

ETHICAL GUIDELINES FOR SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH IN HEALTH

By
National Committee for Ethics in
Social Science Research in Health (NCESSRH)

Section II Ethical Principles for Research

II.1. Four well-known moral principles constitute the basis for ethics in research. They are:

- (i) *The Principle of Non-maleficence*: Research must not cause harm to the participants in particular and to people in general.
- (ii) *The Principle of Beneficence*: Research should also make a positive contribution towards the welfare of people.
- (iii) *The Principle of Autonomy*: Research must respect and protect the rights and dignity of participants.
- (iv) *The Principle of Justice*: The benefits and risks of research should be fairly distributed among people.

II.2. Ten general ethical principles, presently relevant for social science research in health in India, are as follows:

- (i) *Essentiality*: For undertaking research it is necessary to make all possible efforts to get and give adequate consideration to existing literature/knowledge and its relevance, and the alternatives available on the subject/issue under the study.
- (ii) *Maximisation of public interest and of social justice*: Research is a social activity, carried out for the benefit of society. It should be undertaken with the motive of maximisation of public interest and social justice.
- (iii) *Knowledge, ability and commitment to do research*: Sincere commitment to research in general and to the relevant subject in particular, and readiness to acquire adequate knowledge, ability and skill for undertaking particular research are essential prerequisites for good and ethical research.
- (iv) *Respect and protection of autonomy, rights and dignity of participants*: Research involving participation of individual(s) must not only respect, but also protect the autonomy, the rights and the dignity of participants. The participation of individual(s) must be voluntary and based on informed consent.
- (v) *Privacy, anonymity and confidentiality*: All information and records provided by participants or obtained directly or indirectly on/about the participants are confidential. For revealing or sharing any information that may identify participants, permission of the participants is essential.
- (vi) *Precaution and risk minimisation*: All research carries some risk to the participants

and to society. Taking adequate precautions and minimising and mitigating risks is, therefore, essential.

(vii) Non-exploitation: Research must not unnecessarily consume the time of participants or make them incur undue loss of resources and income. It should not expose them to risks due to participation in the research. The relationship within the research team, including student and junior members, should be based on the principle of non-exploitation. Contribution of each member of the research team should be properly acknowledged and recognised.

(viii) Public domain: All persons and organisations connected to research should make adequate efforts to make public in appropriate manner and form, and at appropriate time, information on the research undertaken, and the relevant results and implications of completed research.

(ix) Accountability and transparency: The conduct of research must be fair, honest and transparent. It is desirable that institutions and researchers are amenable to social and financial review of their research by an appropriate and responsible social body. They should also make appropriate arrangements for the preservation of research records for a reasonable period of time.

(x) Totality of responsibility: The responsibility for due observance of all principles of ethics and guidelines devolves on all those directly or indirectly connected with the research. They include institution(s) where the research is conducted, researcher(s), sponsors/funders and those who publish material generated from research.