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Ethical Issues for Consideration in Conducting Research in the Social and Behavioural Sciences

Dr. ThankGod C. Agwor

Senior Lecturer, Department of Accountancy, Rivers State University, Nkpolu Port Harcourt, Nigeria

Osho Adesina

Ph.D. Research Candidate, Department of Management, Rivers State University, Nkpolu Port Harcourt, Nigeria

Abstract:

Interests in the best method to conduct research in the broad areas that constitute the field of social sciences have dominated the thought of researchers. This thinking is not only limited to the best method to conduct research, it also include the best ethical practices required in conducting research. This piece entitled 'ethical issues required for consideration in conducting researches in the social and behavioral sciences has brought to the front burner some of the ethical issues that all researches in the social and management sciences need to have at their finger tips. The piece considered ethical issues at each stages of conducting research right from conceptualization of the research problem up to the dissemination of the research findings. The paper concludes that in order to maintain and sustain the integrity of research all researchers in the fields that constituted the social and behavioural sciences should consider ethical issues as very important.

Keywords: *Ethics, Ethical issues, Research Problem, Social science research, Data Collection*

1. Introduction

Social Sciences, in modern terms, have been conceptualized as science of people or collection of people and their individual or collective behaviors in groups, firms, societies, or economies (Johnnie, 2017; Agwor&Ndukwe, 2008). Interest in the best method to conduct research in the broad areas that constitute the field of social sciences have dominated the thinking of researchers. This thinking is not only limited to the best method to conduct the research, it also include the best ethical practices that is required in conducting such research.

Ethics are set of moral principles of conduct used to govern the decision making behaviour of an individual or a group of individuals (Agwor & Osho, 2017; Ezigbo, 2009). These principles guide individuals in their dealings with other individuals or groups and provide a basis for deciding whether behaviour is right and wrong. It also helps people determine moral responses to situation in which the best course of action is unclear. For that reason, ethics refer to the study of moral principles or values that determine whether actions are right or wrong and outcomes are good or bad.

Consequently, Social and Behavioural Science Researchers need to look forward to the ethical issues that might come up during their studies. For instance, it is well known that social science research does entail gathering data from people and about people. Therefore, moral principles requires that research participants and respondents must be protected, have confidence in their response and participation, advocating the excellence of research, guiding against anomalies or misconduct that might replicate on the organizations and to deal with predicaments that keeps reappearing during the course of the research (Creswell, 2007).

In extant literature, matters concerning ethics are quite often discussed during presentations regarding subject of regulations of professional behaviour for researchers and in observations on the subject of ethical problems and their probable way out of such problems (Punch, 2005).

Emphatically, Social scientists need to anticipate and address any ethical dilemmas that may arise in their research, be it qualitative, quantitative or mixed method (triangulation) study and to all sections and sub-sections of the study (Berg, 2001; Punch, 2005; and Sieber, 1998). Social science researchers need to religiously foresee them and aggressively attend to them in their study design and implementation.

From the foregoing, the objective of this paper therefore, is to explore the ethical issues majorly required for consideration in conducting social and behavioral sciences research. The paper refers to ethical issues in many stages of behavioural and social science research. Although, these presentations may not necessarily or comprehensively address all ethical issues, however, emphasis and attention may have been devoted to those regarded as very important.

1.1. Ethical Issues for Consideration in the Research Problem

The introduction section of a study encapsulates and identifies the significant problem or the issue for investigation and justifies the reason for its importance. The question arises 'how does ethical issue enter into the selection of a research problem or the issue to investigate? The answer is simple. During the identification of the research problem or the issue for investigation, it is very imperative and equally very crucial that the problem identified or the issue under investigation benefits the respondents or the individuals being studied. That is the problem should be meaningful to others (the participants and respondents) aside the researcher alone. In a nut shell, it will be very unethical to sample opinion of people on the issue that the outcome will not be meaningful or beneficiary to them. According to Creswell (2007), a center thought of exploit/participatory investigation is that the investigator will not short change or disempowered the study contributors. Sentinel in opposition to this, researchers can conduct pilot study to ascertain dependence and high opinion with the contributors so that researchers can become aware of any form of improper arrangement or alignment before the plans formulated and the study began. Furthermore, the intention declaration or the essential intention and the subject matter for the study should be made very clear to the study participant (Sarantakos, 2005). It is very deceitful and thought provoking when investigator have a different purpose in mind but gave the respondents another reasons for carrying out the study.

1.2. Ethical Matters for Consideration in Reviewing Literature

The literature review section is dedicated to acknowledgement of the use and recognition of other peoples work and ideas in a current study. Therefore, some ethical values should be thoroughly considered by the researcher. The under listed are very important: (i) It is very unethical for a researcher to submit another's person's work, word-for-word, as if it is one's own work. This is known as cloning or genetic copy. That is the author duplicates the work of another author without any form of referencing. Researchers should guide against this; (ii) It is also unethical for a researcher to present a written piece that contains significant portions of text from a single source without alterations. This is called control -c or popularly known as cut and paste. It is very closely related to cloning. Researcher should desist from such act because it is unethical; (iii) Researchers are fond of the act of changing key words and phrases but retaining the essential content of the source in a paper without properly referencing the source. Such practice is unethical; (iv) Researchers should avoid an act of paraphrasing from different sources, bringing the piece together and making the content fit together seamlessly; (v) It is unethical for researcher to recycle one owns work in different publication or the act of borrowing generously from one's own previous work without citation. This is known as self plagiarize; (vi) Social science researchers should desist from the act of combining perfectly cited sources with copied passages, without citation in one paper, the act of presenting piece that represents a mix of copied material from several different sources without proper citation and a written piece that includes citations to non-existent or inaccurate information about sources.

1.3. Ethical Issues for Consideration in the Collection of Data

The data collection stage is very important for both the quantitative researcher and the qualitative researcher. This is one stage that the researcher needs to have complete interface with the study participant or sample. Hence, ethical issues need to be prioritized. The researchers need to respect the participants and the sites for research in a case of non-contrived settings. Many ethical issues arise during this stage of research investigation.

First, it is very unethical to manufacture data in representative of a target population of study. Sometimes data are manufactured by lazy researchers within the confines or the conveniences of the researcher without using the questionnaires designed for the study. This mostly takes place frequently in quantitative studies where the use of questionnaires as research instrument is paramount.

Second, some researchers tend to make use of same data that have been used by a previous researcher. This practice of rig mar rolling and recycling same data for different studies is very unethical. This act is mostly found in quantitative study. It erodes the integrity of research.

Third, the researcher should as much as possible secure the anonymity and the confidentiality of the study participant and never put them at risk. Social Science Researchers (Students and Trainees) must give their proposals to their supervisory team in their colleges and university campuses so as to identify the risk that might be associated with such research plan before the study begins.

Confidentiality is a two edge sword. Some participant in a study may not want to have their identity not to be disclosed. When a researcher allows this, the investigator permits the contributors to hold on to rights of their right to be heard and request their authorization in making judgments. However, they need to be well up dated concerning the likely risks of none confidentiality. Such could be the inclusion of data in the final report that they may not have anticipated, information that contravenes on the rights of others that should stay obscured.

According to Sarantakos (2005), in qualitative research, the researcher need to build up an enlightened permission form for research sample frame to sign before they get involved in the study. This form recognizes that contributor's privileges will be guarded against during facts gathering.

Other ethical modus operandi during facts gathering entails gaining the conformity of individuals in power to give access to study contributors at investigating venue. This over and over again entails communicating by putting pen to paper of the amount of time, the probable shock and the upshots of the investigation.

In case of data gathered from internet source, exploit of internet result gained in the course of electronic questions or surveys necessitates authorization from contributors. This can be achieved in different ways. First getting authorization and then sending out the discussion survey. Social Scientists need to value research places so that they are left without interruption after a research study. This entails that inquirers, especially in qualitative studies involving extended examination or interview at a site, be mindful of their shock, negative actions and reduces their interruption of the physical surroundings. For instance, they might properly calculate their visits so that they do not interfere on the course of activities of the sample frames. Also, organizations often have principles that make available direction for conducting research without upsetting their surroundings. This principle needs to be explored.

In an appraisal/survey research, investigators require to gather data so that all contributors, not only the main study group, gain from the actions. This may necessitate providing some action to all groups or performing the action so that in due course all groups be given the valuable action.

Interviewing in qualitative study is more and more becoming accepted as honest investigation (Kvale, 2007). Therefore, interviewers require to think about how the discussion will perk up the human circumstances (as well as enhance scientific knowledge), how a responsive dialogue communication may be demanding for the partakers whether partakers have a say in how their proclamations are construed, how importantly the respondents might be queried, and what the anticipated cost of the interview between the respondents and the investigator might look like. This demands that the investigator display empathy.

Researchers, in addition, require looking forward to the possibility of detrimental, cherished information being divulged through the data gathering course of action. It is not easy to look forward to and try to plan for the unexpected result that might come of this information throughout or at the end of the interview. For instance, participant may argue government issues that are uncalled for at the research venue which might reveal some confidential statements. Under such circumstances the ethical matter for consideration is to protect the identity of the contributors involved in the study.

1.4. Ethical Matters for Consideration in Data Breakdown and Explanation

Data analysis and interpretation stage is that section where data collected, collated are presented, analyzed and discussed. When the researcher examines and read between the lines both quantitative and qualitative data, matters come into view that calls for good ethical judgments. In a study, social scientist should think about the following: (i) In what way will the research look after the inscrutability of entities, characters, and occurrences in the study? For instance, in a cross sectional study, investigators should remove names from responses for the duration of the coding and recording procedure. In qualitative study, investigators should use assumed names or pen names for persons and places, to keep identities (Creswell, 2007); (ii) Data, facts, information, once treated, required being under custody for practical period of say 5-10 years (Sieber, 1998). Investigators should then throw away the data so that it does not fall into the hands or been made use of by other investigators who might be tempted to reuse it; (iii) Ownership right to data collated for research might draw up some issues under certain circumstances among the research team. One of the best ways to handle such issue is to specify at the proposal stage how issue bearing on ownership of data will be resolved (Punch, 2005). Berg (2010) advocates the application of individual conformity to choose rights of investigators materials from inquiry. An expansion of this thought is to safeguard alongside giving out the data to persons not engaged in the study

(iv) During data elucidation, investigators require to give a precise account of the information. This accurateness may have need of information involving the investigator and contributors in quantitative study (Berg, 2001). In qualitative study this may comprise of using one or more of the approach to check the preciseness of the data with contributors or transverse unlike source of data (Creswell, 2007).

1.5. Ethical Issues for Consideration in Writing and Propagating the Study

A social science researcher needs to report the outcome of the research. The ethical concerns do not merely get to a close with data compilation and breakdown of same. Ethical concerns pertain equally to genuinely putting together in a piece and propagation of the finishing investigated study. The following guidelines are adequate: (i) Social science researcher should desist from use of words that connotes bias, bigotry, and hatred for other races or assumed to be insulting. For example instead of using the phrase 'old age', a better word could be men of advanced age. See APA Publication manual for guidelines (2001); (ii) Other ethical concerns in writing the report of the investigation will involve the possibility of holding back, fabricating, or formulating findings to meet a researcher's or spectators' expectation. These deceitful practices are not accepted in professional research entities and they represent scientific misdemeanors (Neuman, 2000) and (iii) In planning a study, it is important to look forward to the consequences of conducting the research on certain audiences and not to misuse the outcomes to the advantage of one group or another. The researcher is required to make available to those at the research site with a preliminary copy of any publications from the research (Creswell, 2007).

1.6. Ethical Issues for Consideration in Paper Publication

Social science researchers need to bring to the fore their research findings, published most preferably as an article in a scholarly journal. The ethical issues required here are numerous, they include: (i) All papers for publication in a reference journal must be peer reviewed. This step encloses the integrity of research; (ii) Social science researcher should display

accurate and honest reporting of research methodologies and results which indiscriminately are the basis of all scientific publications. To this end, researchers should avoid dividing a project into least publishable units that might render the whole intention of the study useless or not worthwhile; (iii) Researchers should avoid publishing duplicate studies, a practice that also unfairly represents the importance of the research; (iv) An important concern in putting up an intellectual script is not to take advantage of the labor of colleagues and to provide authorship to individuals who to a large extent add to publications. Is real and Hay (2006) cited in Creswell, (2007), discuss the unethical practice of so-called 'gift authorship' to individuals who do not contribute to a manuscript and 'ghost authorship', in which junior staff who made remarkable inputs have been left out from the list of authors;

(v) Authorship should be given to the individuals that contributed to the study. An author is considered anyone involved with (1) initial research design, (2) data collection and analysis (3) Manuscript drafting and mentorship (4) Proof reading, critics and final approval. However authorship cannot be attributed to the person providing funding or resources but not helping with the publication itself (Creswell, 2007); (vi) The primary author assumes responsibility for the publication, making sure that the data are accurate, that all deserving authors have been credited, that all have given their approval to the final draft, and handles responses to inquiries after the manuscript is published.

2. Conclusion

To promote the integrity of research, guard against misconduct and impropriety that might reflect on the organizations, institutions and to cope with new emerging problems, ethical issues in conducting social science research should not be thrown into the dust bin. Ethical issues need to be identified along the value chain of research procedure. This paper has identified primarily some basic and fundamental ethical issues that are necessary in social science research right from conception of the research ideas up to the publication of the research findings. All social science researchers should be up right in doing what is good and discarding what is bad during the research period. Therefore, the paper recommends the set up of ethical committees in higher institutions of learning and other research-based institutions to regulate ethical issues that are associated with conducting social science research and to guide trainees on the golden standard required in carrying out research in the academic environment.

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