UNIT 15: ETHICS IN RESEARCH

UNIT STRUCTURE

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15.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- learn the concept of research ethics
- discuss the Clients Ethical code
- discuss the Researchers Ethical code
- describe the Ethical Codes related to respondents
- outline the responsibility of ethics in research

15.2 INTRODUCTION

Ethics or moral philosophy is a branch of philosophy that involves systematizing, defending, and recommending concepts of right and wrong conduct. The term ethics derives from the Greek word ‘ethos’, which means habit and custom. Research ethics involves the application of fundamental ethical principles to be applied in planning, conducting and reporting of research.Let us discuss the differnt aspects of ethics in reserach in the following sections.

15.3 MEANING OF RESEARCH ETHICS

Research that involves human subjects or participants raises unique and complex ethical, legal, social and political issues. Research ethics is specifically interested in the analysis of ethical issues that are raised when people are involved as participants in research. There are three objectives in research ethics. The first and the broadest objective is to protect human participants. The second objective is to ensure that research is conducted in a way that serves the interests of individuals, groups and/or society as a whole. Finally the third objective is to examine the specific research activities and projects for their ethical soundness, looking at issues such as the management of risk, protection of confidentiality and the process of informed consent.

For the most part, research ethics has traditionally focused on issues in biomedical research. The application of research ethics to examine and evaluate biomedical research has been well developed over the last century and has influenced much of the existing guidelines for the ethical issues arise. However, in humanities and social science research, different kinds of ethical issues arise. New and emerging methods of conducting research, such as autoethnography and participatory action research raise important but markedly different ethical issues and obligations for research.

Research involving vulnerable persons, which may include children, persons with developmental or cognitive disabilities, persons who are institutionalized, the homeless or those without legal status, also raises unique issues in any research context.

Research ethicists everywhere today are challenged by issues that reflect global concerns in other domains, such as the conduct of in developing countries, the limits of research involving genetic material and protection of privacy in light of advances in technology and internet capabilities.

15.4 CLIENTS' ETHICAL CODE

Client means any or organisation, department or division (including any belonging to the same organisation as the researcher) that requests, commissions or subscribes to all or any part of a market, social and organisational research project.

Relationships between a Survey Research Organization and Clients for whom the surveys are conducted should be of such a nature that they foster confidence and mutual respect. They must be characterized by honesty and confidentiality.

The following specific approaches describe in more detail the responsibilities of Research Organizations in this relationship:

1. A Survey Research Organization must assist its clients in the design of effective and efficient studies that are to be carried out by the Research Organization. If the Survey Research Organization questions whether a study design will provide the information necessary to serve the client's purposes, it must make its reservations known.

2. A Research Organization must conduct the study in the manner agreed upon. However, if it becomes apparent in the course of the study that changes in the plans should be made, the Research Organization must make its views known to the client promptly.

3. A Research Organization has an obligation to allow its clients to verify that work performed meets all contracted specifications and to examine all operations of the Research Organization that are relevant to the proper execution of the project in the manner set forth. While clients are encouraged to examine questionnaires or other records to maintain open access to the research process, the Survey Research Organization must continue to protect the confidentiality and privacy of survey Respondents.

4. When more than one client contributes to the cost of a project specially commissioned with the Research Organization, each client concerned shall be informed that there are other Participants (but not necessarily their identity).

5. Research Organizations will hold confidential all information that they obtain about a client's general business operations, and about matters connected with research projects that they conduct for a client.

6. For research findings obtained by the agency that are the property of the client, the Research Organization may make no public release or revelation of findings without expressed, prior approval from the client.

15.5 RESEARCHERS' ETHICAL CODE

Researcher means any individual or organisation (or that part of an organisation) that carries out, or act as a consultant or subcontractor for market, social and organisational research, or offers their services or the services of others to do so, including those working in client organisations.

General rules for Researcher

Few general rules researcher must follow are:

1. Researchers must conform to all relevant state, national and international laws.

2. Researchers must behave ethically and must not do anything which might damage the reputation of market, social and organisational research.

3. Researchers must take special care when carrying out research among children and young people and other vulnerable groups in the community.

4. Participants' cooperation is voluntary and must be based on adequate, and not misleading, information about the general purpose and nature of the project when their agreement to participate is being obtained and all such statements must be honoured.

5. The rights of participants as private individuals must be respected by researchers and they must not be harmed or adversely affected as a result of cooperating in a research project.

6. Participants' identifiable research information must not, without their consent, be revealed to anyone not directly involved in the research project and not be used for any non-research activity directed to individual participants.

7. Researchers must ensure that projects and activities are designed, carried out, reported and documented accurately, transparently and objectively.

8. Researchers must conform to accepted principles of fair competition.

Moreover, the researcher has a duty to safeguard the issues pertaining to:

Participants' anonymity must be strictly preserved. If the participant on request from the researcher has given consent for their personal information or identifiable research information to be disclosed:

(a) The participant must first have been told:

i) to whom the information would be supplied and

ii) the purposes for which it will be used.

(b) The researcher must take reasonable steps to ensure that:

i) the personal information will not be used for any non-research activity, and

ii) only that part of the information considered necessary for the purpose is disclosed.

(c) Researchers must ensure that research projects are designed, carried out, reported and documented accurately, transparently and objectively.

(d) Researchers must only collect sensitive information (whether from a participant or from a third party) where the participant has consented, and the information is reasonably necessary for a research purpose.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q.1. What do you mean by research ethics?

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Q.2. Write about clients' ethical code.

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Q.3. Fill in the blanks

a. Participants' ..... must be strictly preserved.

b. Researchers must take special care when carrying out research among children and young people and other ..... groups in the community.

15.6 ETHICAL CODES RELATED TO RESPONDENTS

Researchers have professional and legal responsibilities to their respondents that are embodied in the procedures of a research study. Underlying these specific responsibilities are four fundamental ethical principles:

Respondents should be:

(a) willing participants in survey research;

(b) appropriately informed about the survey's intentions and how their personal information and survey responses will be used and protected;

(c) sufficiently satisfied with their survey experience;

(d) willing to participate again in survey research.

Confidentiality of Respondents:

1. Since individuals who are interviewed are the lifeblood of the Survey Research Industry, it is essential that Survey Research Organizations be responsible for protecting from disclosure to third parties—including Clients and members of the Public—the identity of individual Respondents as well as Respondent identifiable information, unless the Respondent expressly requests or permits such disclosure.

2. A minimal amount of Respondent-identifiable information will be disclosed to the client to permit the client to validate interviews and to determine an additional fact of analytical importance to the study.

3. Before disclosing Respondent-identifiable information to a client for purposes of interview validation or re-inquiry, the Survey Research Organization must take whatever steps are needed to ensure that the client will conduct the validation or recontact in a fully professional manner.

4. Assurance to respondents will be given that the Client will respect such limitations and maintain Respondent confidentiality.

5. To assure client compliance, the Survey Research Organization must obtain written confirmation from the client before releasing any data.

6. The research firm has obtained a written agreement from the client assuring that no other use will be made of Respondent-identifiable information.

15.7 RESPONSIBILITY OF ETHICS IN RESEARCH

There are several reasons why it is important to adhere to ethical norms in research.

First norm promote the aim of research, such as knowledge, truth and avoidance of error. For example, prohibiting against fabricating and falsifying or misrepresenting research data promote the truth.

Second, research often involves great deal of cooperation and coordination among many different people in different disciplines and institutions, ethical standards promote the values that are essential to collaborative work, such as trust, accountability, mutual respect and fairness. For example, many ethical norms in research, such as guidelines for authorship, copyright and

patenting policies, data sharing policies and confidentiality rules in peer review, are designed to protect intellectual property interests while encouraging collaboration. Most researchers want to receive credit for their contributions and do not want to have their ideas stolen or disclosed prematurely.

Third, many of the ethical norms help to ensure that researchers can be held accountable to the public. For instance, conflicts of interest, the human subjects' protections and animal care and use are necessary to make sure that researchers who are funded by public money can be held accountable to the public.

Fourth, ethical norms in research also help to build public support for research. People are more likely to fund a research project if they can trust the quality and integrity of research.

Finally, many of the norms of research promote a variety of other important moral and social values, such as social responsibility, human rights, animal welfare, compliance with the law, and public health and safety.



15.8 LET US SUM UP

After going through the unit we have come through the following:

- Ethics or moral philosophy is a branch of philosophy that involves systematizing, defending, and recommending concepts of right and wrong conduct.
- Research that involves human subjects or participants raises unique and complex ethical, legal, social and political issues. Research ethics is specifically interested in the analysis of ethical issues that are raised when people are involved as participants in research.
- Relationships between a Survey Research Organization and Clients for whom the surveys are conducted should be of such a nature that they foster confidence and mutual respect. They must be characterized by honesty and confidentiality.

- Few general rules researcher must follow are:

  1. Researchers must conform to all relevant state, national and international laws.

  2. Researchers must behave ethically and must not do anything which might damage the reputation of market, social and organisational research.

  3. Researchers must take special care when carrying out research among children and young people and other vulnerable groups in the community.

- Researchers have professional and legal responsibilities to their respondents that are embodied in the procedures of a research study. Underlying these specific responsibilities are four fundamental ethical principles:

  (a) willing participants in survey research;

  (b) appropriately informed about the survey's intentions and how their personal information and survey responses will be used and protected;

  (c) sufficiently satisfied with their survey experience;

  (d) willing to participate again in survey research.



15.9 FURTHER READING

Malhotra, N.K. and Dash, S. (2011). Marketing research: An Applied Orientation (6th edition), New Delhi: Pearson Education.



15.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q.1. Research that involves human subjects or participants raises unique and complex ethical, legal, social and political issues. Research ethics is specifically interested in the analysis of ethical issues that are

raised when people are involved as participants in research. There are three objectives in research ethics. The first and the broadest objective is to protect human participants. The second objective is to ensure that research is conducted in a way that serves the interests of individuals, groups and/or society as a whole. Finally the third objective is to examine the specific research activities and projects for their ethical soundness, looking at issues such as the management of risk, protection of confidentiality and the process of informed consent.

Ans to Q2. Client means any or organisation, department or division (including any belonging to the same organisation as the researcher) that requests, commissions or subscribes to all or any part of a market, social and organisational research project.

Relationships between a Survey Research Organization and Clients for whom the surveys are conducted should be of such a nature that they foster confidence and mutual respect. They must be characterized by honesty and confidentiality.

Ans to Q.3.

(a) Participants' **anonymity** must be strictly preserved.

(b) Researchers must take special care when carrying out research among children and young people and other **vulnerable** groups in the community.



15.11 MODEL QUESTIONS

Q.1. What is ethics and why it is important in business research?

Q.2. Write about clients' ethical code.

Q.3. Write about researchers' ethical code.

Q.4. Describe ethical codes related to respondents.

Q.5. Illustrate the responsibility of ethics in research.

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