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Research Ethics: A Brief Introduction

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ABSTRACT

This paper deals with the first step of any type of research, be it legal, sociological or philosophical. The author here tries to give a brief introduction about the research ethics in legal and sociological research. The paper deals with an introduction to research and ethics along with the ethical standards of research and a discussion about the applicability of ethics in the writing of a research paper. The point of legal sanction and morality of research has also been pointed out. The paper also discusses plagiarism and provides a brief description of it and the increase in technology that has made plagiarism quite easy and also the technology to counter it. In concluding remark, the author has tried to give importance to the ethical committees regarding the checking of research works and to make them more vigilant with respect to the new research works.

Keywords: Research Ethics, History of Research Ethics, Legal.

I. INTRODUCTION

Research means a detailed and careful study of something to find out more information about it, and the person who does research is called a researcher. Every human being lives a researcher, and the thing that separates a researcher from others is his ability to sift out research problems from the everyday environment. In short, the concept of research is present in our everyday lives; a person is a researcher till a person learn ethics from the day he is born till the last day of his life. Research involves systematic investigation in any field of knowledge, be it about any of the issues, be it philosophical, materialistic or anything that can be perceived by our senses. The start of research is coupled with the desire of the researcher to seek answers for the questions which compelled the researcher to do research.

Ethics may be called the philosophy (more or less moral philosophy) in which the discipline connected with what is morally good and bad or what is right or wrong, more accurately, the term used for application to any system or theory of moral values and principles. In simple words, ethics are moral principles. They affect how people make decisions and lead their life, ethics are a system of accepted beliefs of a person that control his behaviour, and these ethics are based on morals. The word 'moral' is derived from morality, which can be understood as the social standards of the quality of being right, honest or acceptable.

For a society to be streamlined, two things are very important, i.e., law and morals. Law regulates expected social conduct under a framework of 'Crime and Punishment'. Usually, the government of the land enforces these laws to regulate social behaviour to establish social order. They are framed by legislatures and are subject to judicial scrutiny and may or may not conform to morality; some of the examples can be given as traffic rules, land acquisition laws etc., a large chunk of the population lives in a public space and sometimes laws are not only the driving force which governs the behaviour of the individual, there are some other factors too, one of them is ethics.

Many individuals do work for a living; they belong to any of the professions, they are governed by professional ethics as every profession have some work ethics. There are guidelines which are being evolved by many of the societies and organizations, e.g., University Grants Commission, American Sociological Association etc. these ethical guidelines might have no legal binding nor can be subjected to judicial intervention, but some exceptions are there, like the use of animals and humans in the laboratory or any experiment, without the permission of competent authorities are strictly prohibited, and legal action can be initiated against the wrongdoers.[2]

With the advancement of technology and other factors, research has become quite easier and unethical practices to become easier, the researcher while doing research, must strictly adhere to these ethics so that the sanctity of the research is not compromised, any research is like the stepping stone of other research, and it should be done with properly and carefully to set a land-mark to other researchers which can be done by only development of proper research ethics.

II. CONCEPT AND HISTORY OF RESEARCH ETHICS

The term "ethics" is generally defined as a set of principles that distinguish between acceptable and unacceptable behaviour or way of conducting a task. These guidelines or principles may vary across countries, disciplines, institutions, and even laboratories.

The first example of research ethics in research was related to the medical field only, one of the old cases regarding medical ethics. In case, Schloendorff v. Society of New York Hospital[3], J. Cardozo stated, "Every human being of adult years and sound mind has a right to determine what shall be done with his own body; and a surgeon who performs an operation without his patient's consent commits an assault, for which he is liable in damages."

After the Second World War, Nuremberg Trials[4] consist of many fundamental principles, now known as the Nuremberg Code, regarding the research ethics in which the subject matter of the research is humans; some of the salient features of the principles are as follows:

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[2] In India, Committee for the Purpose of Control and Supervision of Experiments on Animals (CPCSEA), a statutory body is formed under section 15(1) of

Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, 1960.
[3] 211 N.Y. 125, 105 N.E. 92 (1914).
[4] [1946] 22 IMT 203.

a) "The voluntary consent of the human subject is absolutely essential."

b) "The duty and responsibility for ascertaining the quality of the consent rest upon each individual who initiates direct or engages in the experiment. It is a personal duty and responsibility which may not be delegated to another with impunity."

c) "The experiment must be such as to yield fruitful results for the good of society, unprocurable by other methods or means of study, and not random or unnecessary in nature."

d) "The experiment should be so conducted as to avoid all unnecessary physical and mental suffering and injury."

Research ethics may be referred to as doing what is morally and legally right in research. They are actually norms for conduct that distinguish between right and wrong and acceptable and unacceptable behaviour. The research is related to a person as to how he/she perceives a thing or idea from his/her surrounding environment, the environment is the same to everybody, but each one of us observes it differently. There are many problems in the society, but it may be perceived by different individuals in different ways, e.g., if the crime rate of a particular place is getting low, one individual may deduce that the law-and-order situation at that place is good, while the other individual may deduce that the law enforcing authorities are not registering criminal cases. The same problem is viewed by different researchers differently. Thus, it is not only the societal dynamics that trigger research but also an observation on the part of the researchers.

Observation is like the ignition of research; it is an integral part of the research; observations create many questions in mind that trigger the research; these questions are like the path by which research scholar will frame research problem which further triggers the research.

The final destination of any research work is a research report; a research report may be an article, a dissertation, a thesis etc., the report contains not only the final conclusion of the researcher but also the innovations, imagination and vision of the researcher to arrive at that particular conclusion, to arrive at that conclusion involves a great amount of thinking and application of mind. In fact, even if the conclusion of two research works might be the same, it might not be the same vision or imagination of the researcher(s) involved.

It is true that thinking and application of the mind are not as easy as it seems; it involves a diligent process of putting the mind to work. Sometimes, due to many reasons, unethical means may be employed to produce a research report for dodging sincere efforts and to gain fast results; it is wrong because it violates the "ethics". The field of research is too vast, and a number of research enthusiasts are in this field, so there is a need for some proper regulations and ethics to prevent unethical means in research.

Ethics give the entire fraternity of researchers a source of discipline. Ethics lay down the ground rules for legitimate, moral and fair research. It is like a guiding light to fair research, and it is not limited to research reports only; research is a

compass that gives direction to other research works. It is a moral and professional obligation to conduct research according to ethical norms. The need of having standard research ethics norms is due to the following reasons:

a) A particular set of standards are made for the knowledge and for the gain of everyone.

b) It rules out uncertainty.

c) Standard research ethics norms will be the same for one and all; no one can claim that ethics and morality changes from person to person.

d) The norms of research ethics may give a sense of security to the human subjects of the research, e.g., many people believe that giving some controversial information may put their well-being in jeopardy, so these norms will protect their interests and allow them to participate in the research freely.

III. CODE OF RESEARCH ETHICS

The principles of research ethics are not listed in a concise manner. There are no strict rules that are to be observed in research. However, just like the processes and techniques of research that have developed over time, there are a few accepted rules of conduct that are considered as the basic principles of ethical research. One such set of codes of ethics has been given by the American Sociological Association (ASA)[5].

Following is the important code of ethics according to ASA:

- **Professional Competence**:

There are two important factors for the competence of a researcher for research are, qualification and intellectual capacity and both are important, but intellectual capacity is most important for a research work often the acquiring of a Master's degree alone is not sufficient to certify that a person is fit and qualified to research.

- **Integrity:**

There is always an expectation of honesty, genuineness and fairness in research; the researcher must work for their professional welfare but not at the cost of another researcher's welfare; the researcher must be respectful towards others in their professional activities and should not knowingly make any statements which are false, vexatious or deceptive.

- **Professional and Scientific Responsibility:**

Any research is always steered by societal dynamics; the research cannot be carried out in the isolation of the society; in fact, the need for research mostly arises from the problems of the society, and the research affects the probable solutions of these problems. It is the responsibility of the researcher to be fair in the research as any careless approach in the research may create problems in future research in that field. So, the researcher must be very careful

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[5] American Sociological Association, Code of Ethics, https://www.asanet.org/about/governance-and-

leadership/ethics (last seen 21/07/2021).

about the professional and scientific responsibility of the research.

- **Respect for Peoples' Rights, Dignity, and Diversity:**

A researcher must not have any preconceived notion regarding any of the subject matter of research; the society we live in is filled with people who have conflicting rights and different ideologies. Diversity is the reality of society, and the researcher must be very careful while recording any of the views relating to any of the applicable basis prescribed by law; the point is that the researcher must make sure his personal bias does not hamper the findings of the research.

- **Social Responsibility:**

There must be social responsibility of researchers towards the society; it is moral and professional obligation of the researcher to conduct themselves and their research in such a way that it is not disorderly to the society. The researcher must be in a position to demarcate the things which are beneficial for society and things that are not, be it any information or invention. When undertaking research, the researchers must strive to serve the public good and to be aware of the situation which may harm the individuals, groups or communities.

IV. TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANCEMENT

Technological advancement has been proved to be a breakthrough for research work as it provided for various cost-efficient and quick ways to conduct the research; computers have given too much relief in the field of research as the hard work has been converted into smart work and more focused in the approach, it has reduced the paperwork to a great extent, and data collection has become even easier, the person can have the information of hundreds of the book in a single pen drive, apart from this various database of e-books, articles and many open access journals which were not possible previously. However, these benefits are also exploited by the researchers who are indulged in unethical practices and sometimes, the internet become the very source of plagiarism friendly technology:

a) One of the most requisite conditions for plagiarism is copying and pasting it from sources on the internet. If the internet is not there, it will be a difficult task for the researcher to copy every word. Even if the plagiarism is done, it requires a great amount of effort, but now, with the availability of e-content and computers, copying and pasting big paragraphs has become common.

b) The second condition is open access content; the internet consists of many sources, which can be of two types open access or limited access. In open access, a website allows free access to the materials present in the websites, and they are easier to copy as anyone can access and copy it.[6] In limited access websites, the content is to be accessed only via an institution's registration or by paying fees. So, in open access

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[6] Lakhotia, Subhash, (2017), The Fraud of Open Access Publishing, Proceeding of Indian National Science Academy, Vol. 83. Issue 1, p.1.

materials, it is quite a possibility that the researcher might end up using unethical means for research.

c) Easy sharing of works due to technological advancement also plays a great part in plagiarism. Sometimes the sharing of research work by the researcher to anyone for recommendation may lead to plagiarism.

To control the practice of plagiarism, many software has been developed for the similarity check, and with this software, plagiarism has been controlled to a great extent; software like Turnitin is providing the services to check plagiarism, though sometimes it may encounter some problems, it definitely provided some check-in plagiarism.

V. CONCLUSION

The discussion on the following of research and publication ethics is very lengthy. One of the reasons regarding the current situation of research in India is the absence of research ethics committees[7]and the commercialization of peer-reviewed journals to a great extent, which led to the publication of sub-standard research work. However, these committees can control plagiarism in the research, but the first rule of honest research is self-internalization. The principles of research ethics emanate from understanding right and wrong. One must know about the perceptions of morally right and wrong things.

The best way to keep a check on such violations is constantly keeping checks and balances on the researcher, and the best way to keep this check and balance is through the supervisor, where the research is done under the guidance of supervisors in institutions. The supervisor can keep an eye on the researcher's method and help him to internalize the ethical ways while doing the research. Any institution can incorporate the evaluation of research on the basis of some checks, one of them being ethical research. In fact, many institutions have now started this it is innovation whereby technology is used to curb plagiarism. A software programme named 'Turn-it-in' is used to check if a research report submitted by the student has any amount of plagiarised material. The student may be asked to resubmit the report if plagiarism has been found in his work. This will promote good quality of research from the student level.

It is also true that research can never be done in a vacuum. A person who is going to research may have an interest in a particular topic, but it is very different in having an interest in the topic and to have knowledge about it, a person can gain knowledge about any topic is by either perceiving through common sense and experience or by reading books and articles related to that topic. The knowledge gained through personal experience is the own knowledge of the person, while if it is perceived by reading or other sources, this knowledge is obtained via some intermediate medium, who is the author of the book or article. In this way, the

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[7] Parveen, Huma & Showkat, Nayeem, (2017), Research Ethics. p. 9. https://www.researchgate.net/p ublication/318912804_Research_Ethics. (last seen 28/07/2021).

person may get aware of the facts and knowledge which was not known earlier but, where this knowledge has been used by the person in the research work, it must be given due credit if it has been derived from the past publications. The credit is usually given in the form of a citation; it is the method of mentioning the name and credits of the source of information used. There are various formats of citation that are used in research. Some of the formats of citations are MLA format, OSCOLA format, Harvard Bluebook style, APA style, etc. each of these citation formats are unique in itself; there are rules for everything right from mentioning the name of book or journal, author, publication year and publisher to the web address of websites when it was last accessed etc.

It has been seen that technological advancement acts as both boon and bane in the case of research work; it is the duty of the researcher to use the technology in an ethical way. On the internet, there is a huge amount of information regarding everything, but it can be authorized or unauthorized. A large amount of information on the internet is open access, and most of them are not reliable; and if a researcher is using unethical measures, it might be great trouble, firstly, plagiarism and secondly, incorporating false information in the research work. If the information is taken from the website, the proper citation must be used to mention the web address and the date and time it was last accessed, but if the source is unauthorized, it is advisable to avoid information from such sources.

The unethical way of doing research is like compromising the reliability and quality of the research. If this is controlled in the initial stage itself, i.e., during the time of students in academic institutions itself, it will prevent plagiarism from becoming such a big problem. The quality-oriented research work must be taught to the students from the beginning itself. Ethical research must be encouraged in educational institutions and colleges rather than easy and quick research, which is unethical. The students must be encouraged to conduct their research in an ethical way.

So, we can say that the research is not only the way to increase the knowledge of the society but also the way to influence public opinions. So, it is important to make the research free from unethical means, as the true zest of research can be obtained only if the process of research is free from corrupt practices; only with healthy research work, true fruits of the research can be obtained by the society.

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