such experiences.

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