

# Ethical Issues of Qualitative Research

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## INTRODUCTION

In broad, research approach can be classified in two categories; Qualitative research approach and Quantitative research approach. Qualitative research has been defined in various ways. Basically, Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed, that is, how people make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world (Merriam, 2009). The qualitative nature of research may be derived from the research issue, the methods used, the analysis strategies, and the scientific justification of procedure used (Heyink, & Tymstra, 1993). Qualitative research may follow various form like Phenomenology, Case Study, Ethnography, Inductive Thematic Analysis, Grounded Theory, Discourse/Conversation Analysis, Narrative Analysis and Mixed Methods. Qualitative data may derive from audio, text or video sources (Ryan, & Bernard, 2000). Data may be collected by participant observation, in-depth interviews, focus groups or by document analysis. These various nature, form, research execution style and research input raise different complexity in their respective area.

Generally, the term 'Ethics' is associated with the discipline like philosophy and theology. Ethics is often defined as a system of moral principles, which standard and concepts defined, systematized and recommend concepts of right or wrong behavior (James, 2003). Ethics is relative at least to an extent also. Therefore, it is agreed that subject moral, social, political and cultural back forms the shape of ethics in the relevant environment.

Area of qualitative research is vast. Qualitative research can be found in the area of social science including economics, psychology, sociology, anthropology, politics, geography and law and in the area of applied science including nursing research, pharmacy practice research, social work research and so on (Murphy, Dingwall, Greatbatch, Parker, & Watson, 1998). Consequently, ethical concern is vast. Ethical issues are important to ensure the common standard of the research. However, argument has emerged for differentiating the ethical issues for different areas e.g., between social research and medical research (e.g., Tanner, & Shaw, 2000). This chapter discusses the common ethical issues from the perspective of research process.

Qualitative researchers are increasingly recognizing the struggle to find the sound balance between the autobiography of the researcher and biography of the participants. At the time of collection of data, it is required for the researcher to collect the real thinking of participants. At the same time, he/she must ensure that the participants are not influenced by the researchers. Be a 'snooping stranger' and a 'good friend' simultaneously is big dilemma in many forms of qualitative research (Jarvie, 1982). In case of data analysis, researchers also play a dual role as a researcher and a research subject, which adds a complex layer to the subsequent analysis of data (Matteson, Lincoln, & Yvonna, 2009). Therefore, researchers own values often shape the studies they conduct. Ethical issues are concerned from the questionnaire development processes to the interpretation of the research results in the qualitative research. And ethical issues appear in various

forms. Ethical issues might be discussed from various perspective; the research methodology, rights and obligation of the concerned parties, research interest etc.

This chapter discusses the basic ethical issues on the basis of previous literature. In previous literature ethical issues of qualitative research has been presented in various ways. For example; Helen Simons (2006) discusses the code of ethics and clarify the rules, standard, principles and theories to discuss the ethics in research. John Johnson and David Altheide (2002) mention that ethics is issue based rather than research based. To describe their view, they discuss five spheres of ethics; 1) Personal Ethics, 2) Research Ethics, 3) Intellectual Ethics, 4) Professional Ethics and 5) Corporate Ethics. Steiner Kvale (1996) posed three ethical models within which the researchers reflect the ethical issues; Duty ethics of principles, Utilitarian ethics of consequence and value ethics of skills. Elmes, kantowitz, and Roediger (1995) discusses some basic issues of ethics in qualitative research, e.g., Informed Consent, No deception, Right to withdraw, Debriefing and confidentiality. Bahn and Weatherill (2013) focus on the self-care practice during the sensitive data collection stage. Sinha and Back (2013) discuss ethical stance under the two way communication environment of participants and researchers. Peled and Leichtenrill (2002) discuss the ethics of qualitative research under some guiding assumptions. Ian Shaw (2003, 2008) discusses the basic issues of qualitative research. Apart of these, he discusses some ethical issues like ethical issues in evaluation research, fieldwork and others considering their distinctiveness. It seems that Ian Shaw (2008) covers the vast area of ethical issues in an excellent way in a short space.

Ethical issues rise through the different school of opinions, obligation and interaction of concerned parties, from basic principles and from special circumstances. In this chapter, the ethical issue has been arranged in four parts 1) firstly the background as well as the fundamental school of the ethical issues in qualitative research has been discussed. 2) Secondly, the concerned

parties and the interactions among them has been discussed to highlights the ethical issues, 3) thirdly, the general principle that must be confirmed to ensure the ethical concern of a research has been discussed, 4) fourthly, some special issues that rise in the evaluation research, fieldwork research and in research analysis has been discussed and finally future trends of ethical issues of qualitative research has been discussed.

## BACKGROUND

In scientific research, ethical issues emerged from the consequences of the disaster of the II world war, especially from the facts of Nazi-sponsored medical experiments. To prevent such tendency Nuremberg Code delivered 10 points where first one was about the informed consent. Participants are fully informed about the research procedure is the premise of informed consent. Consisting with that different arena started to execute the ethical guidelines. Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans was a notable initiative that was started by Medical Research Council of Canada (MRC), the Natural Science and Engineering Council of Canada (NSERC) and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) in the early 1990s. Later, the standard of research ethics has been developed by the various areas' experts and researchers.

There are two main schools of thoughts for research ethics; one is Positivists and another is Relativists (Peled et al., 2002). Positivist perspective is represented by the biomedical model. The research ethics of biomedical approach is based on the values of autonomy, justice, beneficence and non-beneficence. The principles like informed consent, privacy, confidentiality, non-deception, absence of psychological or physical harm and commitment to collecting and presenting reliable and valid empirical materials are based on these values (Clifford, 2000). Institutional Review Boards (IRBs) enforce these principles in qualitative research in the area of Europe and America.

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