

Ethics in Nursing Research

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Introduction

The Ethics are the moral principles that govern a person's behaviour. Research ethics may be referred to as doing what is mostly and legally right in research. They are actually norms for conduct that distinguish between right and wrong, and acceptable & unacceptable behaviour. Knowingly that research is "a process of investigation leading to new insights, effectively shared." Research is a multi-stage process. Ethics are central to this process. Researcher need to take care of various ethical issues at different levels of this process [1-4].

Definition: Ethics in nursing research can be defined as the act of moral principles which the researcher has to follow while conducting nursing research to ensure the rights and welfare of individuals, groups or community under study.

Importance of Ethics in Nursing Research

Ethics within healthcare are important because workers must recognize healthcare dilemmas, make good judgments and decision based on their values while keeping within the laws that govern them. The important reasons to support importance of ethics in nursing research are:

- Protect the vulnerable group & other study participants from harmful effects of the experimental intervention.
- Participants are safeguarded from exploitation by researchers.
- Establish risk-benefit ratio for the study subjects.
- Ensure the fullest respect, dignity, privacy, disclosure of information & fair treatment for study subjects.
- Build the capability of subjects to accept or reject participation in study and to have access to informed or written consent for participation in research study.

Ethical Principles

The three broad principles on which standards of ethical conduct in research are based: Beneficence, Respect for human dignity and Justice.

Principle of beneficence

Beneficence imposes a duty on researchers to minimize harm and maximize benefits. Human research should be intended to produce benefits for participants or a situation that is more common for others. Participants must

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be provided with maximum physical, psychological, social & religious comfort and undue disturbance and time utilization of the subjects should be avoided. Participants must be assured that their information will not be used against them in any way e.g person reporting drug abuse should not be exposed to the of criminal authorities. Research must be conducted by scientifically qualified expert. This principle covers multiple dimensions:

- Freedom from Harm
- Freedom from Exploitation
- Benefits from Research
- The Risk Benefit Ratio if the perceived risks to participants outweigh the anticipated benefits of the research, the research should be either abandoned or redesigned.

Principle of respect of human dignity

This principle includes the right to self-determination and right to full disclosure. This principle of the ethics emphasizes on the freedom of choice, where participants have right to accept or reject to be a part of the research study. In addition, volunteers must be provided full information about the research study and an informed consent must be obtained, preferably a written one. The researcher under this principle must ensure following:

- Participants have full right to question the researcher for any additional information or clarification of doubts.
- Participants have right to quit from the study at any stage of the research study.
- A fully informed consent must be taken from the participants. In case of foetus, child, psychological, neurological, physical inability to give informed consent; this can be obtained from parent or legal guardians.

The contents of an informed consent must include the following:

Purpose of the research study, Procedural process & any intervention involved in the study, expected time & nature of participant's involvement in the study, type of data /information to be obtained for respondents, details of the support available in case any harm occurs to participants, details of the potential discomfort or risk for participants in the study, description of the expected benefits of the research study, there are certain ethical dilemmas where taking consent may distort the actual situation & research finding. Example: A study on nurses' time utilization in productive & non-productive activities during working period, Behaviour of the nurses with patients and their family in surgical wards, Performance observation of the nurses in medical ward.

Such ethical dilemmas must be dealt carefully, where informed consent may be avoided until research does not actually harm the participants or breach their privacy & take permission from competent authority. However, strictly speaking, the ethical principles never permit this.

Principle of Justice

This principle concerns justice, which includes participants' right to fair treatment and their right to privacy.

- The fair & non-discriminatory selection of the participant such as any risk & benefits will be equally shared by study participants.

- The fair treatment principle covers issues other than participant selection. the right to fair treatment means that researchers must treat people who decline to participate (or who withdraw from after initial agreement) in a non-prejudicial manner, that they must honour all agreements made with participants (including payment if promised), that they demonstrate respect for the beliefs, habits & life styles of people from different background or cultures.
 - Anonymity of participants & confidentiality of information must be maintained.
 - No information collected from study participants can be used for other than research purpose.
 - The vulnerable subjects such as children, pregnant women, mentally ill, institutionalized (prisoners) people etc., who are easily accessible must be protected from overuse & undue use for research purpose.
- Obtain identifying information (e.g. name, address) from participants only when it is essential to do so. Destroy identifying information as quickly as is feasible.

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