

# COMPARATIVE STUDY OF OPENLY ACCESSIBLE ETHICAL POLICIES AND PROCESSES ACROSS FOUR UNIVERSITIES TO UNDERSTAND THEIR DISCIPLINARY LEVEL FOCUS

Shiva D. Sivasubramaniam<sup>1</sup>, Zeenath Reza Khan<sup>2</sup>, Salim Razi<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*University of Derby, United Kingdom*

<sup>2</sup>*University of Wollongong in Dubai, United Arab Emirates*

<sup>3</sup>*Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University, Turkey*

## KEY WORDS

---

ethical policies, higher education, review panels, guidance

Institutions around the world are being encouraged to establish regulations and structures to enforce ethical conduct in research. In many countries, universities are expected to implement ethical training in the responsible conduct of research. In order to do this, it is imperative to have established policies within the institutions. However, the question is whether the policies are discipline-specific (in other words each discipline should have their own policies) or should there be one institutional level ethical policy? Do these policies help the students to 'own' ethical behaviour? With reference to the Nuremberg Code which is known as the first attempt to regulate human research ethics for the prevention of research ethics violations, many academics argue research ethics should be the same in any field. No matter how different the disciplines are, the aim of providing ethical guidance should be based on the four cardinal principles namely (a) Maximizing benefits (beneficence), (b) respecting dignity and individual rights, (c) conduct competent research with honesty and accountability, and (d) deliver/report outcomes with integrity and merit.

Is this really possible in reality?

This paper is an attempt by the authors to review existing open-access policies and ethical guidelines of four institutions from three countries (Turkey, UAE and UK) to understand the procedures, principles and expectations of institutions towards conducting academic research in an ethical manner. These insti-

tutions are specifically selected as they are pioneers in promoting academic ethics/integrity in their local areas. The main objective of the research study is to explore commonalities between the policies laid out by the institutions to develop an understanding of expectations across varied backgrounds and disciplines which may pave a way for answering the question posed by the authors above. During the course of the study, the authors collected the policies and procedures from open-access documents. These were then reviewed based on the following criteria to identify similarity and differences:

- Area/discipline coverage
- Panel chosen for approval
- Degree level (UG/PG/PhD/Academics)

Initial analysis suggests that all four universities have well-established policies for research ethics in alignment with either local or international policies (such as WHO's ethical advisory guidelines, 2009). All policies have well defined terminologies, with clear expectation that all academic research that includes human participants must acquire ethics approval from the committees before engaging in such studies.

Most importantly, we have noticed a common practice of giving importance for establishing an ethical culture/behaviour on impactful research directions (such as PhD, post-doctoral and independent research). Among the differences, the approach of

handling the ethical reviews and providing guidance were found to be different. Whilst one institution has separated the ethical applications for “invasive” and “non-invasive” research, others tried to offer a common application format divided by separate sections. Another noted-difference was found to be in the selection of the ethical review panels and their memberships.

It is also noted that all four universities focused on using members from a variety of discipline areas to make the committee/panel for approval, however we were not able to see consistency in using representations from the community (i.e. lay-person membership). Based on the body of literature, we find this to be, in our opinion, it is essential to provide unbiased advice by critically analysing the impacts of the methodology and procedures that might affect the participants (Ciulei 2019; Benčin et al., 2015; Vanclay et al., 2013; Kolthoff, Erakovich, Lasthuizen 2010). The review also found less focus was given to the research carried out at undergraduate or postgraduate (Masters) levels. At least one institution has separated the ethical application review processes of UG-/MSc-level investigations from impactful research. Interestingly the ethical

considerations/applications and advice of the former is handled at the supervisory level without involving the college or university-wide ethics committees. This could lead to concerns of disparity that can result in some questionable practice and/or potential ethical dilemmas within UG-/Masters level research. We will discuss some of these issues in our presentation.

In summary, this independent study was conducted as an initial exploration to understand similarities and differences in existing ethical review and guideline policies and procedures across four universities to see if a universal policy can be proposed. Our investigation has suggested, although there may be different approaches to the actual ethical review process, target of those reviews and procedures or membership contributions in providing ethical guidance, the sample universities have followed fundamental principles for establishing ethical policies. Despite the fact that this is an initial study, our analysis suggests, it may in fact be possible to develop a universal ethical policy that is suited to different HE institutions.

Future scope of this study needs international collaborations involving all interested parties.

## REFERENCES

- BENČIN R., ŠUMIČ-RIHA J., STRLE G., and RIHA R. (2015). *Ethics assessment and guidance in different types of organisations universities* (The SATORI Project). [https://satoriproject.eu/media/3\\_e-Universities.pdf](https://satoriproject.eu/media/3_e-Universities.pdf)
- CIULEI T. (2019). Comparative analysis of the codes of ethics in top universities in Romania. In T. CIULEI (Ed.), *Ethics in research practice and innovation* (pp. 88-92). DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-6310-5.ch004
- KOLTHOFF E., ERAKOVICH R., and LASTHUIZEN, K. (2010). Comparative analysis of ethical leadership and ethical culture in local government: The USA, The Netherlands, Montenegro and Serbia. *International Journal of Public Sector Management* 23(7), 596-612. DOI 10.1108/09513551011078879
- VANCLAY F., BAINES J. T., and TAYLOR C. N. (2013). Principles for ethical research involving humans: Ethical professional practice in impact assessment, Part I. *Impact Assessment and Project Appraisal*, 31(4), 243-253. DOI: 10.1080/14615517.2013.850307