The Basic Research Ethics

Acknowledgment

This paper presented on The Basic Research Ethics is a product of the contributions of many individuals. It is immensely grounded on the guidance from Dr. Respicius Damian Shumbusho (The Ethics in Research and Public Policy course instructor for MRPP at the University of Dar es Salaam). Also, the paper is benefited from the contributions of all participants of the MRPP class. The presenter would like to especially acknowledge the contributions of all authors whose ideas were borrowed during preparing this paper and their readings appear at the end chapters of this paper as references.

Abstract

People living in the society are normally guided by ethics and laws to regulate the conducts of their life. Researchers as part of society have adhere to these ethics and laws. This paper that was presented in MRPP class was specifically based on topic entitled “The Basic Research Ethics”. The sub-topics of that topic were; research, society and ethics-conceptual issues the dual motives behind research-science vs. welfare, the rights and responsibilities of researchers ethical considerations and principles in research dealing with ethical dilemmas –taking the right decision. The paper is divided into three sections with introduction, main body, recommendations & conclusion and reference page.

Section One: Introduction

1.1 Research, Society and Ethics

In society there are morals that are perceived as the rules to distinguish what is wrong and right so as to create the sense of ethical norms. Most people learn ethical norms at home, at school, in church and in other social settings and they work as codes and norms of conduct. Although most people acquire their sense of right and wrong during childhood, moral development occurs throughout life and human beings pass through different stages of growth as they mature. Ethical norms are sometimes ambiguous to understand because what is thought to be ethical in one society can be unethical to the other. People may recognize some common ethical norms but other different individuals could interpret and apply these norms in different ways in the position of their own values and life experiences. Most societies have legal laws and rules that govern behavior, but ethical norms tend to be broader and more informal than laws. Both laws and ethical norms are used by the society to enforce moral standards be accepted in the society but it is important to remember that ethics and law are not the same. An action may be legal but unethical or illegal but ethical. Individuals within the society can use ethical concepts and principles to criticize the legal laws (Resinik2011).

Ethics can work as a method, procedure, or perspective for deciding how to act and for analyzing complex problems and issues. For instance, in considering a complex issue like global warming, one may take an economic, ecological, political, or ethical perspective on the

problem. Ethical norms also serve the objectives of people who conduct research activities. There are several reasons why it is important to adhere to ethical norms in research. First, norms promote the aims of research, such as knowledge, truth, and avoidance of error. Ethical norms promote the values that are essential in work environments such as trust, mutual respect, fairness, guideline for authorship, copyright policies, data sharing policies, social responsibility, human rights, compliance with the law, safety and confidentiality. Many of the ethical norms help to ensure that researchers are held accountable for the public through different policies, for instance, policy on research misconduct, conflicts and human rights violation. Ethical norms in research help to build public support for research as people like to fund research project if they can trust the quality and integrity of research. Ethical lapses in research can significantly harm human and animal subjects, students, and the public. For example, a researcher who fabricates data in a clinical trial may harm or even kill patients, a researcher who fails to abide by regulations and guidelines relating to radiation or biological safety may jeopardize his health and safety or the health and safety of staff and students (Resnik,2011).

1.2The dual Motives behind research-science vs the welfare

Research in social sciences is concerned with double emphasis on knowledge for its own sake and with knowledge for what it can contribute to practical concerns in social issues especially in the case of social science. Its responsibility as a science is to develop a body of principles that make possible the understanding and prediction of the whole range of human interactions. On the social orientation, it must look for practical guidance in solving social problems and studying social relationships for the sake of being able to do something better in the society. The possible motives for doing research may be due to; desire to get a research degree with its consequential benefits, desire to face the challenge in solving the unsolved problems, desire to get intellectual joy of doing some creative work, desire to be of service to society, desire to get respectability, directives from government, employment need, curiosity about new things, desire to create social critical thinking and awakening. Research provides the basis for government policy making and decision-making. For instance, in the analysis of the needs and desires of people research is most needed. Research facilitates implementation of alternative policies and the decisions of the policy makers in delivery of social services to address the issues like, working conditions, trade union activities, defense and security services, allocation of nation’s resources and collecting information on the economic and social structure of the nation. For philosophers, thinkers, intellectuals, analysts, research may mean the generation of new ideas, insights and theories. Thus, research is the fountain of knowledge for the sake of knowledge and an important source of providing guidelines for solving different social problems. It is a sort of formal training which enables one to understand the new developments in one’s field in a better way (Kothari,2004).

Research is mostly undertaken to generate knowledge and contribute to scholarship, policy, practice and generally to the wellbeing of the people who participate in it. Sound research is a moral and ethical endeavor and should be concerned with ensuring that the interests of those participating in a study are not harmed as a result of research being done. Typically universities and research institutions lay down principles and guidelines for conducting research in an ethical appropriate manner and require the researchers to obtain approval from ethics committees or equivalent (Halai,2006).

Section Two: The Basic Research Ethics

2.1The Rights and Responsibilities of Researchers

Researches have the responsibility of making sure the topic of the investigation is suitable, the competence to undertake the study is achieved, the program in which the study is undertaken is appropriate for the topic, the study constitutes a valuable contribution to the literature, the topic is manageable in relation to the time, the study provides learning experience to researchers, there is access to resources, objectives of the study are well set, understand any alterations needed in the proposal, consultation with stakeholders like supervisors and advisors and ownership of the research material as intellectual property is understood and specified, (Mauch & Park, 2003).

The rights of ownership of intellectual property that are research documents property refers to materials that be owned legally through laws and copyrights. Intellectual specifies that the property results from mental labor, rational thought, and exercise of the intellect. Also are materials developed by theorists, artists, researchers, authors and performers in the academic and professional discipline. Ownership can be established through copyright, contract, registration and court decision. You as researcher have the responsibility of resolving any issues about ownership of data or other joint work in the thesis or dissertation when there is a possibility that a faculty /university/publisher/ dictates that ownership should be decided on and established legally as early as possible member may assert some right or interest. Copyright registration is important to the protection of your rights as author and researcher. Serious problems can arise in the absence of clear understandings about the ownership of intellectual property. Researchers must consider the ownership of the materials, rights and conditions regarding publication If the student research is done as part of a contract for research with the university or the advisor, the student should be supplied with a copy of the contract before doing any research (Mauch & Park, 2003). Do not use unpublished writings, information, ideas, concepts or data. Also do not plagiarize data, research procedures and data analysis (Bhattacherjee,2012)

2.2. Ethical Consideration and principles in Research

There should be the consideration of using private information (Mauch& Park, 2003) talk about the principle of confidentiality when collecting data as it is unethical to break it. It is recommended to collect data anonymously, roster data by number rather than names, destroy names and the questionnaires for collecting information soon as there is no further need for it and finally keep sensitive files out of sight and under lock.

Duty to inform and informed content principle should be followed that you should seek permission to do research since it is ethical obligation that stem from customs, policies, laws and legal rights. The examples of permission to seek is permission to use children or persons under guardianship as research subjects like jailors, physicians, employers, teachers , principals and armed service personnel, permission to use instruments for data-gathering purposes, permission to review data from personnel records, student records, and other records that are not part of the public domain, permission to use charts, tables and other material from the work of others if are copyrighted and eligible for citing and paraphrase. Permissions should be obtained in writing, should specify the purpose and should be signed by a person in authority. The signed and dated permission is the valuable insurance and a pass for use with individuals who have direct custody of the persons, records and materials to which access is needed

(Mauch, & Park, 2003). Furthermore, all participants must receive and sign an Informed Consent form that clearly describes their right to not participate and right to withdraw, before their responses in the study can be recorded. For example in a medical study, this form must also specify any possible risks to subjects from their participation. For subjects under the age of 18, this form must be signed by their parent or legal guardian. Researchers must retain these informed consent forms for a period of time (often three years) after the completion of the data collection process (Bhattacherjee, 2012). The participants should have access to relevant information prior to the consent. Prior information on key elements of research includes purpose, procedures, time period, risks, benefits, and a note stipulating that participation is voluntary (Halai,2006).

Avoiding harm and protection of the vulnerable is the universal principle whereby researchers have obligations to protect human subjects in terms of honour, respect and diginity. These obligations are legal and ethical in nature (Mauch, & Park, 2003). Subjects in a research project must be aware that their participation in the study is voluntary, that they have the freedom to withdraw from the study at any time without any unfavorable consequences, and they are not harmed as a result of their participation or non-participation in the project (Bhattacherjee,2012). Researchers are expected to inform the participants the risks and benefits of participating in the study and the ways through which participants could be compensated for their time and effort (Halai, 2006). The vulnerable groups like refugees, have complications patterning to ethical issues like distrust of research done by researchers, the inability of many researchers to cope with them as research participants, lack of feedback from researchers like promised reports and photos after giving time for interviews and disclosing personal stories, false expectations of assistance from researchers, exploitation by researchers and journalists including unauthorized publication of names and photos leading to situations of danger for their participation in the research. These incidents constitute a violation of human rights because they firmly place refugees as objects of research. Researchers directly address the harm due to misuse of data. They table the value of stories collected and the benefits that are expected from vulnerable groups. They draw the notion into mind that research data once collected belongs to the researcher and their institution but not to vulnerable groups (Pittaway, et al,2010).

Transparency to the respondents for the right to know is important. Researchers have an obligation to provide information about their study to potential subjects before data collection to help them decide whether they wish to participate in the study not. For instance, who is conducting the study, for what purpose, what outcomes are expected and who will benefit from the results. However, in some cases, disclosing such information may potentially bias subjects' responses (Bhattacherjee,2012).

Respect the rights of research subjects by not making misrepresentations to editors and conference program chairs about the originality of papers you submit. Do not abuse the authority and responsibility you have been given as an editor, reviewer or supervisor. Do not use published or unpublished data without both permission and acknowledgment. Acknowledge the substantive contributions of all research participants, whether colleagues or students, according to their intellectual contribution (Bhattacherjee,2012). Also there is the importance of respecting people and their rights to express their views, within the context of a research project. These people may be interviewees, focus group members or questionnaire respondents. It is to ensure that they are listened to and their views recorded fully and their rights observed as they participate in the research (Faulkner 2004). Having respect for other persons, most moral philosophers argue is good not because we are likely to receive better

treatment from them but because each person is capable of moral actions and so is worthy of respect,(Traer,2013:6)

2.3 Dealing with Ethical Dilemmas –Taking The Right Decision.

There are actions that would be regarded as either ethical or unethical by researchers. Indeed, in research there are practical problems and misconducts that arise in which different people debate about the proper course of action and there is no broad consensus about what should be done. This situation cause the sense of argumentation and conflict on the use of ethical principles hence creating difficult decisions for research known as ethical dilemmas. Example of issues that may cause ethical dilemmas are such as publishing the same paper in two different journals without telling the editors, including a colleague as an author on a paper in return for a favor even though the colleague did not make a serious contribution to the paper, discussing with your colleagues confidential data from a paper that you are reviewing for a journal, using an inappropriate statistical technique in order to enhance the significance of your research, conducting a review of the literature that fails to acknowledge the contributions of other people, failing to keep good research records, failing to maintain research data for a reasonable period of time, promising a student a better grade for sexual favors, making significant deviations from the research protocol approved by your institution, rejecting a manuscript for publication without even reading it, stealing and making unauthorized copies of data, papers and computer programs (Resnik,2011).

The best way to deal with ethical dilemmas is that the researcher should reflect the following questions before making the decision;What is the problem or issue? What is the relevant information from available literature? What are the different options? How do ethical codes or policies as well as legal rules apply to these different options? Are there any people who can offer ethical advice? Which choice could stand up to further publicity and scrutiny? Which choice could you not live with? Which choice would be the most just, fair and have the best overall consequences? (Resnik,2011).

Section Three: Views, Recommendation And Conclusion

3.1Views, From MRPP Class

The MRPP class members aired their views on the topic that:-

- Most of research ethics and principles are often not followed by many researchers
- Many researchers do research just for their own interests
- MRPP students take the course just for degree award and employment purpose but not otherwise
- Some commented that the dissertations/thesis done as part of degree award completion has no significant contribution to the society since is only done to fulfill the requirement of graduating the particular course.
- Freedom of ownership of thesis/dissertation by students is too limited therefore academic institutions have to set new mechanisms allowing students to own fully their works.

3.2 Recommendation From course Instructor

During the classroom discussion the course instructor gave out recommendations that indeed were impressing. Those recommendations were as follows:-

On issue of motives behind research one of its aspect is researcher to do research for the purpose of serving the community welfare. The course instructor insisted on this aspect that it is very important for the researchers to follow this principle. The course instructor gave out some of examples from his experience that, he ever conducted the study as researcher in one of the districts in Kigoma Region –Tanzania. During the study he promised the community that he will come back with the results for them. He claimed that although it is now almost several years passed without going to visit the villagers but he plans and arrangements are on progress to do so. Another example he gave out is about his profession as worker at the University of Dar es Salaam, the call from one of the Universities in Kenya was made needing him leave the job at UDSM and join that particular university with the offer of more pay of salary. The Instructor stated that, he rejected simply because of his interest to serve the community of the University of Dar es Salaam and the nation at large.

3.3. Conclusion

Studying the basic research ethics is indeed taken as one of the core aspects for researchers and institutions in general. The presentation on this topic was taken to be very useful especially for new young researchers who are unaware of ethical conducts for research. From views in the discussion conducted during the presentation of this paper, participants ended stating that most of the problems that rise due to unethical conduct of research are due to researchers themselves who tend to violate the basic principles for doing research and also the government that there is problems with guidelines and procedures for conducting research that make researchers have illegal approach to research.

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