

Research Ethics

[Definition](#)

[Ethical Issues](#)

[Links](#)

[Suggested Reading](#)

[Facts and Statistics](#)

Definition: What is Research Ethics?

Research ethics is the study, practice, and monitoring of ethical conduct in research.

In order for the results to be reliable and trustworthy, research must be conducted ethically. If even one part of a research project is conducted immorally, harmfully, or incorrectly, the validity of the entire project is called into question.

Much of research ethics focuses on the protection of human subjects. To protect those who participate as research subjects, the U.S. Government-the largest single research funding organization in the world- requires that institutions have an Institutional Review Board (IRB). An IRB reviews all proposed research projects, helps ensure that human subjects are informed of burdens, and monitors ongoing research.

Upon discovery, unethical research practices, called research misconduct, can lead to: discrediting of research, fines, and imprisonment.

[Top of Page](#)

Ethical Issues

Many ethical questions in research involve informing human subjects, but other issues include:

- Authorship practices: Are the appropriate people getting credit for their work?
- Potential financial conflicts of interest: Could a financial incentive potentially influence research results?
- Participant privacy concerns: How is data managed and safeguarded?
- Humane use of animal subjects: How are the animals cared for? To what procedures are they subjected?
- Fostering the peer review process, in which researchers submit their completed work to others in the field for close scrutiny: How does this process affect ethical conduct?

Links

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Service's Office of Research Integrity (ORI) promotes integrity in biomedical and behavioral research supported by the Public Health Service (PHS) at about 4,000 institutions worldwide. ORI monitors institutional investigations of research misconduct and facilitates the responsible conduct of research through educational, preventive, and regulatory activities. The ORI is on the Internet at: www.ori.dhhs.gov

The International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE) publication guidelines include sections on authorship practices and peer review, available online at <http://www.icmje.org/index.html#authorsu>. (Refer to section II. Ethical Considerations in the Conduct and Reporting of Research).

The University of Minnesota provides an online tutorial covering informed consent for human subjects research in both health & biological sciences and social & behavioral sciences. This website provides historical information, examples, exercises, and a tool to create your own consent document, available online at <http://www.research.umn.edu/consent/>

The American Counseling Association's Code of Ethics includes a section on human subjects research by counselors, available online at <http://www.counseling.org/Resources/CodeOfEthics/TP/Home/CT2.aspx>

Suggested Reading

Books

Ethics in Research with Human Subjects.

Bruce Sales and Susan Folkman, editors: American Psychological Association (2000).

Scientific Integrity: An Introductory Text with Cases.

Francis Macrina; American Society for Microbiology (2000).

Who Goes First? The Story of Self-Experimentation in Medicine.

Lawrence Altman: University of California Press (1998).

Articles

"Scientists behaving badly"

Martinson B. Anderson M. deVries R. Nature 435: 737-738 (9 June 2005) <http://www.nature.com/nature/journal/v435/n7043/full/435737a.html>

"Report of a case of cyberplagiarism-and reflections on detecting and preventing academic misconduct using the Internet"

Eysenbach G. Journal of Medical Internet Research 2000; 2(1):e4

<http://www.jmir.org/2000/1/e4/>.

[Top of Page](#)

Facts & Statistics

According to the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors, to be an author on an article, you must: 1) contribute to the research; 2) write or revise the article; AND, 3) approve the final version of the article.

Unless there is a clear statement that the article is being republished, reprinting the same article in a different journal after it has been published elsewhere is a special kind of plagiarism, called redundant publications.

Researchers that receive federal funding are required to report their results to the agency from which they received funding. However, in general, the results are first submitted for publication in a primary-source professional journal. These journals publish results of original work (which cannot have appeared in print elsewhere) that has passed a process of peer-review (critique by researchers in the same field). Publication in these journals is considered to be a significant step in validating research results.

Ironically, formal ethical guidelines for conducting research on human subjects grew out of the Nuremberg Trials for Nazi war criminals. The Doctors Trial of 1946-1947 held accountable those doctors involved in atrocious and evil experiments performed on humans in concentration camps. Attorneys for the prosecution presented a list of ethical guidelines-the Nuremberg Code-for conducting research on human subjects.

[Top of Page](#)