Chapter 3

Relevance and Importance of Ethics in Post-Grad Research at South African Universities

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ABSTRACT

Ethics in research is a very important consideration that researchers and scientists all over the world should be aware and consciously recognize its importance. Ethics in research did not gloriously appear one day; it advanced and was perfected over time. It took the Nuremberg Code (1951), The Declaration of Helsinki (1964), The Belmont Report (1979), the APA Ethical guidelines (1947, 1953, 2002), and government regulations to assist in setting a guide to research ethics involving key principles to protect respondents. The focal point of ethics in research is to protect the respondents from harm and safeguard their dignity, anonymity, and confidentiality. If the test subject is human, plant, or animal, there should be a humane way of handling test subjects. This chapter looks at research ethics and its relevance to post-grad students conducting research at a university. It is pivotal that students are aware of their ethical responsibility towards their test subjects/respondents whilst conducting their study.

INTRODUCTION

In any society ethics is the cornerstone that lays the foundation of good business practice and good human values and behaviour. In research, ethics are the foundation blocks that are the fundamental components of good research. The origins of ethics stems from Green philosophy. According to Johnstone (2009) ethics refers to a system of principles, which can critically change previous considerations about choices and actions. Ethical issues are present in both qualitative and quantitative research. Post-grad students conducting research in any related field at a university should abide by good research ethics that ensure the protection confidentiality, anonymity and dignity of its respondents. Violation of the respondents’ human rights at any point in the post-grad students’ study will amount to a violation of research ethics that can result in the discontinuation of the study or the removal of the post-grad students degree who

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violated the human rights of his/her study respondents. Caplan (1992) argued that violations of human rights in the name of scientific research have been among the darkest events in history. The Tuskegee study is a reflection of violating human rights. This study was conducted from 1932-1972 on more than 400 African American people who had syphilis and were deliberately left untreated to study the illness. Although United States Public Health Service sponsored the Tuskegee syphilis study, the disclosure of the 40-year study caused public outrage. Ethics is fundamental and must be treated with respect and post-grad students at a university should understand that violating ethics in their research study could have disastrous circumstances to their study outcome.

The following key areas are put forward and discussed in this chapter:

- Different theorists views on ethics in research
- What is post-grad research at universities
- Post-grad Students’ Ethical Considerations Towards Their Respondents in Qualitative and Quantitative Research
- Gaps experienced by Post-grad research students
- Future research areas

To begin the discussion it is important to unpack the important issues theorists have indicated in research. In the section below different theorists, views on ethics in research will be highlighted and discussed.

**DIFFERENT THEORISTS VIEWS ON ETHICS IN RESEARCH**

There are differing views on ethics in research. Under this theme in the chapter different theorists views on ethics in research will be highlighted.

Ethics in research refers to the correctness of behavioural relation to the rights of those who become the subject of work to be carried out (Saunders et al, 2009). David & Sutton (2011) maintains that collecting information about people raises ethical issues in the focus of attention chosen, in the methods adopted and in the form and use of the findings. In any research study conducted by post-grad students, the students must protect the human rights, dignity, anonymity and confidentiality of their study respondents.

According to Blumber, Cooper & Schindler (2014) there are two dominant philosophical standpoints on research ethics: deontology and teleology. In deontological view the end never justifies the use of the means that are questionable on ethical grounds. The teleological view posits that morality of the means has to be judged by the ends served. Hence, the study is weighted against the costs of harming the people involved.

The research company or sponsor also has a responsibility to the respondents and should not violate their trust or confidentially or harm them in any way. Kumar et al (2002) suggests that companies or sponsors that practice legitimate research can violate the rights of the respondents in the following manner namely:

- Disguising the purpose of a particular measurement, such as a free draw or free product choice question
- Deceiving the prospective respondent as to the true duration of the interview
- Invading the privacy of the respondent