

Ethics in research: Beating a dead horse

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The word "ethics" is found to be used by every other individual in our daily settings. Judging and weighing colleagues, friends, relatives, neighbors, government officials etc. if not researchers for their accomplished tasks with an index finger pointed away towards them and tagging their achievement as either "ethical or unethical" has now been an elite's way of criticizing things. The legendary pillars of ethics in research in relation to *Respect to subject's autonomy, Beneficence and Non-maleficence, Principle of justice/ equity and Respect for environment*^{1,2} at times tend to stand alone bearing no weight at all, usually when researchers' aim to publish an article is confined to personal benefits alone moreover misbalancing the principle of beneficence.

From the era of *The Code of Hamurabi* and *Charaka Samhita* till present day, the guidelines set for researchers have always emphasized to practice ethics in research more than anything else. Strong steps taken against human experimentations, animal experimentations^{3,4} and respect for environment⁵ has certainly made researchers aware of the thin line that one should never cross^{6,7} but the concern lies in gray undefined zone between do's and don'ts in research where researchers/ authors tend either play around with or rather pretend to ignore.

"Is it fine, if I only include data taken from male subjects as there were comparatively very few female subjects participating in my research?"

"Can I exclude these two subjects from my study as it gives better results?"

"Should I include my senior's name as co-author, as he/she had included mine in his/hers?"

Arguably, issues of ethics are always invisible – always something embarrassedly swept aside in favor of problems and still easily acknowledged and talked about. "Information to authors" per journal at one point silently provides a discrete variance to authors whilst preparing a manuscript, on the other hand, forms to be filled for ethical considerations are confined to achieving a green signal from Ethical Review Boards and Institutional Review Committees; who despite their rigorous and elaborative exertion are occasionally disabled to sniff the '*invisible iceberg in disguise*' and matters gets even worse when publishers do not demand ethical clearance noticeably.

Informed written consent forms prepared by authors as a weapon against ethical clearance boards before any study are offered in a custom made plate as to either meet the goal of voiding hassles one has to go through in obtaining clearance from reviewers or for the sake of gaining mammoth participation of the sample subjects. As a result, researchers usually tend to crumple the very triad principle of consent⁸ - voluntariness, capacitance and knowledge.

One need not be an elite researcher to understand the principle of humanity, but to implement those principles in practice is where real challenge lie. The perplexity between what hearts think and what brains beat has always made our species make decisions either in favor of an individual human or humanity as a group. These petit decisions one takes while conducting the research finally gives rise to a character the researcher actually posses, he/she be caught or not!!

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