

Ethical considerations in identifying a research focus, developing a research question and selecting a research method

Ethics is an important consideration in all forms of research. From archival to clinical research, researchers must be concerned with ensuring that their work is morally right. There are several key ethical considerations of research, primarily the issue of confidentiality. Confidentiality refers to limiting access to specific data, often by using codes to identify the original source or person. Anonymity however means that names and unique identifiers are never attached to the data, or known to the researcher.

In addition to confidentiality there are several other human rights that must be protected when humans are part of the research process. These include; freedom from harm, full disclosure, respect for people, informed consent & minimization of harm.

During the identification of a research question it is imperative to identify a problem that will benefit and not marginalize the study participants. Therefore it becomes important for researchers to convey the purpose of study to the participants, otherwise participants would feel deceptive.

The research question, ethics, budget and time are all major considerations in any design. Before studying the preferred methods for the individual scientific discipline, every experimental design must make compromises and generalizations, so the researcher must try to minimize these, whilst remaining realistic. In biology, psychology and social sciences, there can be a huge variety of methods to choose from, and a researcher will have to justify their choice. Whilst slightly arbitrary, the best way to look at the various methods is in terms of strength.

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