

IMPLEMENTING ETHICAL PRINCIPLES IN SOCIAL RESEARCH: CHALLENGES, POSSIBILITIES AND LIMITATIONS

ŽYDŽIŪNAITĖ Vilma

St. Ignatius of Loyola College, Kaunas, Lithuania

Abstract

The article is based on descriptive theoretical research and focused on ethical principles in social research. It involves considerations on ethical principles and dimensions in social research as well as challenges and limitations for social researchers / scientists when they implement the social research studies. The following research questions are raised in the article: What are the challenges for social researchers / scientists and how to solve them in order to maintain the ethics of research? What commitments include ethical dimensions of social research? What ethical principles are relevant to scientific research, regardless of its specific discipline? The purpose of the research is to consider the possibilities of implementation of ethical principles, limitations, obstacles, and challenges in social research. The author concludes that ethical considerations in social research are critical as they help to determine the difference between acceptable and unacceptable behaviors. The essential ethical considerations in social research ethics remains professional competence, integrity, professional and scientific responsibility, respect for research participants' rights, dignity and diversity, and social responsibility of social researchers / scientists. In the conclusions also is accentuated that social researchers / scientists must be sensitive to cultural, individual, and role differences in serving, teaching, and studying groups of people with distinctive characteristics. In all of their social research-related or based activities they should acknowledge the rights of others to hold values, attitudes, and opinions that differ from their own. Thus social researchers / scientists should be aware of their professional and scientific responsibility to the social sciences communities and societies in which they live and work. They are responsible to apply and make public their knowledge in order to contribute to the public good.

Keywords: Ethical dimensions; Ethical challenges; Ethical dilemmas; Ethical principles; Social

research; Social researcher.

Background

In recent decades, ethical considerations in research and academic communities have become more intense. This is in part a consequence of the legal changes related to human rights and data protection, but it is also the result of increased public concern for research and discovery restrictions. It is also concerned about responsible work in the workplace, especially in large organizations, expressing an interest in ethical standards at a higher level, focusing on consumer behavior and relationship with them, and related investment decisions (Broom, 2006). With corporate responsibility increasing, it is recognized that business and public services are not free from values and can not meet standards based solely on measurable performance indicators. Responsibility means thinking about the consequences of a person in relation to others and clear lines in the issue of accountability.

No human activity can be separated from responsibility and accountability, whether public services, health services, medicine, social care or financial services, commercial actions and decisions. Ethical implications are monitored in all contexts and in all areas of activity. Therefore, there is a need to draw attention to accountability in research and to manage research processes. It relates to the discovery and sharing of information, because the information is open to the public, and if it discovers an entity, then the highest ethical standards are not met (*Association of Social Anthropologists, 1999*). In the evolving age of information and communication technologies, ethical concerns over information management have increased. This is relevant to the public and private sectors, as responsible behavior must be activated.

Science is always associated with ethical issues, because the development of science is non-stop, which means that there are new ethical challenges. Biomedical sciences are traditionally considered to be the most advanced ethical issues. The Helsinki Declaration, published in 1964, has been a major effort to standardize ethical provisions in biomedical

experimentation and has created preconditions and opportunities for preparing documentation for biomedical topics (Stalker et al., 2004).

Research in social sciences regularly encounters authentic ethical problems and lacks a clear standardization decision that is suitable for the various scientific disciplines (social sciences) and appropriate institutional infrastructures representing ethics in order to evaluate social research projects and proposals.

Social sciences investigate complex problems that include social, cultural, legal, economic, educational, and political phenomena. This complexity means that research in social sciences must take care of its moral transparency, ensuring that research processes and research findings or otherwise called results / findings are reliable (Sieber, 1982). Social research involves people (research participants) and demands showing respect for ethical issues by obtaining approval from the institutions that must set up the ethical committees for investigating human behavior based on ethical standards for social research.

In the article, the ethical problems of social research are discussed in several directions - ethical standards, ethical dimensions and ethical principles, in order to answer the following research questions: What are the challenges for social researchers / scientists and how to solve them in order to maintain the ethics of research? What commitments include ethical dimensions of social research? What ethical principles are relevant to scientific research, regardless of its specific discipline?

The purpose of the research is to consider the possibilities of implementation of ethical principles, limitations, obstacles, and challenges in social research.

Ethical principles applied to research

On July 12, 1974, the National Research Act (pub. L. 93-248) was signed into law, there by creating the National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research. The Belmont Report attempts to summarize the basic ethical principles identified by the Commission in the course of its deliberations

(*The Belmont Report*, 1979). The three primary ethical principles cited in Belmont Report are: autonomy, beneficence, and justice.

- *Autonomy* refers to the right of an individual to determine what activities they will or will not participate in. Implicitly, full autonomy requires that the research participants are able to understand what they are being asked to do, make a reasoned judgment about the effect participation will have on them, and make a choice to participate free from coercive influence. The cornerstone of protecting autonomy is the informed consent process, whereby an researcher / scientist provides a potential research participant with full disclosure about the nature of the study, the risks, benefits and alternatives, and an extended opportunity to ask questions before deciding whether or not to participate (Sen & Nagwanshee, 2016).
- *Beneficence* refers to the obligation on the part of the researcher / scientist to maximize benefits for the individual participant and / or society, while minimizing risk of harm to the research participant. An honest enumeration of reasonably anticipated risks must be followed by a thorough risk or benefit calculation (Shah, 2011).
- *Justice* demands equitable selection of research participants, i. e., avoiding research participant populations that may be unfairly coerced into participating, such as prisoners and institutionalized children (Sieber, 1982).

Components of ethically valid informed consent for research

For an informed consent to be ethically valid, the following components must be present:

- *Disclosure*. The informed consent document must make clear that the social research is a study, and not clinical therapy. The potential participant must be informed as fully as possible of the nature and purpose of the social research, the procedures to be used, the expected benefits to the participant and / or society, the potential of reasonably foreseeable risks, stresses, and discomforts, and

- alternatives to participating in the social research. There should also be a statement that describes procedures in place to ensure the confidentiality of data and anonymity of the research participant. The document should make it clear whom to contact with questions about the research study, research participants' rights, and in case of any type of violation (Stalker et al., 2004).
- *Understanding.* The social research participant must understand what has been explained and must be given the opportunity to ask questions and have them answered by someone fully conversant in the research study particulars. The informed consent document must be written in lay language, avoiding any technical jargon. The potential participant must be able to read and / or understand the language in which the consent form is written. Consent forms for multinational research must be translated into the respective language for each participating country and back-translated to verify accuracy (Yip et al., 2016).
 - *Voluntariness.* The social research participant's consent to participate in the social research must be voluntary, free of any coercion or inflated promise of benefits from participation. Care should be taken that the consent form is administered by someone who does not hold authority over the research participant (Vanclay et al., 2013).
 - *Competence.* The social research participant must be competent to give consent. If the research participant is not competent due to mental status, disease, or emergency, a designated surrogate may provide consent if it is in the research participant's best interest to participate (*The Deans of Social Sciences in the Netherlands*, 2016).
 - *Consent.* The potential human subject must authorize his / her participation in the social research study, preferably in writing. If there is no need to collect personally identifiable information, and a signature on the consent form would be the only thing linking the participant to the social research study, an oral or implicit consent may be more appropriate. Children who cannot read or write should still signal their willingness to participate by an affirmative act (for

example, nodding their head). Consent by minors is referred to as assent (*Survey Research Center, 2016*).

As a general rule, deception is not acceptable when doing research with humans. Using deception jeopardizes the integrity of the informed consent process and could harm participants, as well as eroding trust between the public and researchers / scientists. The ethical committees must carefully review any proposal that suggests using deception or misrepresentation. They will require an in-depth justification of why deception is necessary for the study and the steps that will be taken to safeguard participants, including a plan to debrief subjects at the end of the social research (Stalker et al., 2004). A form of deception of research participants can occur if the terms of the informed consent are violated by the researcher / scientist.

Basic principles of ethical standards

In most cases ethical standards involve nine principles (Munhall, 1988; Babbie, 1989; *Association of Social Anthropologists, 1999*; Bulmer, 2001; Smith, 2003; *National Committees in for Research Ethics in Norway, 2006*; *American Sociological Association, 2011*; Resnik, 2015):

1. *Honesty and integrity*. The researcher / scientist must present his / her research in good faith and this relates to methods, data, results and information on the publication of the research. The researcher / scientist can not use any data that constitutes the prerequisite to doubt the objectivity of the research results, which misleads the society.
2. *Objectivity*. The researcher / scientist must avoid bias in any aspect of the study, including design, data analysis, interpretation, and review / evaluation of the report (publication).
3. *Carefulness*. The researcher / scientist must take care to avoid mistakes due to negligence. The researcher / scientist must evaluate his / her research carefully and critically, ensuring that the results / findings are reliable. It is important to keep track

of all the entries in the study. If the researcher / scientist is asked to review, s/he must devote his time to the work to be done efficiently and completely.

4. *Openness*. The researcher / scientist must always be prepared to share his / her data and results, the new instruments (which have been formed) when publishing the results of his / her research, as this helps to develop knowledge and science. The researcher / scientist must be open to critics and new ideas.
5. *Respect for intellectual property*. The researcher / scientist must not plagiarize or copy other researcher's / scientist's work, have a clear permit before using other researcher's / scientist's tools or methods, unpublished data or results / findings. The neglect of these aspects is plagiarism. The researcher / scientist must respect copyrights and patents, and other forms of intellectual property, and acknowledge their contribution to their research.
6. *Confidentiality*. The researcher / scientist must respect anything that is presented in a confidential. The researcher / scientist must follow the guidelines for communicating sensitive information, i. e. information provided by the research participants in the study.
7. *Responsible publication*. The researcher / scientist must publish for the development of science and knowledge, but not just for the care of his / her career. This means that the researcher / scientist should not publish anything that is new or repeats the work of another researcher / scientist.
8. *Legality*. The researcher / scientist must always be aware and deliberately apply the rules, principles and guidelines that affect the ongoing research, and to be sure that all the research activities are in line with these ethical requirements.
9. *Human protection*. If the study involves humans, the researcher / scientist must ensure that the research study reduces any potential damage to the research participants to the minimum and increases the scientific benefit of the participants in the study and other people (society). This means that the researcher / scientist can not force research participants to complete the tests solely because they are needed for the purposes of the individual research. The researcher / scientist must always respect

human rights, including the right to privacy and autonomy. The researcher / scientist must take into account vulnerable groups of children, older people and old people, people with learning difficulties, etc.

Ethical dimensions

Ethical dimensions reflect the different possibilities of access to ethical principles. Dimensions include basic ethical principles that can be found in codes of ethics and in-depth explanations of each basic element of ethics in order to illustrate ethical practices and to clear up possible dilemmas that will have to be addressed in scientific activities and research.

Basic ethical principles are interrelated and may conflict with each other under certain conditions. Therefore, they must be talked about together and they do not have a precise sequence and / or consistency. The basic principles are summarized, so they can not be read and adapted individually. They are presented as an appropriate way to draw the researcher's / scientist's attention to the specific content of the code of ethics.

Commitment to the society. Social research is a benefit for society, groups and individuals, and therefore social researchers / scientists must do their job in a responsibly moral and legal way in the society in which they operate (act) and live. The integrity of social research and the behavior of researchers / scientists depends on the cumulative behavior of individual researchers / scientists and the consequences of their actions in society. Broadly speaking, social researchers / scientists have a commitment to rely on ethical standards in society, because it is precisely in that society that they are conducting social research (Fouka & Mantzorou, 2018).

Researchers / scientists have an obligation to ensure that they are informed about the relevant legal regulations and rules, laws in the particular country where the investigations are conducted and, as such legal acts, the law may affect the conduct of the research. Researchers / scientists can not go along with legal norms in the country

(Bulmer, 2001).

Many contemporary societies are concerned about the scope of social research and legal pressure on researchers / scientists to ensure the rights of participants in the investigation. Legal provisions can have an impact on social research, which will make his idea "diluted" by dissatisfaction with possible disputes. Therefore, before conducting the study, researchers / scientists must scrupulously elucidate all the details of the ethics and possible legal misunderstandings in a particular context, but the delay in conducting the study may limit the potential benefit of the study to the public. Any dilemmas in terms of data protection, human rights and scientific research can be solved by making decisions individually within the community of researchers and in the short term (Broom, 2006).

The concern about the rights of a person must be in balance with the benefits to the public that is derived from the conduct of social research activities. Such ethical conflicts are unavoidable. Social researchers / scientists can not automatically decide on priorities based on research because they need to be shared with the public.

Social researchers / scientists must commit themselves to adhere to the highest standards when applying research methods and evaluating results and disseminating research results. Researchers / scientists must use the possibilities to broaden the scope, contexts and content of social research, and communicate social research findings on as broad a scale as possible, contributing to the widest possible development of the public good (Bell & Bryman, 2007).

Social researchers / scientists develop and use concepts and techniques for collecting, analyzing and interpreting data. They do not always have the ability to define their activity or methods, which is used for data collecting, analyzing or disseminating. However, researchers / scientists must remember that choices always depend on their own decisions, and therefore the personal competence of the researcher / scientist is also a personal responsibility.

Social researchers / scientists enjoy autonomy in their research activities and in the dissemination of research results. But here they are affiliated with sponsor solutions and magazine editors - each of them has specific requirements. For example, the publication

is subject to specific requirements to which the researcher / scientist has to adapt.

Social researchers / scientists are employed in the public sector or in a commercial or industrial area with less autonomy in the use and dissemination of research data. Confidentiality rules vary. For example, researchers / scientists may be subject to pressure on some results and / or data deletion; investigations may not be terminated for technical reasons. In such cases, the final decision on the completion of the full study, the input and dissemination of the results depends on the employer or the client (Adelle & Weiland, 2012).

The social research is based on the expectation that greater access to reasonable information serves the public interest. When planning all phases of the research, social researchers / scientists must rethink the consequences of the study for the public, groups and individual categories of individuals (Adams et al., 1998).

There is no general wording or generic guideline that can accurately measure the benefits or risks of different types of social research. However, social researchers / scientists should be sensitive to possible consequences in their activities and must protect the participants from possible painful effects (social, moral, physical, psychological).

The fact that information may not be properly deconstructed and constructed may be inaccurate, is not a self explanatory argument for collecting data and disseminating it. All information, whether it is - systematically collected or not, is a context for possible misuse of data and use, and therefore the researcher / scientist must seek to ensure that the information based on the investigation is not used to violate anyone's interests (Akaranga et al., 2016). Researchers / scientists should keep in mind that participants in the trial may be harmed by their participation in social studies; group interests may be violated due to specific findings, social and political actions that are based on research results (Bulmer, 2001). So, interpreting the results is a responsible action. Social researchers / scientists should strive to ensure that the results are not misinterpreted and that they have clear results in order to prevent them from being properly interpreted and manipulated.

Social researchers / scientists work in the systems of values of their societies, so they

10.2478 /vtrr-2018-0003 Vocational Training: Research and Realities, Vol. 29, No. 1, 2018

must strive to renew and consolidate their professional integrity without fear and benefit (Baines & Taylor, 2011). They must not question the choices of methods in order to avoid producing irrelevant and uncertain findings or those that can not be interpreted due to lack, ambiguity or negligence (Babbie, 1989). Any research can not be completely objective and social research is not an exception here.

In choosing research topics, attention should be paid to systemic errors, with particular cultural or personal values being preferred. However, it is clear that the basis for recruiting a researcher / scientist relates to financial support resources and other factors that may lead to priorities, commitments and bans. Thus, a social researcher / scientist is never free from objectivity and must be open to known obstacles to objectivity (Adelle & Weiland, 2012). Social researchers / scientists have a commitment to avoid formulation of research questions, data collection and analysis, and interpretation, publication of results that is not intended for the development of knowledge.

Commitments to sponsors and employers. The ratio of researchers / scientists and commitments with sponsors and employers must be clear and balanced: it must not involve compromises from a moral and legal point of view, but academic and professional integrity must be maintained. Social research relates to specific financial support that includes specific mutual obligations. Specific commitments are arranged at the organizational level and the researcher's / scientist's responsibility is to ensure that the commitments do not compromise their personal ethical and methodological standards. Employed research organizations must commit themselves to upholding the interests of their employees. Investigators should not support contractual conditions that already have an implicit percentage of responses and a predicted result (Vanclay et al., 2013). Social researchers / scientists need to make decisions about appropriate methods and procedures related to a specific study and must provide information to the sponsor or employer about the research procedures conducted, balancing the potential benefits and losses with possible alternatives.

Social researchers / scientists have to pre-clean their employers' obligations with

employees. Attention should be paid to ethical standards and performance standards and their coherence. Research reports should highlight the role of researchers and employers. Social researchers / scientists may have information from a sponsor or employer, but they may be required to keep this information confidential. However, the methods and procedures used to produce results / findings can not be confidential. The ethical principles are the common interest of the researcher / scientist and the sponsor or employer for as long as the purpose of the study is to develop knowledge (Yip et al., 2016).

Sometimes the knowledge based on the research findings can be relatively limited and of little benefit to the employer or sponsor, regardless of the fact that the research has been carried out to the highest standards (Kelman, 1982). Therefore, a researcher / scientist must perform a socially objective investigation in a maximally objective manner, especially in the presentation of results and their interpretation and conceptualisation.

The sponsor or employer expects the social researchers / scientists to be loyal to their discipline, the limitations of their research and expertise, the openness of the financial effectiveness test, and the discretion of confidential information. Social researchers / scientists have the right to expect the sponsor or employer to respect their professional distinction and scientific and methodological preparation and the ability to provide honest and objective data. These obligations must be precisely captured when signing contracts. Both sides must understand responsibility, value of the research, i. e. benefits.

Conflict in commitments may arise when a sponsor expects preliminary results and requests them to be guaranteed, for example, they want a minimum error rate when the participation of the participants in the study is voluntary. Social researchers / scientists must take responsibility for the quality of their scientific (research-based) product.

Commitment to colleagues. Social research depends on compliance with standards and appropriate professional behavior shared by the community of researchers. Social research requires methods, procedures and discoveries that are open to peer criticisms, insights and opposition. There needs to be a carefully thought out safety and security questions focusing on the context, entities, methods, data, and results (findings).

Social researchers / scientists are required to provide information to their colleagues about the methods, procedures, techniques and findings used to enable them to assess their objectivity, validity, and reliability. Such evaluations are necessary because they allow investigators to reflect on the ethics and quality of the research conducted (*Social Sciences Committee, 2015*). In order to carry out research study, social researchers / scientists must work with colleagues in other disciplines, as well as with the participants in the research study. In such cases, social researchers / scientists should formulate their ethical principles and communicate them very clearly, and pay attention to the ethical principles pursued by those collaborating with them. Each of these principles relates to the reluctance of the social researcher / scientist and the privilege to access the data not only personally but also on the basis of professional citizenship (Sen & Nagwanshee, 2016). A scholar, a member of the academic community, assumes various responsibilities, and therefore one must expect decisions from this community as well. Different colleagues participate in social studies, and therefore their reputation in society is of paramount importance. All social research should be open to evaluation, detail, possible validation, what colleagues do. Each proposed item due to an ongoing study must be rehearsed, reflected, evaluated, but not ignored.

A balance must be maintained between researcher / scientist autonomy in research studies and an independent external evaluation of a research study (Fouka & Mantzorou, 2018). One of the complicated (complex) obligations of social researchers / scientists is the limited availability of data in terms of relevance, validity and reliability, and the applicability of research findings. There are also many criticisms of qualitative research - it's not possible to generalize them, so the published results must be reassessed from a variety of points of view (Munhall, 1988). Social researchers / scientists have a moral obligation to minimize the opportunities for physical and mental harm to their colleagues during the course of the social investigation (research).

Commitments to research participants. Social researchers / scientists should seek to protect the research participants from a possible violation that may result from their involvement in the study. Therefore, participants in the study must participate voluntarily

10.2478 /vtrr-2018-0003 *Vocational Training: Research and Realities, Vol. 29, No. 1, 2018*

(based on their free will) in the research. Participants in the study should receive as accurately as possible information, preventing their discomfort or dissatisfaction with their decision to participate in a social research study. Must be very responsive to the design of the social research – “Which research participants are required to participate in the study and how they are chosen?” (Townsend & Wallace, 2014)

Some forms of social research may be more cohesive than others, such as observation, interviews. When conducting interviews it is not necessary to meet face-to-face with the participant of the study, therefore there is no moment of fear here (Madushani, 2016). When there is a direct contact with the participants in the research study, they are faced with a variety of questions and related anxiety: questions can cause anxiety, people (research participants) may find themselves lacking the necessary knowledge and therefore feel unwell, information about the subjects of investigation can be accessed by third parties.

People have to participate in the study voluntarily. If participation is necessary due to legal obligations - the research participants need to know about it. Information that may affect the participation of the research subjects in the study should be removed from the invitation. The participants in the study need to understand what and how the research study is conducted, what are the advantages and disadvantages of participating in the study, and whether there is any risk of participation in the research study? (Smith, 2003)

Components for agreement to participate in the research study (*The Deans of Social Sciences in the Netherlands*, 2016):

- Respect for research participants in observational studies. When the participants in the study do not know beforehand that they are being monitored, their private space can not be compromised, but the consent to participate must be obtained (if possible) on the spot, immediately - *post hoc*.
- The power of attorney. There are situations in which the mandate for individual's participation in the research study is required and this is related to children with mental or other disabilities.

- Secondary use of asocial research data. Attention should be drawn to cases where the participants in the study did not know that they were included in the study, for example, when the observation is implemented.
- Deprivation of potential participants in the social research study. In cases where research information is disclosed to the participants in advance, it must be considered whether it is rational? Will it not be distributed elsewhere? Strong problems exist when methodologies run counter to ethical principles, for example, sponsors, observation.

Social researchers / scientists should pay close attention to private and public spaces when disseminating research findings.

The primary concern of the social researcher / scientist should be the holistic safety of the research participant. Protecting subject safety requires the social researcher / scientist to use all available information to identify potential risks to the research participant, to establish means of minimizing those risks, and to continually monitor the ongoing research for adverse events experienced by research participants (*Survey Research Center, 2016*). The social researcher / scientist must be prepared to stop the study if serious unanticipated risks are manifest. The social researcher / scientist must obtain informed consent from each research participant. This should be obtained in writing (although oral consents are sometimes acceptable) after the participant has had the opportunity to carefully consider the risks and benefits and to ask any pertinent questions (Resnik, 2015). Informed consent should be seen as an ongoing process, not a single event or a mere formality. The social researcher / scientist must protect the research participants' privacy and confidentiality. Social researchers / scientists must have mechanisms in place to prevent the disclosure of, or unauthorized access to, data that can be linked to a subject's individual identity (Adams & Callahan, 1998).

Ethical challenges to social researchers / scientists

Social researchers / scientists experience a period of rapid change. Participation in multidisciplinary research projects is increasing, as technological changes create new challenges for social researchers / scientists. Several of these challenges will be mentioned here:

First. Ethical protocols are urgently required for social sciences, which can function effectively between scientific disciplines (scientific areas) and can be adapted to the development of research methodologies and strategies. The Helsinki Declaration strongly focuses on physicians and biomedical researchers / scientists, but does not focus on the ethical issues surrounding specific social research. For example, research in geographic areas that are experiencing emerging regimes, conflicts where researchers from these geographic areas are vulnerable. The allegations of privacy and confidentiality in the Helsinki Declaration are a brief statement that every reason for ethical misconduct needs to be considered, but the growing number of investigations with Big Data (large array of data) and social studies pose potential ethical concerns regarding data sharing, data communication searches, data verification and related privacy issues. This raises the need to formulate a clear, precise and transparent ethical standard adapted to social science research (Fouka & Mantzorou, 2011).

Second. The concern about the fact that social researchers / scientists quite often are choosing not to see ethical issues and ethical dimensions in their research studies. If social researchers / scientists choose not to see ethical problems, then they do not decide on them during the research study. Therefore, there is a need for training to help researchers / scientists to become aware and recognize, understand, and identify ethical issues. In order to do this, it is necessary to create and strengthen ethical structures that support the scientific community in each higher education institution. Successfully implementing such structures, researchers / scientists would not act ethically by showing that they care about the bureaucratic requirement, but consider ethics as an important component of each research that contributes to the quality of scientific work. It's not

10.2478 /vtrr-2018-0003 *Vocational Training: Research and Realities, Vol. 29, No. 1, 2018*

about getting more, but it is about being better because ethics has a direct connection to the research design and contributes to its proper feasibility and the quality of the whole study. Examples: challenging ethical issues require special attention when dealing with vulnerable subjects or their groups (children, illegal immigrants) or in studies where the selection of participants in the survey requires their protection, since their participation is directly related to the clarity, transparency, utility. In such cases, researchers / scientists are having difficulty justifying choices for ethics review committees (*National Committees in for Research Ethics in Norway, 2006*).

Third. Lack of capacity and expertise. Persons in vulnerable situations (for example, refugees with no documentation or migrants living in war zones) may want to participate in the social research study, but at the same time they may have reasonable concerns about the protection of their identities. Institutions that award scholarships to researchers / scientists may have the highest ethical standards, but in most cases they lack the capacity and expertise to help researchers / scientists resolve these issues in ways that allow and encourage them to carry out their intended research. If ethics are to be implemented in social sciences then appropriate expertise must be developed and supported. There are also challenges when you need to get approval to participate in the study. Such a document, obtained from each participant in the study, is a "golden standard". By the way, there are many scenarios where individuals demand anonymity and then the availability of such documents to researchers / scientists is impossible (Shah, 2011).

What to do in such cases? Such scenarios highlight the need for researchers / scientists in the social sciences and the humanities, and those who are skilled in ethics, to be active in contributing to the ethical standards, which should be the basic for ethical committees. Most ethical committees are based on the biomedical science model, which means a situation in which social science researchers / scientists harbor ethical standards applied by representatives of the natural sciences. The growing involvement of social science experts in biomedical ethics committees and their added value in the work of ethical committees would be an important step not only in the work of ethical committees, but

also in reviewing ethical standards or codes. Another wiser decision is to set up ethical committees for social sciences that contribute to the development of ethical standards, the development of ethical advice and guidance, focusing on complex situations, and on the basis of a deeper understanding of specific research questions that are discussed in the theoretical and empirical methodological frameworks of social sciences (Bell & Bryman, 2007).

Fourth. The academic community of the social sciences must itself form the ethical standards that shape its activities and the most appropriate framework for ethically conducting the social research. Only social researchers and scientists are best able to recognize the specific ethical challenges in their scientific fields / disciplines and understand how to address ethical challenges. The ultimate goal of ethical committees in social sciences is to ensure that researchers / scientists have an appropriate ethical "reflex". It encourages them to bring ethical value to their work at the design stage of the research. The social sciences community must also form the authority of ethical standards, representing a common, consensus-based voice. The benefits of this would be to provide a clear set of research ethics for researchers / scientists, ensuring greater openness and access to research for the public; more effective management of social research sponsors' expectations (*American Sociological Association, 2011*).

Academic institutions and social research sponsors need to continue to raise the challenge of appropriate infrastructures, such as setting up social science-based ethics committees, and exerting pressure on existing social science ethics committees to evaluate social research within the framework of the ethics of biomedical sciences, principles and possible problems and research questions.

The role of the ethical committee in higher education school

Most universities have ethical committees. This means that they require the registration of all scientific applications and ensure that they do not create ethical issues. Research

projects and / or proposals for the bachelor, master and doctoral level during the study period are also (or must be) discussed in the committees with the participation of both the student and the supervisor.

The role of the ethical committee is to decide whether what the investigator does is in line with the objective of the research sought in pursuit of ethical principles. If the proposal for a research project raises questions about ethics then the committee should ask these questions to the researcher / scientist and advise him / her to review the description of the research project in a consistent way, and take into account potential problems by describing how they will (possibly) be addressed and solved or managed (*CliffsNotes.com*, 2011).

The ethical committee may propose alternative methods which, in its opinion, are useful to the selection of research participants in the study or to suggest steps that will ensure the transparent and fair implementation of the ethical principles of the investigation.

Researchers / scientists can not start a social investigation until they have formal approval of the ethical committee, which must be documented. Ethics in research can not be "self-evident" (Akaranga & Makau, 2016). The same approach should be implemented in the higher education and / or research institution as in the printing of scientific publications: all details need to be provided on how ethics are implemented in each step of the study - collecting, analyzing and interpreting data; working with analysis of research (re)sources.

Considerations on recommendations regarding ethical standards

Recommendations for ethical guidelines and standards in social research are needed with the focus on the following aspects:

The need for co-operation and the recognition of multidisciplinary social research ethics.

Quite often, the current ethical guidelines focus on the safety of the research participants, but they are not comprehensive. It is therefore necessary to bring together social scientists, biomedical researchers / scientists, and clinical experts to ensure that ethical

10.2478 /vtrr-2018-0003 *Vocational Training: Research and Realities, Vol. 29, No. 1, 2018*

standards for research in social sciences are comprehensive and multidisciplinary. Reliable ethical standards would ensure that ethical principles are used to collect and analyze data. There is a growing awareness in society about the application of ethical principles through the use of social science research. The public (society) recognizes the potential of data sharing, but at the same time perceives the impact of this process on privacy. The social sciences community must ensure for society that it works with caution, sensitivity and proper research data.

The need for ethical assimilation in social science research. Working out high standards in social sciences, cooperation with representatives of other sciences contributes to the improvement of social science research ethics. By choosing a direction in multidisciplinary research, it would strengthen the role of social sciences. At the same time, this would ensure that social science objects are not marginalized in multidisciplinary research projects, and social researchers / scientists must assume leadership responsibility in defining ethical standards in their scientific fields (disciplines) and deciding on applicable fundamental ethical principles.

Speak with one voice – to create an ethical standard for social sciences. It is important to highlight some aspects when initiating such an ethical standard in social sciences. First of all, one must be trained in the precursor ethics, i. e. biomedicine, because any standard is not simply the transfer of ethical principles from one scientific discipline to another. The standard must meet specific requirements of social science, and researchers or scientists must learn to understand these issues and build basic agreements on key principles in social research ethics. The social sciences community has to speak with one voice on ethical issues. Clear statements about principles should be the basis for the ethical standard in social research.

Ensure that the ethical standard in social research has realistic parameters. Ethical standards in social research must be formulated at a high expert and intellectual level, but

not descriptive, and should not be based solely on practical considerations. At the same time, they must be researchers / scientists in the field (discipline) of social science. The ethical standard for social research must be based on realistic parameters and meet the requirements and needs of different social science disciplines or fields.

Development of ethical expertise. On a practical level, it's important to recognize that there is a lack of ethical expertise to train researchers or scientists in a responsible and purposeful manner so that they can carry out evaluations of ethical parameters in social research. Creating a sufficient intellectual capacity for researchers / scientists in social research ethics requires time and investment. There is also a need to consider the power of researchers / scientists in ethics, which requires time and investment. There is also a need to consider the momentum of the resistance of researchers / scientists, since a large proportion of researchers / scientists can treat such training as an obstacle, but not aid, and a direct factor contributing to the quality of social research. The social sciences community and research sponsors must develop expert knowledge in ethics at the national and international levels.

Ensure that ethical solutions in social research are applied properly. Ethical standards contribute to the transparency, rationality of the deliberations in ethical committees, drawing attention to the different degrees of risk that are different in each social research project. Must be properly responsive to real ethical issues and challenges, focusing on specific research questions in a specific social research study. Generally speaking, the interest of each researcher / scientist must be to strengthen the ethics of social research, to support honesty and transparency, and to increase the reputation of social research. This requires not only recommendations or guidelines for social research ethics, but also the necessary standards.

Conclusions

Ethical considerations in social research are critical. Ethics are the norms or standards for conduct that distinguish between right and wrong. They help to determine the difference between acceptable and unacceptable behaviors. The essential ethical considerations in social research ethics remains professional competence, integrity, professional and scientific responsibility, respect for research participants' rights, dignity and diversity, and social responsibility of social researchers / scientists.

Social researchers / scientists strive to maintain the highest levels of competence in their work, thus they must recognize the limitations of their expertise, undertake only those tasks for which they are qualified by education, training, or experience, and recognize the need for ongoing education in order to remain professionally competent.

Social researchers / scientists form communities and they should show respect for other social researchers even when they disagree on theoretical, methodological, or personal approaches to professional activities. While endeavoring always to be collegial, social researchers must never let the desire to be collegial outweigh their shared responsibility for ethical behavior.

Social researchers / scientists should respect the rights, dignity, and worth of all people and strive to eliminate bias in their social research-based activities; they must not tolerate any forms of discrimination based on age, gender, race, ethnicity, national origin, religion, sexual orientation, disability, health conditions, or marital, domestic, or parental status. Social researchers / scientists must be sensitive to cultural, individual, and role differences in serving, teaching, and studying groups of people with distinctive characteristics. In all of their social research-related or based activities, social researchers / scientists should acknowledge the rights of others to hold values, attitudes, and opinions that differ from their own. Thus social researchers / scientists should be aware of their professional and scientific responsibility to the social science communities and societies in which they live and work. They are responsible to apply and make public their knowledge in order to contribute to the public good.

References

10.2478 /vtrr-2018-0003 *Vocational Training: Research and Realities, Vol. 29, No. 1, 2018*

1. Adams, L. A., & Callahan, T. (1998). Research ethics. *Ethics in Medicine*. USA: University of Washington, School of Medicine. Available at: <https://depts.washington.edu/bioethx/topics/resrch.html> (2018-12-16).
2. Adelle, C., & Weiland, S. (2012). Policy assessment: the state of the art. *Impact Assessment and Project Appraisal*, 30(1): 25–33.
3. Akaranga, S I., & Makau, B. K. (2016). Ethical Considerations and their Applications to Research: a Case of the University of Nairobi. *Journal of Educational Policy and Entrepreneurial Research*, 3(12), 1-9. Available at: https://profiles.uonbi.ac.ke/kuria_paul/files/429-825-2-pb.pdf (2018-12-16).
4. *American Sociological Association* (2011). Available at: <http://www.asanet.org/about/ethics.cfm> (2018-12-17).
5. *Association of Social Anthropologists* (1999). Ethical Guidelines for Good Research Practice. ASA Ethics. Available at: <https://www.theasa.org/ethics/guidelines.shtml> (2018-08-31).
6. Babbie, E. (1989). *The Practice of Social Research*. Belmont CA: Wadsworth.
7. Baines, J., & Taylor, C. N. (2011). Ethical issues and dilemmas. Vanclay F., Esteves A. M., (Eds.). In: *New Directions in Social Impact Assessment: Conceptual and Methodological Advances*. (pp. 96–113). Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.
8. Bell, E. & Bryman, A. (2007). The ethics of management research: an exploratory content analysis. *British Journal of Management*, 18(1) 63-77.
9. Broom, A. (2006). Ethical issues in social research. *Complementary Therapies in Medicine*, 14(2), 151-156.
10. Bulmer, M. (2001). The ethics of social research. Gilbert N. (Ed.). In: *Researching Social Life*. (pp. 45–57). London: Sage.
11. *CliffsNotes.com* (2011). *Ethics in Sociological Research*. Available at: http://www.cliffsnotes.com/study_guide/topicArticleId-26957,articleId-26845.html (2018-12-17).
12. Fouka, G., & Mantzorou, M. (2018). What are the major ethical issues in conducting research? is there a conflict between the research ethics and the nature of nursing? *Health Science Journal*. Available at: <http://www.hsj.gr/medicine/what-are-the-major-ethical-issues-in-conducting-research-is-there-a-conflict-between-the-research-ethics-and-the-nature-of-nursing.php?aid=3485> (2018-10-14).
13. Fouka, G., & Mantzorou, M. (2011). What are the major ethical issues in conducting research? Is there a conflict between the research ethics and the nature of nursing? *Health Science Journal*, 5 (1), 3-14.
14. Kelman, H. C. (1982). Ethical issues in different social science methods. In: In T. L. Beauchamp, R. R. Faden, R. J. Wallace, Jr., & L. Walters (Eds.). *Ethical issues in Social Science Research*. (pp. 40-98). Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

10.2478 /vtrr-2018-0003 *Vocational Training: Research and Realities, Vol. 29, No. 1, 2018*

15. Madushani, H. D. P. (2016). Ethical issues in social science research: a review. *Journal of Social Statistics*, 3, 26-33. Available at: <http://repository.kln.ac.lk/bitstream/handle/123456789/15457/STATICA%202016%20%2003%2801%29.26-33.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y> (2018-11-04).
16. Munhall, P. L. (1988). Ethical considerations in qualitative research. *Western Journal of Nursing Research*, 10(2), 150-162.
17. *National Committees in for Research Ethics in Norway* (2006). Guidelines for Research Ethics in the Social Sciences, Law and Humanities. Oslo: De nasjonale forskningsetiske komiteer. Available at: <https://graduateschool.nd.edu/assets/21765/guidelinesresearchethicsinthesocialscienceslawhumanities.pdf> (2018-12-17).
18. Resnik, D. B. (2015). *What is ethics in research and why is it important?* USA: National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences. Available at: <https://www.niehs.nih.gov/research/resources/bioethics/whatis/index.cfm> (2018-12-17).
19. Sen, V., & Nagwanshee, R. K. (2016). Ethical Issues in Social Science Research. *Research Journal of Management Sciences*, 5(10), 37-41. Available at: <http://www.isca.in/IJMS/Archive/v5/i10/8.ISCA-RJMS-2016-079.pdf> (2018-09-15).
20. Shah, N. (2011). Ethical issues in biomedical research publication. *Journal of Conservative Dentistry*, 14(3), 205-207.
21. Sieber, J. E. (1982). Ethical Dilemmas in Social Research. In: Sieber J.E. (Ed.) *The Ethics of Social Research*. Springer Series in Social Psychology. New York, NY: Springer.
22. Smith, D. (2003). Five principles for research ethics. *Monitor on Psychology*, 34(1), 56. Available at: <https://www.apa.org/monitor/jan03/principles.aspx> (2018-11-16).
23. *Social Sciences Committee* (2015). Workshop Report: Ethical Protocols and Standards for Research in Social Sciences Today. 11th June, 2015, Brussels. Available at: https://www.scienceurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/20150911_Workshop-Report_Social_Ethics_web.pdf (2018-09-19).
24. Stalker, K. Carpenter, J., Connors, C., & Phillips, R. (2004). Ethical issues in social research: difficulties encountered gaining access to children in hospital for research. *Child: Care, Health and Development*, 30(4), 377-384.
25. *Survey Research Center* (2016). Guidelines for Best Practice in Cross-Cultural Surveys. Ann Arbor, MI: Survey Research Center, Institute for Social Research, University of Michigan. Available at: <http://www.ccsr.isr.umich.edu/> (2018-12-17).
26. *The Belmont Report* (1979). Office of the Secretary. The National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research. Department of Health, Education, and

10.2478 /vtrr-2018-0003 *Vocational Training: Research and Realities, Vol. 29, No. 1, 2018*

- Welfare. Available at: https://www.hhs.gov/ohrp/sites/default/files/the-belmont-report-508c_FINAL.pdf (2018-12-16).
27. *The Deans of Social Sciences in the Netherlands* (2016). Code of Ethics for Research in the Social and Behavioural Sciences Involving Human Participants (pp. 1-7; pp.1-4). Available at: https://bmslab.utwente.nl/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/DSW_code-ethics-social-and-behavioural-sciences-jan16.pdf (2018-09-12).
28. Townsend, L., & Wallace, C. (2014). *Social Media Research: A Guide to Ethics*. UK: University of Aberdeen. Available at: https://www.gla.ac.uk/media/media_487729_en.pdf (2018-09-04).
29. Vanclay, F., Baines, J. T., & Taylor, C. N. (2013). Principles of ethical reseatch involving humans: ethical professional practice in impact assessment. Part I. *Impact Assessment and Project Appraisal*, 31(4), 243-253.
30. Yip, C., Han, N.-L. R., & Sng, B. L. (2016). Legal and ethical issues in research. *Indian Journal of Anaesthesia*, 60(9), 684-688.

Submitted 2018-06-02

Received 2018-06-02

Accepted 2018-09-24