

RESEARCH ETHICS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF PORTO: A STUDY USING THE ENAI SELF-EVALUATION TOOLS

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Keywords

Research ethics; responsible research practices; researchers; ENAI self-assessment tools

Background

Researchers are expected to employ responsible research practices throughout all stages of designing, implementing, reporting, and publishing a study, as well as to support others (e.g., colleagues, mentees, etc.) to do the same, contributing to open, inclusive and ethically sound research environments (Forsberg et al., 2018; Sivasubramaniam et al., 2021). Despite this, research integrity has been a global concern, recently heightened by the multiple issues around pseudoscience, fake news, questionable research practices (QRPs) and misconduct brought to light during the Covid-19 pandemic (Bramstedt, 2020).

Research ethics as the “compliance with ethical and professional principles, standards and practices” (p.38), and responsible conduct of

research as considering its “potential impact on subjects of research and wider society” (p.38) are key to ensure the validity and trustworthiness of research (Tauginienė et al., 2018). Scientists who breach these standards, either due to lack of knowledge, preparation and/or support from ethically ill research environments, or by intentionally engaging in fraudulent behaviour such as data fabrication, falsification, or plagiarism (FFP), compromise the value and credibility of research (Fanelli, 2010; Yu et al., 2021). These acts undermine the ethics and quality of scientific work, as well as society's trust in science, researchers, academic institutions and professional bodies (Fanelli, 2009; Forsberg et al., 2018; Tauginienė et al., 2018).

Objectives

This study aims to assess practices, knowledge and perceptions towards research ethics

among faculty and researchers at the University of Porto.

Methods

Researchers at academic and research institutions in the University of Porto will be considered for this quantitative, cross-sectional study. The Academic Integrity Self-Evaluation Tool for Researchers (AISETR) developed by international experts of the European Network for Academic Integrity (ENAI) (Gaižauskaitė et al., 2020) will be applied to assess participants' practices, knowledge and perceptions towards research ethics in the following domains: 1) Policies and practices, 2) Questionable research

practices, 3) Reporting and publication and 4) Commitment to responsible conduct of research. As it is the first time the tool is being used for data collection purposes, validation tests will also be conducted. This study will be carried out (online/ in-person, based on available conditions) from mid-March 2022 and will follow the ethical principles approved by the Ethics Committee of the University of Porto. The preliminary results for this presentation will be available by mid-April 2022.

(Prospective) Results

This study is part of a master's dissertation integrated in an institution-wide project taking place at the University of Porto, in collaboration with the ENAI. The results presented during this session will provide an insight into the practices, knowledge and perceptions towards research ethics in both faculty and researchers at the

University of Porto. These results will allow the identification of deficiencies and areas of improvement which can be overcome through more training in research. The benefits and challenges of a newly used tool to assess research ethics will also be addressed.

Conclusions

The outcomes of this research work will be discussed against recent literature. Based on this, the authors will recommend useful strategies that academic institutions, research centres and researchers themselves can adopt to promote responsible research practices and

avoid fraud and misconduct risk. Ultimately, these recommendations should help fostering excellence of scientific research and good quality science which are key for society's advancement and trust in science.

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