



المجلس العربي
للعلوم الاجتماعية

Arab Council
for the Social Sciences
Conseil Arabe
pour les Sciences Sociales

Research Ethics for the Social Sciences in the Arab Region

ACSS GUIDELINES

January 2024

Contents

Introduction.....	3
Defining Research Ethics.....	5
Why do Research Ethics Matter?.....	6
Guiding Principles.....	8
Respect for Persons.....	9
Breaches to the Respect of Persons Principle: Compromised Agency and Deception.....	9
Upholding the Respect of Persons Principle: Free, Informed, and Ongoing Consent.....	10
Beneficence.....	11
Upholding the Principle of Beneficence.....	12
Justice.....	13
Upholding the Principles of Justice Through Social Justice-Oriented Research.....	13
Reflexivity: Beyond Procedural Ethics.....	14
Ethics of Social Science Research in the Arab Region: Why we Need Guidelines.....	16
Institutional Challenges.....	16
The Focus on Medical Research.....	16
IRB and Ethical Review Boards.....	17
Lack of Training.....	18
Doing Research in Authoritarian and Conflict Settings.....	18
Research in Authoritarian or Closed Settings.....	18
Research in Conflict Settings.....	19
Conclusion: The ACSS Approach to Research Ethics.....	20
Appendix 1: Overview of Ethical Frameworks.....	27
Consequentialist Approaches.....	27
Non-Consequentialist Approaches.....	27
Principlist Approaches.....	27
Virtue-Based Approaches.....	28
Situation-Based Approaches.....	28
Critical Approaches to Ethics.....	28
Ethics of Care.....	28
Situational Ethics.....	29
Post-colonial Approaches.....	29
Appendix 2: Research Ethics Questionnaire.....	30
Appendix 3: Applying Ethical Principles in Social Science Research - Quantitative and Qualitative Methods.....	34
Appendix 4: Emerging Issues in Research Ethics.....	36

Research in Pandemic Times.....	36
Internet-based Research.....	38
Big Data.....	39
Visual Methods.....	41
Collaborative Research.....	42
Research Teams.....	43
Appendix 5: Important Ethical Considerations.....	44
The Ethics of Formulating Research Questions.....	44
The Ethics of Conducting Fieldwork.....	44
The Ethics of Disseminating Research Findings.....	45
The Ethics of Collaborative Team Research.....	45
Appendix 6: Limits of Procedural Ethics.....	47
Appendix 7: The Ethical Decision-Making Process.....	48
Researcher's Individual Moral Outlook.....	48
Legal Regulations.....	49
Professional Ethics Guidelines.....	49
Appendix 8: The Governance of Research Ethics in the Arab Region.....	50
Appendix 9: Ethical Challenges in Conflict Settings.....	52
Avoiding the "Therapeutic Misconception".....	52
The Moral Hazard of the "Dual Imperative".....	52
Over-Researched Communities in Conflict Settings.....	52

Introduction

As part of its mission to strengthen social science research and knowledge production in the Arab region, the Arab Council for the Social Sciences (ACSS) has developed this document for its grantees, affiliated researchers, members, and the ACSS academic community. It aims to provide researchers with guidance on ethical decision-making at all stages of a research project, including: 1) design and planning, 2) data collection, 3) data analysis, 4) publication and dissemination of results, and 5) and finally the post-publication phase.

This document is part of a broader effort by the ACSS to develop flexible mechanisms and tools for conducting ethical research in a region where the institutional infrastructure for ethical research is either lacking or does not adequately fulfill its functions. The ACSS is aware that there are different paradigms and schools of thought on the norms and practices of ethical research. Appendix 1 is an overview and discussion of some of these different ethical frameworks for social scientific research. Inspired by these examples and building on its own experience, the ACSS has developed an approach concerning research ethics as anchored in four tenets: (i) ethics as an ongoing process, (ii) ethics as a situated and contextual practice, (iii) ethics as instrumental to protecting researchers, research participants, and society at large, and (iv) ethics through a case-based approach.¹

The ACSS has been working on guidelines and protocols concerning research ethics in the social sciences since 2015, offering regular training sessions for its grantees to introduce its philosophy on, and practices in, research ethics. It has also offered small grants to its former grantees to examine particular ethical conundrums in their projects, and established an ethics research program for institutions in Palestine and Jordan.² Toward that goal, the ACSS has also developed a questionnaire to aid researchers in evaluating the extent to which their research project is ethical or takes into consideration the principles of research ethics. The questionnaire is available in Appendix 2.

This document first defines research ethics and explains why they matter. This is followed by a detailed overview of the three principles of ethical research: respect for persons, beneficence, and justice, with a definition of each principle, potential breaches to it, and practices that uphold it. In addition, this section explains the limits of a procedural approach to ethics and emphasizes research integrity and reflexivity. A discussion of the particular needs of the Arab region follows, highlighting the challenges and specificities of following

¹ This document as well as the training and other activities around research ethics are the result of efforts of different ACSS staff and consultants including: Cynthia Myntti, Muneira Hoballah, Jamil Moawwad, Jana Chammaa and Lana Salman. Support through two grants from the International Development Research Council (IDRC) is gratefully acknowledged.

² Recently, the ACSS began working on building an online, interactive platform to actively promote and reinstate a culture of research ethics among junior and advanced researchers in the Arab region. The platform aims to foster discussion about principles of research ethics and their compatibility with field research requirements and developments in the social sciences and humanities, particularly in conflict and insecure settings. The platform will encourage regional scholars and researchers to contribute by submitting real case studies that reflect a variety of ethical conundrums faced during the research process.

ethical guidelines and protocols in authoritarian and conflict-prone settings. The conclusion summarizes the ACSS four tenets for ethical research, as well as its expectations of its grantees and affiliated research communities.

This document provides guidelines for ethical decision-making processes for social scientists conducting research in and on the Arab region. It considers this process situational and contextual; in other words, ethical dilemmas are viewed, resolved, and justified in different ways depending on the specific issue, discipline, method of data collection, context, and researcher involved.

Defining Research Ethics

The definitional boundaries between morality, ethics, and research ethics are subtle and blurry, and in this document, we make a distinction between the three of them. To begin with, there is a general agreement that morality is concerned with distinguishing between right and wrong and acceptable and unacceptable behavior, whereas ethics is the result of an agreement among members of a group about what is regarded as right or wrong (Resnik 2011).

More specifically, in the Blackwell Dictionary of Sociology (1994) on “morality” (184), “morals” are defined as “a set of norms that define the most fundamental ideas about what is considered right and wrong, laudable and repugnant, good and bad, virtuous and sinful in human behavior”. Morals are the general standards or principles that individuals use to define what is right or wrong behavior. Ethics, on the other hand, are relative to different communities and cultures. They are the community or individual interpretation of norms or morals that allow them to balance and reflect their values and life experiences (Resnik 2011). Another way of defining ethics is regarding them as a method, procedure, or perspective for deciding on actions and analyzing complex problems and issues in particular situations (Ibid).

Morality is concerned with distinguishing between right and wrong and acceptable and unacceptable behavior. Ethics is the result of an agreement among members of a group about what is regarded as right or

wrong. Research ethics is the agreement among members of the social science research community about what is regarded as right and wrong research practices.

In the ACSS guidelines, research ethics refer to the codification of scientific morality in practice (NESH 2016) — in other words — the basic norms governing any research endeavor. Research ethics in the social sciences is the agreement among members of a social science research community about what is regarded as right and wrong research practices. Disciplines, institutions, and professions have norms for behavior that suit their particular goals and help their members to coordinate their actions or activities and establish the public's trust in them (Resnik 2011). Thus, the ethical conduct of research entails knowing and being aware of the general agreement among members of a research community about what is considered proper and improper research practices (Babbie 2007). It follows that different research communities will have somewhat differing norms and codes, and therefore ethics.

Research misconduct includes the fabrication and falsification of data and plagiarism. *Data falsification* involves altering or omitting data to manipulate outcomes and findings. *Fabrication* is the outright creation of nonexistent data. *Plagiarism* is stealing someone else's work and presenting it as one's own without correctly citing their sources.

Complying with, promoting, and maintaining agreed-upon research norms ensures research integrity at every stage of the research process. Researchers owe it to their profession and their colleagues to handle themselves honestly and with integrity. Research misconduct is a breach of research integrity. It includes the fabrication and falsification of data and plagiarism. Data falsification involves altering or omitting data to manipulate outcomes and findings. Fabrication is the outright creation of nonexistent data (Poduthase 2018).³ Plagiarism is stealing someone else's work and presenting it as one's own without correctly citing their sources.⁴ While some research ethics guidelines consider integrity as a separate

³ Mark Israel's chapter on "Integrity and Misconduct" (2015) shows documented examples of fabrication and falsification in social science research around the world. There are no studies on research misconduct in the Arab region.

⁴ The following are types of plagiarism: pure duplication; the use of ideas, hypotheses, concepts, theories, interpretations, designs, illustrations, results; failing to put a quotation in quotation marks; changing words but copying the sentence structure of a source without giving credit; turning in someone's work as your own (Poduthase 2018, NESH 2016).

issue from ethics, for the ACSS, the integrity of researchers is part and parcel of doing ethical research. Integrity is in line with and reiterates one of the four tenets that ACSS upholds i.e., “protecting the research, the participant, and society at large.”

Why do Research Ethics Matter?

The concern with codifying research ethics arose in North America and Europe in the mid-20th century as a response to the abuses of biomedical experimentation before and during World War II; the most famous of these are the Tuskegee syphilis experiments in the United States and the medical research conducted in Nazi concentration camps (Babbie 2007). Although the stimulus to the codification of ethical research principles was biomedical, ethical considerations are now considered essential to any research endeavor, cutting across disciplines and methodologies. The focus has been on safeguarding fundamental rights of human dignity, autonomy, protection, and safety in research, along with bringing maximal benefits and inflicting minimal harm. These summarize the three main principles of ethical research: respect for persons, beneficence, and justice, which will be explored in further detail below.

Research ethics in the social sciences matter for several reasons. Most social scientists involve human subjects in their projects, which can pose real harm to research participants and collaborators, whether direct or indirect, social, psychological, or physical (Fujii 2012).

The importance of ensuring and maintaining trust cannot be over-emphasized. It is only from a position of trust that researchers can continue to do their work ethically.

When social scientists act ethically, they build trust. Research participants feel they may rely on the researcher to recognize their needs and sensitivities, and consequently, they may be more willing to participate in the research. Communal and/or organizational/institutional withdrawal of support for social science research results from incautious research practices and cultural insensitivity (Israel 2015). The importance of ensuring and maintaining trust cannot be over-emphasized. It is only from a position of trust that researchers can continue to do their work ethically.

Different data sources (field notes based on participant observation, quantitative data sets, archival material, etc.) and ways of collecting them imply different ethical norms and practices (See Appendix 3 on “Quantitative and Qualitative Research Methods”). Many journals now ask authors to make available the datasets they used to conduct their statistical analysis for other research community members to replicate. If caught falsifying data, a researcher’s reputation is forever tarnished.

In addition, although research is often conducted individually, researchers do build on each other's work. If any contributions are inaccurate or unethically acquired, researchers bear the costs individually and collectively, affecting their work's reputation, veracity, and reliability.

New methodological and technological social science research tools also have significant ethical implications for research practice. For example, internet research has expanded dramatically in recent years, and so too has the literature on Internet research ethics. Social scientists must decide what voluntary participation means in the context of the Internet; what privacy protections participants expect and are entitled to; what particular harms might be inflicted on participants whose vulnerability (children, for example) is hidden; or how the confidentiality of data can be protected in such a rapidly changing technological field. Another example, most recently, is doing research during COVID-19 imposed restrictions on face-to-face interactions, forcing researchers to do more online and telephone interviews that not only minimize knowledge of the wider social context and pose new challenges to the notion of privacy but also may not be convenient for many participants who do not have access to different technologies (See Appendix 4 on "Emerging issues in Research Ethics.") Research ethics are becoming more complex (Israel 2015).

Guiding Principles

In Appendix 5 we present some general considerations for reflection during the various stages of the research including (i) selecting appropriate research methods, (ii) conducting fieldwork, (iii) disseminating research findings, and (iv) collaborating with research teams. These aspects are essential for planning, designing, and conducting ethical research. However, in the sections below, we will focus on the specific principles that guide ethical research. These principles are currently broadly accepted across disciplines, fields, institutions, and countries. The ACSS endorses these principles, while recognizing that the ways in which they are applied or practiced will differ according to specific contexts and research projects. The principles: respect for persons, beneficence, and justice, are summarized in Figure 1. In this section, we define these principles, detail the risks that may lead to their breach and the issues this raises, and suggest actions that researchers must take to uphold them. While these actions are essential, they fall within the procedural approach to ethical research and remain limited. Engaging reflexively in research is thus required at all stages, which is why this section also addresses the question of research reflexivity.

Principle	Definition	Norm	Action needed
Respect for Persons	Prospective research participants must agree to participate without social pressure or physical or psychological coercion	Voluntary, informed participation based on adequate information (on aims, nature, and consequences of research)	Obtaining Informed Consent
Beneficence	Researchers' responsibility to maximize benefits and minimize harm	Protection from harm	Ensuring privacy and confidentiality Ensuring anonymity
Justice	Researchers' responsibility to ensure justice in the selection of participants and application of research findings	Fair selection process and not out of convenience or personal prejudice The importance of fair-sharing the burdens and benefits of research across the whole community	Fair selection of research subjects Fair distribution of burdens and benefits Formulating research questions to emphasize the concern with equity and justice Giving back

Figure 1: Summary of Ethical Principles and their Applications

Respect for Persons

Respect for persons recognizes the intrinsic value of human beings and the respect and consideration they are due. Respect for persons means acknowledging and respecting people's agency and protecting those with an altered or reduced agency.⁵ In other words, as human beings, research participants have the fundamental right to freedom and to control what occurs to them. Respecting participants' agency in research starts with seeking their free, informed, and ongoing consent. Respect for persons demands that research participants enter the study voluntarily based on adequate information (i.e., voluntary, informed participation) and that they are informed of the aims, nature, and consequences (as far as can be defined in advance) of the research.

⁵ The common language used in ethical guidelines when invoking respect for persons is "autonomy." In these guidelines, we use agency instead of autonomy because the latter is based on western notions of individual sovereign selves, most often associated with white male able bodies, and has been challenged philosophically and in the social sciences. Recent commentary by public health researchers from Turkey and Lebanon has questioned the focus on individual autonomy in a cultural or socio-economic context where autonomous choices rarely exist (Nakkash et al. 2009; Oguz 2003).

Breaches to the Respect of Persons Principle: Compromised Agency and Deception

Researchers who breach the principle of respect of persons compromise the agency of their research participants or exercise deception by withholding certain types of information from their interlocutors.

Agency means that research participants, as individual human beings, have the fundamental right to freedom and control over what happens to them. The international literature stipulates that persons with reduced agency, such as children or prisoners, are entitled to special protection under respect for persons. Individuals who are not free to decide to participate in research must not be exploited by those with power over them.

While the use of deception in research is prohibited as a general principle, there are many situations where it is impossible to disclose comprehensive information about the research objectives to all research participants. There is an active debate about this in the research ethics literature. If the research requires a limited disclosure of the research objectives, the *debriefing* of participants is recommended.

Actions incentivizing participants to take part in research may compromise their agency. As a matter of fairness, some research projects compensate participants for wages lost or transportation and other costs incurred. However, payments may also be viewed as coercive if they induce research subjects to participate in research that they might otherwise be reluctant to join.

Deception entails deliberately misrepresenting the research, including withholding information and covert data collection. When there is deception, participation is neither voluntary nor based on complete information.

While the use of deception in research is prohibited as a general principle, there are many situations where it is impossible to disclose comprehensive information about the research objectives to all research participants. There is an active debate about this in the research ethics literature. If the research requires a limited disclosure of the research objectives, the *debriefing* of participants is recommended. In other words, if it is necessary to collect data without fully informing participants so as not to affect the data collection negatively, then informants should be informed retroactively **before** the data is used or disseminated.

Upholding the Respect of Persons Principle: Free, Informed, and Ongoing Consent

Free consent means prospective research participants must agree to participate without social

pressure or physical or psychological coercion. Informed consent is the most widely cited research ethics norm and is fundamental to the “*respect for persons*” principle. The most detailed standard for informed consent, “The “Common Rule” (US Department of Health and Human Services 2009), guides biomedical research and is sometimes applied in quantitative surveys in the social sciences.

Strict adherence to the Common Rule (Bryman 2008) stipulates that research participants understand the following: (i) what the research is about, (ii) the purposes of the research, (iii) who is sponsoring it, (iv) the nature of their involvement in it, (v) how long their participation will take, (vi) that their participation is voluntary, (vii) that they can withdraw from participation at any time, and finally (viii) what is going to happen to the data (how they will be kept).

Ongoing consent means that the researcher is responsible for ensuring participants’ continued consent throughout the research process by reminding them that they may withdraw their participation at any stage of the research.

Free, informed and continued consent is usually obtained in writing. Still, specific research contexts account for whether such information should be read out loud or shared in writing and how consent is documented. Socio-cultural factors affecting the application of strict informed consent guidelines include the capacity of participants to comprehend the information provided to them and their understanding of their ability to make choices.

It is important to mention, however, that ethnographic research challenges the notion of informed consent because this type of research requires a more contextual approach as it involves communities, not just individuals, and often, a lengthy participant-observation process entirely different from a one-off interview. Despite that, it is strongly believed that the spirit of informed consent should guide the research process: providing honest and open explanations and gaining the trust of opinion leaders and other participants (Fluehr-Lobban 1994).

Ongoing consent means that the researcher is responsible for ensuring participants’ continued consent throughout the research process by reminding them that they may withdraw their participation at any stage of the research.

Beneficence

Researchers respect beneficence when they *do no harm*, or they maximize possible benefits and minimize possible harms. Beneficence is not always apparent, and different claims covered by the principle may come into conflict and force difficult choices. For instance, an

ethical problem emerges when research may harm individual participants but promises future benefits to society. Many ethicists, however, would argue that the obligation to research participants is primary, and the more vulnerable they are, the stronger the obligation should be.⁶

Above all, beneficence is concerned with participants' rights to privacy and confidentiality and requires special confidentiality measures for data protection. It is noteworthy that vulnerability to harm is context-specific and may be tied to gender, class, nationality, sexual orientation, political affiliation, legal status, and other individual or community characteristics. For example, in a context where engagement in same-sex relationships is illegal or when criticism of authority figures is subject to imprisonment, special protection needs to be put in place to safeguard research participants from harm by the authorities.

Upholding the Principle of Beneficence

Protection from Harm. Biomedical research, based on the model of clinical trials, assumes that research participants may be harmed by the research process itself – the administration of drugs or the carrying out of specific procedures. Some experimentation in psychology fits under this general assumption. For most social sciences, however, harm will likely occur after research findings are shared at the publication stage. If reporting results requires the naming of key individuals, they must give their permission to be named. Every social scientist must consider whether some research findings, especially sensitive or controversial ones, might harm individuals or communities studied. Researchers may unilaterally decide to anonymize citations, even when their interlocutors have agreed to be named. They do so when they deem it necessary because the research may put said interlocutors in danger at some point in the future (see, for example, Nicola Pratt, 2020, 24).

For most social sciences, harm will likely occur after research findings are shared at the publication stage. Every social scientist must consider whether some research findings, especially sensitive or controversial ones, might harm individuals or communities studied.

The protection of Privacy. The protection of the *privacy* of research participants is required during the research and the write-up of the research findings. This issue is pertinent in household or community-based research and studies using the participant observation method.

⁶ Vulnerable groups are children, minorities, marginalized people, migrants, refugees, and victims of abuse and violence (European Commission 2018).

Privacy is violated when behavior is observed covertly, when interviews dealing with personal or sensitive questions are overheard, and when information about an individual is shared without permission or for purposes other than research dissemination.

Right to Confidentiality. While privacy relates to individuals, *confidentiality* concerns data and requires specific data storage measures to protect against unauthorized access and use. Decisions must be made about how personal identifiers will be stored. Implementing this requires researchers to separate names and other personal identifiers from responses to survey or interview questions during data analysis and reporting results. Researchers also need to ensure that the raw data of field notes, recordings, photographs, or any items that contain personal identifiers, will be protected from access by others.

Justice

The principle of justice refers to distributive justice: a fair distribution of the burdens and benefits of research across a whole community so that specific individuals or groups do not bear disproportionate risks while others reap the benefits. This is done through a fair selection of research participants. Under this principle, the selection of research subjects is scrutinized to check whether some groups have been chosen simply out of convenience or personal prejudice rather than for reasons directly related to the problem being studied.

Many scholars have argued that justice is more than just a fair selection of research subjects or the equitable distribution of benefits. Social research consists of an intrusion into a research participant's life as it disrupts their regular activities, requires their time and energy, and invites them to unearth personal information about themselves to researchers. While physicians and lawyers ask for such details, it is often in the personal interest of the respondent (Knott 2018). Unlike lawyers and physicians, social scientists cannot make that claim and can only argue that their research may ultimately benefit the participants and the wider community they belong to in the form of informed policy actions or by committing, from the earliest stages of research, to principles of social justice.

Upholding the Principles of Justice Through Social Justice-Oriented Research

Social justice is a dimension of the principle of justice. It calls upon researchers to apply the knowledge they produce for social transformation. Deriving from critical social science, this approach requires the researcher to redefine the purpose of the research as part of a broader struggle for equity and justice. This starts at the earliest stages of the study, when researchers scrutinize their research question: to whom is it important? Is it as valuable to the researchers and research participants alike? It also encourages the researcher to reflexively examine their position of power in the research process. Throughout the various research stages, the researcher commits to asking how participants would benefit from the research and what their obligations are to apply their findings to benefit participants. Social justice considerations become crucial at the publication and research dissemination stages.

The principle of justice refers to distributive justice: a fair distribution of the burdens and benefits of research across a whole community so that specific individuals or groups do not bear disproportionate risks while others reap the benefits. This is done through a fair selection of research participants.

It has also been stated that there needs to be a balance between what each side — the researcher and the research participants — gain from the research relationship (Hammersley and Traianou 2014). In fact, it can be argued that researchers gain more than their research participants since they extract data for free to produce research and knowledge that advances their careers in terms of reputation, promotion, and tenure, among other benefits. On the other hand, some researchers argue that research participants obtain benefits by having someone listen to their problems, even going as far as stating that some participants enjoy being interviewed and may find it therapeutic (Ibid).

In addition to rethinking their research questions and reflecting on how their research would benefit participants at various stages, researchers can also engage in reciprocal relations and committing to giving back (Hammersley 2007 in Hammersley and Traianou 2014). There are many ways of “giving back” to those who help produce research. Ideally, research results should be communicated and made readily available to research participants, who should be allowed to respond to the research in which they have been included (Alen Sula 2016). This can be communicated, similar to informed consent processes, in plain language and presented in ways that participants can understand. Writing blog articles or newspaper articles is one way of transforming academic knowledge into knowledge that is widely accessible and meaningful, resonates with research participants, and helps reach a larger audience (Knott 2018). Other reported ways are providing minor services of various kinds, from reading and writing letters to babysitting to supplying low-level medical treatment (Hammersley and Traianou 2014). A more direct and immediate way of providing benefits for research subjects is the provision of material compensation or gifts to ensure some level of reciprocity and fair reward for participants (Omata 2019). It has to be remembered that by accepting to partake in a research study, participants may have accrued costs related to transportation to research sites and their time. While providing some financial or material compensation is controversial, it has undeniable benefits. It should still be considered an option in light of “research fatigue as well as resentment for time wasted” or an overall mistrust of researchers (Omata 2019).

Ideally, research results should be communicated and made readily available to research participants, who should be allowed to respond to the research in which they have been

included. This can be communicated, similar to informed consent processes, in plain language and presented in ways that participants can understand.

Reflexivity: Beyond Procedural Ethics

Procedural ethics alone are insufficient to address the everyday ethical difficulties of research practice (Guillemin and Gillam 2004). This does not mean that procedural ethics are irrelevant. On the contrary, procedural ethics and the grasping of ethical principles, as included in international codes and guidelines, offer a checklist and remind researchers to be both mindful and active in protecting research participants and themselves from harm and undue risks, as well as affording respect for agency. They also remind them to balance the benefits of research against its risks, and to think of the steps needed to ensure the privacy of research participants and the confidentiality of the data received.

Ultimately, the responsibility of conducting ethical research falls back on the researchers themselves, and it is where, in practice, their ethical competence comes to the fore. At this level, “reflexivity” is an important aspect of research practice. Reflexivity involves critical reflection on how the researcher produces knowledge based on their research. It requires a sensitivity to, and awareness of power relations in the knowledge production process, whether in the data collection, fieldwork stage or in other phases. As a concept connected to ethics, reflexivity is not only focused on the production of knowledge but also the whole research process. Adopting a reflexive attitude entails submitting one’s research to continuous critical scrutiny and interpretation, not just regarding research methods but also with regard to participants and the research context (Guillemin and Gillam 2004).

Ethical reflexivity includes questions about the ultimate purpose of the research: is it to produce knowledge, advance the researcher’s career, benefit the research participants in some way, or a particular mixture of these purposes? It also includes the interpersonal aspects of research, such as the interactions between the researchers and the research participants. It is during these interactions that respecting the agency and dignity of participants lies, and also the risk of not doing so. Moreover, it is also during these interactions that the process of informed consent actually occurs and not on pieces of paper that a research ethics committee requires for submission.

Reflexivity is part of a broader ethical decision-making process. Appendix 7 charts this process and discusses the role the researcher’s moral outlook plays in it. By being reflexive, the researcher has to be willing to acknowledge the ethical dimension of research practice, recognize when an ethical issue comes to play, and use their abilities to think through these ethical issues and respond appropriately. Also, researchers must reflect on how their research might affect research participants before any actual research is conducted and consider how they should react in the situations they can only envisage at the early stage of research. It

encourages researchers to develop skills to respond in ethically appropriate ways, even in unforeseen situations.

Reflexivity is not prescriptive; it does not offer specific responses to research situations, nor does it ask to predict all likely ethical problems that may arise. According to Guillemin and Gillam (2004), to be reflexive is to engage in a research practice that: (1) acknowledges micro-ethics, that is, the ethical dimensions of the ordinary and everyday research practice, (2) sensitizes “ethically important moments” in research, in all their particularities and (3) provides the ability to develop a means of addressing and responding to ethical concerns if and when they arise in the research process.

Reflexivity involves critical reflection on how the researcher produces knowledge based on their research. As a concept connected to ethics, reflexivity is not only focused on the production of knowledge but also the whole research process. Adopting a reflexive attitude entails submitting one’s research to continuous critical scrutiny and interpretation, not just regarding research methods, but also with regard to participants and the research context.

Ethics of Social Science Research in the Arab Region: Why we Need Guidelines

Information on research ethics for the social sciences in the Arab region is scarce. These guidelines aim to initiate a conversation about the need for, or limitations of, existing ethics guidelines on social science research in the region. Many ethical principles may be accepted as universal, but the regional and local contexts of social science research raise questions and pose specific challenges for research ethics. Below, we discuss the various institutional and context-specific challenges facing the ethics of social science research in the region, justifying the need for clear and evolving guidelines adaptable to authoritarian and conflict-ridden settings.

Institutional Challenges

Countries and world regions where norms for the review of research are enforced, possess an adequate institutional infrastructure of universities and active ethics review committees or boards. Below we discuss this extant infrastructure in the region (mainly characterized by the overwhelming focus on medical research), the roles of review bodies, and the adequacy of training.

The Focus on Medical Research

Worldwide and in the Arab region, available resources and guidelines on ethics and social sciences are generally inspired by and better suited for biomedical research, and then applied uncritically to the social sciences and humanities. The existing literature on research ethics derives almost exclusively from the public health and biomedical sciences (Abou-Zeid et al. 2009; Kandeel et al. 2011; Nakkash et al. 2009; Oguz 2003; Ramahi et al. 2009). Given that principles of research ethics are derived mainly from the medical and laboratory sciences and originated in Western contexts and are adapted to the institutional norms of such settings, their applicability to the social sciences and humanities and to different social-political contexts poses many challenges.

IRB and Ethical Review Boards

The availability of ethical review bodies and the application of ethical standards varies widely between Arab countries. Appendix 8 provides an overview of the governance of research ethics in some countries of the region, with a clear distinction between resource-rich Gulf countries and the rest of the region. Although university-based researchers (both faculty and students) should be subject to ethical review procedures through Research Ethics Committees (RECs) or Institutional Review Boards (IRBs), in the region, only a few universities have established such bodies and procedures. When they do exist and are active, they may function in ways inimical to social science research, either because there are few or no social scientists on such boards, or due to non-academic considerations such as conservative approaches to social and cultural issues or state security perspectives.

IRBs and ethical review procedures offer researchers an ethics checklist that enables them to consider the issues mentioned earlier, in addition to giving them institutional credibility to carry out the research. Thus, this activity forces researchers to consider and reflect on principles of research ethics and reminds them to protect their research participants and themselves actively.

Typically, the REC or IRB committees would assess applications submitted by researchers before the start of a research process, advising researchers to consider the following issues: voluntary informed consent, the confidentiality of information provided by participants, the anonymity of study participants, and the avoidance of harm (Wiles 2013). These procedures offer researchers an ethics checklist that enables them to consider the issues mentioned earlier, in addition to giving them institutional credibility to carry out the research (Guillemin and Gillam 2004). Thus, this activity requires researchers to consider and reflect on principles of research ethics and reminds them to protect their research participants and themselves actively.

While ethical governance structures and codes help identify and work through ethical issues, the real responsibility rests on the researcher to navigate specific research environments and make appropriate ethical decisions.

Lack of Training

Based on its experience, the ACSS has noted a deficiency in awareness about ethical research considerations, whether in designing a research project, doing fieldwork or publishing research, and determining authorship. Grant applications received by ACSS often show that the ethical dimension of research is insufficiently elaborated or evident. In general, grantees do not receive adequate training on research ethics in their universities and cannot find it elsewhere. In addition, they find it challenging to identify, explain and write clearly their ethical conundrums and discuss specific solutions or strategies. This demonstrates that regional researchers need to acquire the prerequisite knowledge of ethics, as well as adequate information and training on how they should be applied during the research process.

Doing Research in Authoritarian and Conflict Settings

In authoritarian, closed, and non-democratic states, specific bureaucratic processes to control the research and the researchers may threaten the privacy of research participants and even cause harm to the researcher and their interlocutors. In such contexts, social scientists must be careful how they frame their projects, what permissions they seek, and in general, how to organize and conduct their research (Appendix 9). These concerns are exacerbated even further in conflict-ridden settings.

In authoritarian and conflicts settings in the Arab region, ethical principles and practices are often not easily adaptable, resulting in cases or situations that do not necessarily correspond to the normative principles to which researchers are required to adhere (for example, the challenges of obtaining written informed consent for a subject's participation in research conducted in high-surveillance regimes).

Research in Authoritarian or Closed Settings

The responsibility of researchers to protect their research subjects from harm takes on a particular urgency in countries that are marred by unstable, non-democratic systems of governance and often less than benign local authorities. The Arab region is not unique in this regard, as such situations exist in many other regions as well (see for example Morgenbosser and Weiss 2018; Janenova 2019).

In addition to protecting participants, in such settings, researchers must also take extra care to protect themselves since they may be observed and subjected to all types of harassment, including sexual harassment, their movement closely scrutinized, and their data seized and destroyed, further compromising the safety, privacy, and anonymity of their interlocutors. Female and younger researchers are even more vulnerable in these situations. This is added to

difficulties related to access: obtaining research permits, sampling and accessing interviewees, convincing people to speak to them, and, more broadly, establishing trust relationships with their interlocutors (Clark 2006). The situation can become trickier for scholars *of and from* the region. While foreign scholars are, in most cases, represented and protected by their embassies and ultimately return to their home academic institutions, constrained freedoms in the region mean that some academics can be sacked, arrested and questioned, and prevented from engaging in research again (Brand 2007).

The best way to guarantee engagement in ethical research in such settings is to prepare well in advance of the research, including practicing scenarios where some dilemmas may emerge and planning “a response in advance, in a calm environment, rather than on the fly under pressure” (Morgenbossler and Weiss 2018). Another way is to contact researchers, academics, journalists, and civil society organizations who have previously worked on one’s topic of interest to get a better lay of the land and know what likely ethical dilemmas may emerge. In addition to respecting the three principles of research ethics outlined earlier, keeping in mind two of the tenets of these guidelines, (i) ethics as an ongoing process, (ii) ethics as a situated and contextual practice, also aids in navigating potential obstacles that may arise in authoritarian settings.

In addition to protecting participants, in such settings, researchers must also take extra care protecting themselves since they may be observed and subjected to all types of harassment, including sexual harassment, their movement closely scrutinized, and their data seized and destroyed, further compromising the safety, privacy, and anonymity of their interlocutors.

Research in Conflict Settings

Ethical challenges in social science research are especially salient in regions afflicted with conflict and crisis. Many countries in the region, have also witnessed violent and sometimes protracted conflicts and wars that significantly increased forcibly displaced populations. These environments are often politically complex and dangerous, and research participants in these countries are likely to be traumatized and vulnerable (Khoshnood et al. 2017). In addition, some of these communities, such as Palestinian and Syrian refugees, are over-researched, leading to a feeling of research fatigue where interlocutors are less likely to engage in the research. This is in addition to the statements related to authoritarian and closed settings detailed above.

Research in conflict and emergency settings also poses challenges for Ethics Committees (IRBs and RECs) since such research often requires an expedited review and approval (Khoshnood et al. 2017).⁷

Conclusion: The ACSS Approach to Research Ethics

In this document, we have sought to present an overview of the principles and practices of research ethics — a neglected area that is of great importance to researchers in the Arab region. In various places, when appropriate, we have alluded to the position of the ACSS towards specific aspects of ethical research and in these concluding paragraphs, we will highlight and reiterate that position.

The ACSS believes in engaged, reflexive research and acknowledges that research is profoundly political at all stages, from planning, data collection, analysis, and publication, to dissemination and “giving back” to the community. The ACSS adheres to principles of ethical research, respect for persons, beneficence, and justice, even while recognizing their origin in the Western medical sciences and liberal democratic settings and hence their limitations. These principles are essential guiding frames, but their implementation should always be context specific. Rather than abstract principles only, the ACSS is invested in understanding them through concrete case studies and the experiences of its grantees and beyond in the field. These discussions are open-ended. They are continuous and continuously constructed.⁸ It is complemented by providing the infrastructures necessary for regular conversations between peers about these norms to foster a collaborative and sustainable research culture in the region.

The remainder of this conclusion reiterates the four tenets of ACCS approach to research ethics and summarizes each. These tenets are (i) ethics as an ongoing process, (ii) ethics as a situated and contextual practice, (iii) ethics that protects the researchers, participants, and society at large, and (iv) ethics as a case-based approach.

Ethics as an Ongoing Process: The ethical conduct of research entails more than the simple act of gaining the approval of a research ethics committee at the early stages of research. The researcher must be responsible for making judgments when conceptualizing and planning the project, developing research questions, gaining access to individuals and information, managing data and protecting personal identifiers, deciding on analytical tools, presenting findings in publications, presentations, and other venues and through to the creation of the final research product. Ethical issues should be assessed and considered at each juncture of a research project. Multiple judgments are possible, and ambiguity and uncertainty are part of the process (AoIR 2012). ACSS sees it as essential to encourage the integration of reflexivity into every step of the research process. This prompts a need for dynamic and context-specific

⁷ In the case of organizations, one solution is to develop and establish their own research ethics committees or collaborate with other institutions or universities that have their IRBs or RECs. One successful example is Doctors without Borders (MSF), which established its own IRB in 2001.

⁸ The plan is for the ACSS electronic platform to be a good modality for capturing the changing context and reality of ethical norms of research in the region.

approaches as researchers may encounter numerous obstacles or unexpected situations during the research process.

Ethics as a Situated and Contextual Approach: ACSS proposes approaching ethics from a situated and contextual angle. Ethical considerations vary significantly between national or local contexts and should adapt to new methodological approaches and technological advances. Researchers in different contexts have to deal with, negotiate, and apply principles and rules while always respecting the welfare and rights of all actors involved in the research.

Ethics that Protects the Researchers, the Participants, and Society at Large: ACSS calls for a deeper understanding of the peculiarities of ethical considerations for the social sciences. Central to this understanding is that researchers should protect the rights and welfare of the researchers in the field, the participants in the research, and society at large. The study should provide the maximum benefit to individuals or groups and minimize the risks and harm resulting from it. It must preserve the rights and dignity of the target groups (individuals, groups, or communities at large). Participation in the research must be voluntary and based on full knowledge of the project's objectives, and the research must be implemented with all transparency and credibility.

Ethics as a Case-Based Approach: Rather than prescribe a set of approved practices and rules, ACSS advocates an approach that attends to the specific needs of each case. Ethical conundrums are complex, and often there is not one clear solution to the dilemma faced. Researchers should manage emerging ethical issues in reflexive ways by being aware of the context and the contours of the specific case. Therefore, researchers need to attune themselves to the different ethical frameworks that would enable them to conduct their research with careful consideration, evaluation, and justification of ethical decisions when confronted with a challenge. Every researcher will resolve ethical conundrums differently, drawing from their own moral outlooks and ethical frameworks. Cases help to define and clarify ethical principles when approaching unfamiliar territory and contexts when the proper application of standard ethical principles is unclear. By learning and drawing from similar ethical dilemmas or cases, researchers can reach conclusions about ethical issues and apply them to the complexities of the issue at hand.

Finally, the ACSS acknowledges that this effort cannot be undertaken alone; other institutions and researchers in the Arab region should be thinking and working together on ethical and responsible research practices. By engaging with others, this effort would foster more locally specific approaches to research ethics in context, in conversation with global and regional discussions on research ethics. This would increase the likelihood of successfully developing a community committed to long-term mutual contributions to the culture of research ethics in the region and beyond.

Bibliography



- Abou-Zeid, A., Afzal, M., and Silverman, H.J. (2009). Capacity mapping of national ethics committees in the Eastern Mediterranean Region. *Biomed Central*, 10:8. <https://doi.org/10.1186/1472-6939-10-8>
- Alen Sula, C. (2016). Research Ethics in an Age of Big Data. *Bulletin of the Association for Information Science and Technology*, 42(2), 17–21. <https://doi.org/10.1002/bul2.2016.1720420207>
- American Anthropological Association. (2012). *Statement on Ethics: Principles of Professional Responsibilities*. Arlington, VA: American Anthropological Association.
- American Psychological Association. (2002). *Code of Ethics*.
- American Sociological Association. (2008). *Code of Ethics*. Washington DC: American Sociological Association
- Association of Internet Researchers Ethics Working Committee. (2012). *Ethical Decision-Making and Internet Research: Recommendations of the AoIR Ethics Working Committee (Version 2.0)*.
- Babbie, Earl. (2007). The Ethics and Politics of Social Research. In *The Practice of Social Research* (12th ed.) (pp. 62-86). US: Wadsworth Cengage Learning.
- Bryman, Alan (2008). Ethics and Politics in Social Research. In *Social Research Methods* (3rd ed.) (pp. 113-135). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Cannella, Gaile and Yvonna Lincoln. (2011). Ethics, Research Regulations and Critical Social Science. In Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln (Eds.) *Qualitative Research* (pp. 81-89). London: Sage.
- Carapico, S. (2006). No Easy Answers: The Ethics of Field Research in the Arab World. *Political Science and Politics*. 39:3, 429-431.
- Christians, Clifford. (2011). Ethics and Politics in Qualitative Research In Denzin, Norman and Yvonna Lincoln (Eds.) *Qualitative Research* (pp. 61-80). London: Sage.
- Denzin, Norman and Yvonna Lincoln. (Eds.) (2011). *Qualitative Research*. London: Sage.
- Eriksson Baaz, M., and Utas, M. (2019). Exploring the Backstage: Methodological and Ethical Issues Surrounding the Role of Research Brokers in Insecure Zones. *Civil Wars*, 21(2), 157–178. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13698249.2019.1656357>
- Flicker, Sarah et al (2007) Ethical Dilemmas in Community-Based Participatory Research: Recommendations for Institutional Review Boards. *Journal of Urban Health*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11524-007-9165-7>
- Fluehr-Lobban, Carolyn (1994) Informed Consent in Anthropological Research. *Human Organization*, 53(1): 1-10.
- Franzke, A S, Bechmann, A, Zimmer, M, Ess, C and the Association of Internet Researchers (2020). *Internet Research: Ethical Guidelines 3.0*. <https://aoir.org/reports/ethics3.pdf>
- Fujii, Lee Ann (2012) *Research Ethics 101: Dilemmas and Responsibilities* <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/ps-political-science-and-politics/article/research-ethics-101-dilemmas-and-responsibilities/90D5442392CD0716F04E764939054FF7>

- Glasius, Marlies, Meta De Lange, Jos Bartman, Emanuela Dalmasso, Adele Del Sordi, Aofei Lv, Marcus Michaelson, and Kris Ruijgrok. (2017). *Research, ethics, and risk in the authoritarian field*. Springer Nature.
- Guillemin, M., and Gillam, L. (2004). Ethics, Reflexivity, and “Ethically Important Moments” in Research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 10(2), 261–280. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800403262360>
- Hammersley, M., and Traianou, A. (2014). An alternative ethics? Justice and care as guiding principles for qualitative research. *Sociological Research Online*, 19(3), 104-117.
- Hamzé, M., Saadé, N., and Fawaz, F. (2016). Charter of ethics and guiding principles of scientific research in Lebanon. 15.
- Israel, M. (2015). *Research ethics and integrity for social scientists: Beyond regulatory compliance*. Sage.
- Kandeel, Nahed et al. (2011). A multicenter study of the awareness and attitudes of Egyptian faculty towards research ethics: A pilot study. *Journal of Empirical Research on Human Research Ethics*, 6(4) 99–108.
- Khoshnood, K., Sousa, C., and Clark, K. (2017). Ethical issues in conducting research in conflict settings in the Arab region. In *Research ethics in the Arab region* (pp. 133-146). Springer, Cham.
- Knott, E. (2018). Beyond the field: Ethics after fieldwork in politically dynamic contexts. Lewis-Beck, Michael, Alan Bryman and Tim Futing Liao (2004) *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Social Science Research Methods*. E-book.
- Lobe, B., Morgan, D., and Hoffman, K. A. (2020). Qualitative Data Collection in an Era of Social Distancing. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 19, 1609406920937875. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406920937875>
- Lupton, D. (editor) (2020) Doing fieldwork in a pandemic (crowd-sourced document). Available at: <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1clGjGABB2h2qbduTgfqribHmog9B6P0NvMgVuiHZCl8/edit?ts=5e88ae0a#>
- Makhoul, Jihad and Rima Nakkash (2013) Challenges and dilemmas of applied research ethics involving human subjects in Lebanon and Qatar. Powerpoint presentation.
- Masterson, D., and Mourad, L. (2019). *The Ethical Challenges of Field Research in the Syrian Refugee Crisis*. Available at SSRN 3522168.
- Nakkash, R., Makhoul, J., and Afifi, R. (2009) Obtaining informed consent: observations from community research with refugee and impoverished youth. *Journal of Medical Ethics*, 35, 638-643.
- National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research (1979) *The Belmont Report: Ethical Principles and Guidelines for the Protection of Human Subjects of Research*.
- National Committee for Research Ethics in the Social Sciences and the Humanities (NESH). (2016). *Guidelines for Research Ethics in the Social Sciences, Humanities, Law and Theology* (4th edition).
- Oguz, N. Yasemin. (2003). Research ethics committees in developing countries and informed consent: With special reference to Turkey. *Journal of Laboratory and Clinical Medicine*, 141(5), 292-296.

- Omata, N. (2019). 'Over-researched' and 'under-researched' refugees. *Forced Migration Review*, 61.
- Poduthase, H., L. Garza, and J. Wood. "Scientific research misconduct in social science research: What is it and how can we address it." *Sociol Int J* 2.2 (2018): 85-86.
- Pratt, N. (2020). *Embodying Geopolitics: Generations of Women's Activism in Egypt, Jordan, and Lebanon*. University of California Press.
- Ramahi, I., and Silverman, H., (2009) Clinical Research Law in Jordan: an Ethical Analysis. *Developing World Bioethics*. 9:1, 26-33.
- Ravitch, S. (2020, March 23). THE BEST LAID PLANS... Qualitative Research Design During COVID-19. *MethodSpace*.
<https://www.methodspace.com/the-best-laid-plans-qualitative-research-design-during-covid-19/>
- Resnik, J. D. (2011). What is ethics in research & why is it important. *National Institute of Environmental Health Science*. Retrieved from
<http://www.niehs.nih.gov/research/resources/bioethics/whatis>.
- Silverman, H. (2018). What Kind of Research Ethics for the Arab Region? In H. Silverman (Ed.), *Research Ethics in the Arab Region* (pp. 21–29). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-65266-5_3
- Sleem, H., El-Kamary, S., and Silverman, H. (2010). *Identifying structures, processes, resources and needs of research ethics committees in Egypt*. *BioMed Central Medical Ethics*, 11(12).
- UNESCO (2019). Charter of Ethics of Science and Technology in the Arab Region. http://www.umi.ac.ma/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Charte-Ethique-des-Sciences-et-Technologies-UNESCO-V.Eng_.pdf
- US Department of Health and Human Services, Office for Human Research Protections (2009). *The Common Rule CFR* 45-46.
- Weinhardt, M. (2021). Big Data: Some Ethical Concerns for the Social Sciences. *Social Sciences*, 10(2), 36. <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci10020036>
- Wiles, R. (2013). *What are Qualitative Research Ethics?* A&C Black.

Appendices



Appendix 1: Overview of Ethical Frameworks

Ethical frameworks exist as tools or means of thinking to guide decision-making in research so that when an ethical dilemma ensues, or a researcher is confronted with an ethical challenge, they can rely on ethical frameworks to assess what an appropriate course of action might be (Wiles 2013). Ethical frameworks are distinguished based on the driving force behind ethical decisions: principles and rules, consequences, or morals/virtues.

Consequentialist Approaches

Within this approach, ethical decisions are made based on the consequences of specific actions or choices, not the intent or motivation that lies behind them (Wiles 2013; Israel 2015). Therefore, a researcher assesses what the anticipated outcomes of a decision might be and goes with the outcome that generates the most benefits to the research participants and wider society. If the benefits that flow from a decision or an action outweigh the risks of either not acting or of doing something else, then the action may be morally desirable or defensible (Israel 2015). This approach protrudes that an ill-intentioned act with beneficial outcomes may be understood to be more appropriate than a well-intentioned act with undesirable consequences. From a consequentialist approach, breaking a promise or violating trust could be justified because it produced greater benefits than the costs imposed. Critics of consequentialism note the difficulty of evaluating the consequences of every act, for every person, for all time (Sinnott-Armstrong 2003 in Israel 2015). They suggest that, for example, this approach might allow slavery or torture if the benefits to the majority outweigh the harms to those enslaved or tortured.

Non-Consequentialist Approaches

Within this approach, ethical decisions are made based on what is morally right to do, regardless of the consequences (Wiles 2013). This approach regards an ethical course of action as morally right or obligatory if it keeps a promise, shows gratitude, maintains confidence, or demonstrates loyalty to research subjects, even if it does not promote the greatest balance of benefits over risks (Israel 2015). Non-consequentialist approaches emphasize duties or unconditional commands or doing what is right towards fellow humans regardless of consequences. While consequentialist approaches demand the promotion of good actions or behavior, non-consequentialist approaches exhort us to exemplify it.

Principlist Approaches

Principlism draws on the principles of respect for autonomy, beneficence, non-maleficence, and justice in guiding and making ethical decisions and was originally developed by Beauchamp and Childress (2012). When these principles conflict with each other, principlists argue that researchers should use moral judgment and intuition to balance them in an effort to make an ethical decision (Silverman 2018). Principlism forms the basis of procedural ethics, which is the practice of seeking approval from an ethics committee (Research Ethics Committees or Institutional Review Boards) in the early stages of the research process. Central to this approach is that consent must be given voluntarily, and that potential research participants should not be coerced or incentivized. Principlism assumes that principles are universal and transcend traditional and cultural boundaries (Silverman 2018). Principlism has been criticized for its reliance on Western values. Critics suggest that local values and cultural norms should be incorporated rather than endorsing a set of universal principles (Silverman 2018).

Virtue-Based Approaches

Within this approach, decisions are made based on the researcher asking what would a virtuous researcher do in a given situation (Wiles 2013). So, contrary to a focus on consequences or rules, or principles, this approach is person-based and focuses on the virtue or moral character of the researcher. Furthermore, it draws on the notion of researcher integrity and seeks to identify the necessary virtues a researcher would need to behave morally or ethically (Wiles 2013). It also calls on researchers adopting this approach to strive for the following characteristics: courage, respectfulness, resoluteness, sincerity, humility, and reflexivity. Further traits can also be added to the list, such as fairness, openness, resourcefulness, conscientiousness, flexibility, and integrity (Israel 2015). The question of trust is also central to this approach. When community members choose to trust a researcher with whom they have a long-standing relationship, they may be doing it out of virtue and an assessment of character rather than respecting their ability to apply an ethical code or a formal agreement (Israel 2015).

Virtue-based approaches have not been free of criticism. They have been criticized for their relativism (it is unclear what constitutes a virtue); their inability to handle conflicts between different virtues; their failure to provide specific guidance on behavior; and because even virtuous researchers are less moral when placed in less rewarding or more stressful situations (Appiah 2008 in Israel 2015).

Situation-Based Approaches

This approach denotes that specific cases and challenges inform moral principles and that decisions about ethical conduct are generated by analogy rather than by appealing to consequence or principle (Israel 2015). In unfamiliar contexts, a proper application of principles is deemed difficult and complex. However, conclusions about ethical issues can be drawn from similar dilemmas or analogous situations and applied to the complexities of the predicament at hand (Israel 2015).

Critical Approaches to Ethics

Critical approaches to ethics focus on relationships and interactions between researchers and research participants, the broader structural relationships within society, and the particular contexts within which decisions are made (Israel 2015). If a society is classified according to race, gender, or class, these relationships of domination and subordination will be replayed through research. Researchers adopting a critical approach strive to challenge power relations and reflect their own position within these societal hierarchies (Israel 2015).

Ethics of Care

Stemming from feminist and participatory research, is one example of this approach. Ethics of care recognizes the rationality and interdependency of researchers and research participants. In this approach, ethical decisions are made by drawing on the notions of care, compassion, and a desire to act in beneficial ways in relation to research participants (Wiles 2013). It contends that a researcher cannot anticipate and prepare for all potential scenarios of ethical challenges but that caring for research participants and doing all they can to enable them to be cared for is the most ethical response one can strive for, as it protects and respects the subjects whose life story has been shared (Daley 2012 in Israel 2015). The key features of this approach are: meeting the needs of others, recognizing emotions, recognizing people's rationality and interdependence, and respecting and seeking the views of others and their moral claims (Wiles 2013). Thus, an ethics of care approach stresses the relationships of people and the importance of nurturing relationships and highlights the importance of

context. This approach requires researchers to understand how their own place within hierarchies of power might affect their perceptions, to strive to build neutral and distanced relationships with research participants, and achieve greater social justice.

Situational Ethics

The context, place, situation, technologies, methodologies, and research participants as crucial factors in resolving ethical tensions and determining ethical conduct. Social scientists adopting this approach question research ethics governance structures that require them to predict ethical issues that are likely to be encountered in the field, to then respond only in premeditated ways on the basis of the complexity of field relations and volatility of the field settings. Instead, they call for ethical decisions to be devised to be responsive to the local and the specific. Ethnographers and researchers of online communities fit within this rubric, in addition to researchers operating in new environments and dealing with emerging issues in the research field.

Post-colonial Approaches

Post-colonialists adopt a view of research ethics that assumes that contemporary social relations occur in the presence or aftermath of colonialism. This applies to the research endeavor as well. The post-colonial condition should serve as a basis for developing emancipatory research ethics driven by social justice and the empowerment of research participants (Silverman 2018). Research participants are viewed as active participants in the research process rather than simply as informants. This approach criticizes principlism for its failure to take into account historical patterns of oppression and domination. Instead, post-colonialist approaches identify issues and questions for research in an effort to understand and challenge ongoing inequalities in the research process.

Appendix 2: Research Ethics Questionnaire

Please complete the form carefully and in full detail. By answering these questions, the researcher, or the research team confirms that the research project (methodology, fieldwork, data collection, study, and dissemination) takes into consideration the basic principles of research ethics in the social sciences.

Plagiarism: The ACSS stresses the importance of avoiding any sort of plagiarism such as fabrication, forgery, copying, or misrepresentation of data or texts that may arise during the grant period. Any breach by the researchers of these principles would lead to the suspension of the grant until the matter is fully reviewed.

The responsibility of the researcher is of utmost importance in applying these rules and principles. The researcher or research team should also report to the ACSS if some aspect of the research violates these principles as a result of the nature of the fieldwork and its specificities, even when not caused by bad faith or intentional harm by the researcher(s).

I. Research Methodology

Please provide details of your adopted research methodology, including the data collection methods that will be employed during this project. What justifies the use of this methodology?

Based on your project's adopted research methodology, please explain the recruitment procedure, including who will be responsible for identifying and recruiting the research participants and the ways for reaching and persuading them to participate in the study.

How does the adopted methodology take into account ethical considerations of the privacy of research participants (individuals or groups)?

Do you think that your research project can cause violations of the rules of ethics and cause harm to society or individuals? And how will you work to mitigate this damage?

II. Research Participants/Subjects

If the participants come from vulnerable groups, what added protections are planned to minimize harm?

What are the methods used to inform the research participants about the research objectives (oral or written consent...), and who will summarize this? Is it possible for participants to withdraw from the study, and what are the rules that govern them this right?

Will any compensation be offered to participants?

III. The Research Project and the Institutional Context/Setting

What permissions are necessary for the research at official/state level, the community level, the level of institutions (schools, clinics, etc.), or from international or national organizations? Do any permissions require information that may threaten the privacy of and cause harm to research participants?

Will the research go through an IRB approval process? At which institution? What are the steps to be taken within this process?

IV. Informed Consent

Will the potential participants be fully informed about the proposed study/project and their role in it? And will they be asked to give their informed consent in writing? If a choice is made not to inform participants of certain aspects of the study, please detail why, the urgency of doing so, and what kind of information will not be communicated to the participants.

In the event that participants in the research are unable (minors, people with special needs...) to give prior consent, how will researchers approach this? How can autonomy be maintained at the individual or community level?

V. Privacy and Data Protection

Describe the ways the privacy of individuals will be protected during data collection.

Describe the procedures for maintaining the confidentiality of the data during analysis and/or dissemination of results. What protection measures will be used for electronic and hard copy data? Will the data be shared with anyone else?

Is the research based on collecting personal information about the participants in the research? How will it be collected, and how will confidentiality, and privacy of information be preserved?

Will the names of the participants be published in the research, or the use of pseudo-aliases? (Please justify in both cases)

VI. Research Dissemination

Do you anticipate any negative consequences to participants (individuals or the community) from publications resulting from the research? What steps will be taken to avoid or minimize these consequences?

To what extent will research participants benefit from the research? How will the research findings be disseminated to the study participants themselves, and in which language?

VII. Working within a Research Team

In the event that two or more persons are involved in the research team, have the publishing mechanisms been agreed upon between the team members, and if the research includes the names of the research staff, on what basis?

Appendix 3: Applying Ethical Principles in Social Science Research - Quantitative and Qualitative Methods

Social scientists use a wide range of methods and tools to research living human beings, or *human subjects* that require ethical decision-making. Among them: *biographies; case studies; ethnography; experiments; focus group discussions; impact assessments; life-histories; online surveys; oral history; panel studies; participant observation; participatory action research; personal records analysis; program evaluation; questionnaires; role playing; secondary data analysis; social network analysis; structured observations; surveys; visual research (including photography and film).*

For purposes of illustration, we raise questions about two broad approaches: quantitative and qualitative research. The research methods and tools mentioned above may employ one or more of these approaches.

IN QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH. Social scientists designing and conducting surveys have a number of ethical decisions to make. Among the decisions: who the sample will be, how their choice relates to the research question and any particular vulnerabilities they may have; how to ensure the voluntary participation of research subjects; when deception is justified and how participants will be protected; whether there are any risks of harm to individuals or their communities by participating in the research; how to protect privacy during data collection, analysis and write up; how the research participants will benefit from the research, if at all.

Of these, two decisions are particularly critical: ensuring voluntary participation and the protection of privacy.

Voluntary participation/informed consent

How detailed should the explanation of the research be so that the selected person can make a voluntary decision to participate?

The “Common Rule,” the most detailed standard for informed consent, (US Department of Health and Human Services 2009) guides biomedical research and is sometimes applied in the social sciences.

At a minimum, social scientists using surveys in their research should present their research honestly and clearly so that participants can make an informed and voluntary decision to participate or not. Participants should understand (Bryman 2008:133)

- ✓ What the research is about
- ✓ The purposes of the research
- ✓ Who is sponsoring it
- ✓ The nature of their involvement in it
- ✓ How long their participation will take
- ✓ That their participation is voluntary
- ✓ That they can withdraw from participation at any time

✓ What is going to happen to the data (how they will be kept)

For surveys using interviews, should this information be read out loud or shared in writing?

How should consent be documented? In writing, with a signature?

If deception or limited disclosure is essential for research, what protections will be instituted? Will participants be debriefed?

The protection of privacy

For surveys using interviews and asking personal or sensitive questions of the respondent, how will privacy be protected during the interview itself?

What mechanisms will be set up to maintain the confidentiality of data, to separate names and other personal identifiers from responses to survey questions during data analysis and the reporting of results? And how will the personal identifiers be stored?

IN QUALITATIVE RESEARCH. Social scientists planning qualitative research must consider a number of ethical questions, prominently among them voluntary participation, the protection of privacy, and the minimization of harm. Ethnographic research challenges the notion of informed consent as it is applied in biomedical and survey research and requires a more contextual approach. Carolyn Fluehr-Lobban (1994:8) argues that informed consent is as relevant to ethnographic research as it is to survey research. Its spirit should guide the process: encouraging greater openness and transparency on the part of the researchers, empowering voluntary participants in the research, and ultimately, creating a more collaborative relationship between the researcher and the researched.

Voluntary participation/informed consent

Knowing that the omission of significant information about the nature of the research or its sponsors might affect participants' decisions to engage in the research, how should the research be described to the community without prejudicing the 'natural setting' of ethnography and its main method, participant observation?

What is the best way to make informed consent part of the natural development of the research project: providing honest and open explanations, and gaining the trust of opinion leaders and other participants?

The protection of privacy/confidentiality of field data

How are the raw data of field notes, recordings, or photographs, which contain personal identifiers, to be protected from access by others?

Are confidentiality agreements the best way to guarantee the confidentiality of data when consultants, research assistants, translators, and transcribers are involved in gathering data and analyzing the findings?

How are identities protected, of individuals, families, and the community itself in publications and presentations?

Appendix 4: Emerging Issues in Research Ethics

In recent decades, there have been numerous developments in methodological approaches in the social sciences, in addition to broader social, political, and economic shifts in Arab societies that have molded the way researchers conduct research. These developments have also affected the nature of ethical issues that social scientists grapple with. This section outlines some of these developments and the corresponding ethical issues they raise.

Research in Pandemic Times

The COVID-19 pandemic has profoundly shifted how social science research is conducted and raised serious questions about ethics and safeguarding research practice.

Researchers, who are closely working with communities using participatory methods or ethnographic ones, or any other type of qualitative research, are particularly facing a difficult time in maintaining their fieldwork. Because most data collection methods require direct social interaction, physical distancing, quarantines, and other measures such as partial and total lockdowns have pushed researchers to think about how to take their research forward and reconsider their research plans – whether to adapt or postpone existing research plans, or develop new projects.

Many researchers have moved towards the use of online and other remote tools as a way of redesigning their projects to take into account social-distancing measures and researcher immobility. The most obvious tools are the use of video-calling (e.g. Skype/Zoom) or the use of text-based instant messaging (e.g. WhatsApp) or phone interviews to virtually replicate the face-to-face interview or focus group discussion. Another method for qualitative data collection used is online surveys by asking respondents to type their responses to open-ended questions. While the former methods allow data to be collected over large geographical areas, the latter allows data collection from a larger number of people, relatively quickly. While these methods offer a useful communicative tool for conducting interviews or focus groups, they are neither universally available nor reliable for all researchers and their research participants (DeHart 2020). Problems may arise that might disrupt the data collection process, such as the inability of participants to use the technology or having a poor WI-FI connection. As important, researchers should be aware that these methods eliminate the social context of interviews or focus groups, and they should be considered as complementing rather than substituting in-person exchanges. This issue will be explored further in the internet-based research section.

Moreover, there are many other options for conducting valuable research with minimal or no contact with participants. While some have said that primary data collected voluntarily from willing participants is entirely ethical, others have argued that research during a global pandemic should only be conducted with either previously acquired or secondary data; (Pacheco and Zaimağaoğlu 2020). Still, others are opting towards the suspension of data collection or analysis of existing data sources (Jowett 2020), such as: print media (e.g., news and magazine articles) which can be used to analyze social representations of a wide range of topics; broadcast media (e.g., television or radio discussion programs) can imitate focus group discussions on topics; published autobiographies or blogs can provide first-person

narratives for examining a wide range of human experience; qualitative analyses of textbooks, websites, political speeches and debates and so on; online discussion forums and social media have also been used to examine a wide range of social phenomena. These sources of data can be useful whether researchers are operating amid a global pandemic or not, for easy accessibility. It is argued that by using these data sources, the researcher is examining the ‘real’ social world rather than artificially generating data specifically for the purposes of research (Jowett 2020). Additional methods to consider are: observational methods, content analyses, meta-analyses, or secondary analyses (Pacheco and Zaimağaoğlu 2020). This global moment, importantly, necessitates learning a set of new skills necessary to design and conduct valid, humanizing research online (Ravitch 2020). Researchers may opt to collect data through methods that have a documented potential for promoting psychological well-being, or which are also considered therapeutic (Pacheco and Zaimağaoğlu 2020). Such approaches include methods that ask participants to reflect on their own experiences (e.g., audio-diaries, reflective entries, interviews with photo-elicitation) and those which focus on positive thoughts or emotions (e.g., topics related to hope, resilience, progress) (Ibid).

There are also additional complex ethical issues to consider when thinking of conducting research during a global pandemic. The first thing to bear in mind is that the health and well-being of participants and researchers should take priority over research timelines and thesis/dissertation deadlines (Jowett 2020). Researchers should consider whether asking people to participate in research at this time will put them under any additional unnecessary stress. A core concern here is not to overburden people at a time of uncertainty, when they may be experiencing both physical and mental ill health, worsened hardship, working from home, or out of work, searching for jobs, juggling family responsibilities, sometimes including kids and elderly parents during the workday, or taking care of people who are ill and could likely be grieving for lost loved ones (Ravitch 2020). For example, attempting to conduct online interviews with health professionals would most likely be inappropriate in the current context. To do ethical research, one should be aware that during pandemic times, researchers would be asking more of their research participants than ever before and should try to be more intentional in planning for and collecting online data so that the research experience is generative, positive, engaged, and enriching. The following presents some recommendations to consider (Pacheco and Zaimağaoğlu 2020; Garthwaite et al. 2020; Ravitch 2020):

- Provide prospective participants with all the necessary information on what is expected from them, whether in an online survey or a virtual interview. Short and simple consent forms may not be enough. Respondents should be encouraged to ask questions. The validity of consent obtained in traumatic, unusual, and stressful circumstances such as a global pandemic may be questioned.
- Approach participants with respect, humility, and appreciation for their time and make an effort to schedule around their needs (e.g., childcare, work schedules)
- Give attention to the various details of the research design: (1) shortening the duration of online interviews, (2) giving participants the option of not turning their cameras on, (3) shortening surveys and demographic questions, (4) devising creative solutions to provide a benefit to participants. These do not have to be in financial or material form but could be in adopting methods for data collection that may promote psychological well-being and have a therapeutic aspect by asking participants to reflect on their own

experiences, and finally (5) considering whether a research study needs participants at all.

- Develop an ethical compass that raises issues of disparities of power and influence, uphold sensitivity when asking participants about their experience, and offer them the opportunity to genuinely shape and engage in the research design and process.

Internet-based Research

Online and remote research tools have been used for some time, and a rich literature on internet-based literature has been produced. Their importance is growing, particularly in the context of the global pandemic. Much warranted up-to-date guides have proliferated that help researchers carry out research that is appropriate and sensitive to these new and fast-shifting ethical contexts. (Lupton 2020; Hawkins et al. 2020; UNICEF 2020; Whittaker and Zakayo 2020; Lobe et al. 2020; Jowett 2020; Ravitch 2020). If researchers are thinking of modifying their method of data collection, from face-to-face in-person interviews to online methods, it is important that they inform their ethics committee beforehand (Jowett 2020). Ethics committees may help researchers in identifying areas of their research design that may be arduous to participants and thus have to be adapted to protect research participants (Pacheco and Zaimağaoğlu 2020).

In the context of the internet, researchers must reflect on the following issues:

Informed Consent

One of the central issues of IRB is the blurred distinction between private and public spaces and its implications on whether informed consent is required. Valid consent should be obtained, as it cannot be argued that online data are ‘in the public domain’. The online consent process is the same as the in-person one, which means key aspects of the consent information should be conveyed clearly to research participants (e.g. their withdrawal rights, how information will be disseminated, allowing participants to further probe about research aims prior to consent). As in all research environments, special care needs to be taken when seeking valid consent from groups whose members may be vulnerable to coercion.

Questions: How are the participants to be approached by the researcher? Will informed consent be sought? At what level – the site organizers or individual participants? How will the researcher ensure that participants are fully informed?

Privacy of Participants, Confidentiality of Data, and Data Security

Privacy is violated when behavior is observed covertly—even on the Internet when conversations deemed private are seen by others when researchers identify individuals they have studied or release or share an individual’s data. Privacy also raises issues about the expectations of participants in a site. *Private information* is information that has been provided by an individual expecting that it will not be made public. The online researcher has a responsibility to protect participants’ expectations of privacy and not to assume that people participating in online forums seek visibility.

Questions: If access to a site is publicly available, do members perceive the context to be public and their interventions to be public?

Data Storage

Strict ethical procedures should be followed after data has been collected online such as de-identifying data, and keeping it confidential, keeping various research files (e.g., transcriptions, field notes, and personal data), password protection, and encryption for data stored on the researcher's local computer, and timely deletion of audiovisual recordings (Lobe et al. 2020).

Questions: What methods will be used to secure and manage potentially sensitive data, and prevent the linking of individuals and data through searches and other technology?

Harm

Online environments, constitutive of physical, emotional, and physical distance from the research subjects, make it difficult for researchers to monitor participants and limit their ability to deal with risks and possible causes of harm. Potential sources of harm in an online setting are: (1) emotional distress caused by questions asked, (2) breach of confidentiality (3) damage to the welfare of an online group or chat room.

Questions: What is the potential harm for individuals and the online community to be studied? In situations where identity, age, and other characteristics of the participants are unknown or hidden, and vulnerability cannot be determined a priori, how will harm as an ethical concern be operationalized in the study?

Big Data

The term "Big Data" (BD) refers to any collection of data sets so large and complex that it becomes difficult to process using traditional methods. It refers to any kind of data generated in the digital sphere. Research using BD is characterized by 3Vs: Volume, Variety, and Velocity (Weinhardt 2021).

Volume: there has been a vast increase in the amount of data that has become available electronically over the past two decades due to the rise of personal use of information technology and, especially, the internet.

Variety: BD is not a singular entity. Rather, it comes in many different forms and encompasses data from a wide variety of sources such as internet connections, search engines, website usage, chat forums, email and messaging services, wearables such as fitness tracking devices, but also video portals, digital libraries, and the simple everyday usage of computers, smartphones, tablets, and internet browsers.

Velocity: This vast volume of data is accompanied by a rapid speed of how these data are stored, managed, and used for other purposes. Accordingly, the high-velocity aspect is coupled with providing instant access to people all around the world at any time.

The value of BD for social science is substantial. It has been hailed as the “new oil of the twenty-first century,” with undeniable benefits to policy, society, and public opinion research (Weinhardt 2021). So, what are the ethical implications of research using big data?

There is a fourth defining characteristic of BD: its *value*. For whom different BD applications are valuable varies widely, from state actors to private companies (Weinhardt 2021). From an ethical point of view, it is important to recognize that value and risk are inherently linked. What makes BD applications so valuable (for example to state actors) directly poses threats to the privacy and self-determination of citizens. BD opens up completely new possibilities for political interference, state control, and surveillance. State actors have for some time now recognized the vast potential that comes with the digitalization of life and communication. While historically states developed official statistics to govern their populations, administrators and authorities are now using BD for this purpose too. Thus, it becomes clear that there are severe risks from (mis)use of BD by state actors (Weinhardt 2021).

Additional ethical questions may be considered in terms of participant selection, invasiveness, informed consent, privacy/anonymity, exploratory research, algorithmic methods, dissemination channels, and data publication (Alen Sula 2016). The wide availability of online data (for example, blogs, fora, social media posts) makes them tempting targets for research endeavors. However, even though large numbers of people contribute content online, these spaces might not be representative or even appropriate for a given study. In fact, using data from an online community without engaging in questions of sample reliability and representativeness will compromise the ethical merit of a research study. For instance, each social media platform is known to have different demographic characteristics. Any study using social media data should note these limitations, and researchers should not use such data uncritically, making claims about the general population on the premise that such data is widely available.

In terms of the invasiveness, the prevalence and easy access of BD data makes it carry more information than is necessary to conduct a particular study. Collecting entire profiles of social media posts may reveal other information about the users, which could be damaging and used for additional purposes. Ethical researchers should be careful to collect and analyze only the data that is necessary for their research purposes. They can either refuse to collect additional identifying data or remove such data immediately from large datasets before moving forward with the study.

In terms of informed consent, BD data collection often proceeds without informing participants that a study is underway or securing their explicit consent due to the public nature of posts. Also, given the complexity and technicality of the new algorithmic methods for examining and analyzing big data, it might be difficult for most participants to understand how their data is being used or even what the results mean in the context of research questions.

To address these concerns, researchers might want to consider involving participants more fully at all stages of the research process. Ethical researchers also strive to describe their procedures in plain language that participants can comprehend, help them understand the role their data played in the findings, and represent participants in ways they can comprehend. Ethical researchers also notify research participants of their inclusion in a study and provide them with options to correct or remove data or other personal details about themselves. Furthermore, the digital format of data makes it unlikely that datasets will disappear over

time, which makes it more likely to be integrated and compared with other datasets collected for different purposes. The longevity of data and its unanticipated uses call into question the ability of BD researchers to guarantee the privacy and anonymity of research participants.

As for dissemination channels, the same platforms used to collect data can also be used to disseminate information and hence afford participants the opportunity to respond to the research in which they have been included. In terms of data publication, the publication of datasets along with research results brings ethical benefits for participations in addition to aiding public accountability and furthering research. By sharing existing datasets, researchers minimize the need to collect additional ones (to avoid duplications in research efforts) making their work less invasive and potentially less harmful to a new research population (Alen Sula 2016).

Visual Methods

Visual methods comprise a vast array of different types of approaches that use visual data such as photographs, film, video, drawings, sketches, advertisements or media images, and graphical representations and models created by a range of creative media (Wiles 2013). Visual data is distinguished into four types: 1) found data (such as family photograph albums), 2) researcher created data such as images or film taken by the researchers, 3) respondent created data such as models or drawings created by research participants and 4) representations such as graphical representations of data (Prosser and Loxley 2008 in Wiles 2013).

Visual research methods have accumulated a rapid growth in interest in their use in qualitative research, and there are a number of ethical considerations to consider that arise from adopting such methods. Perhaps the most apparent issue centers around the use of visual data or material that shows faces of individuals. The ethical challenges here are similar to those raised by all research, primarily as they are related to issues of anonymity, confidentiality and consent. Other ethical issues that have been identified in this kind of research are concerned with the ways in which researchers present images or construct them and the interpretations different audiences may make or the way in which they consume this image, which are not in the control of the researcher.

While many established visual researchers adopt participatory or collaborative relationships with their research participants, stemming from an intention to make materials that emerge from collaborations between the researcher and the participants, hence seen as jointly owned, nevertheless the potential remains for participants in these visual studies to be unhappy with the way they have been portrayed (Wiles 2013). It would not be surprising to argue that visual research methods do not fare easily within conventional governance structures of research ethics and regulations in social science research. This poses problems in relation to the review of visual research by research ethics committees. Proponents of visual research have noted the importance of visual researcher adhering to ethical practice and becoming members of research ethics committees in order to improve the ethical review process in relation to visual research (Pauwels 2008 in Wiles 2013). Thus, it is imperative for scholars using these research methods to: identify the potential uses to which this material may be put, minimize the possibility of causing distress to participants, obtain consent from incidental people who enter the frame, maintain data security and control secondary use of data (Heath et al. 2010 in Israel 2015)

Collaborative Research

Some forms of collaborative research involve partnership between researchers from developed and developing countries. In some of these contexts, inequalities and exploitative experiences have marked collaborative research, particularly in research in conflict and insecure settings, and these inequalities will probably be highlighted more in research implemented in pandemic times. Ethical issues governing research partnerships and collaborations are concerned with the overt inequality between researchers based in developed countries i.e., the Global North and those based in developing countries i.e., the Global South. The latter are referred to in the literature as “facilitating researchers” or “research brokers” or “local research assistants” and are key agents between the researchers and the researched who regulate the access and flow of knowledge between them (Eriksson Baaz and Utas 2019, Dunia et al. 2020). This group of researchers does not only come in the form of individuals, but also as institutions and organization based in the research setting. The former group of researchers is known as “contracting researchers” who contract facilitating researchers. Facilitating researchers are a highly heterogeneous group performing various tasks such as: providing access to respondents; translating and adapting methodology (interview guides/survey questions) to specific contexts; collecting data in insecure settings, summarizing the data and providing crucial inputs into interpretation (Eriksson Baaz and Utas 2019, Dunia et al. 2020). Despite their crucial role in the research process, facilitating researchers tend to be systematically silenced and erased from publications that emerge out of the research for which they have been contracted. They also have to endure precarious and insecure research settings with limited financial means and a lack of insurance on behalf of contracting researchers, often at great risk for themselves. Precarious living conditions may force them to accept work that involves considerable risks and limited pay. Dunia et al. (2020) devised a comprehensive approach towards ethical and collaborative approach that calls for change in these types of partnership:

- Rethink and challenge the authorship of research. Co-authorship is often denied for facilitating researchers, and sometimes not even discussed at all, on the grounds that it requires authors’ involvement in two or more parts of the research process (preparation/conceptualization; data collection; interpretation and writing) and facilitating researchers are only involved in data collection. This unfairly ignores the hard work that collecting data entails, particularly in insecure settings. Moreover, it erases the role that facilitating researchers often play in the other phases (i.e., translating and adapting the methodology and interpretation of data).
- Develop a remuneration policy that provides better and proper pay and a more transparent process through documented contracts, leaving space for the compensation to be open for negotiations, rather than presenting it as a fixed fee (passed on informally by contracting researchers). Compensation has to reflect the levels of risk involved and the changing costs of living.
- Since access to insurance might be impossible, until then, additional costs must be added within overall project budgets to aid facilitating researchers in covering unexpected costs crucial to their health, well-being, and safety. The insecure situation in which facilitating researchers work in without insurance and having to endure the payment of unexpected costs in the field caused by accidents, illnesses, theft and

managing intimidation and threats through the meager remuneration offered to them is untenable.

This approach places responsibility on various actors: funding agencies, ethics committees and research institutions; academic publishers and journals by requiring to acknowledge and list facilitating researchers and their role in the research; individual researchers by putting pressure on colleague who fall into the trap of exploitative partnerships through constructive critique; and on facilitating researchers themselves by developing union-like organizations that allow them to negotiate better pay, demand co-authorship and assurances of security measures and enhance research capacity by sharing experiences and arranging seminars (Dunia et al. 2020).

Research Teams

Scientific credibility in research practice is not only about the protection of research participants or the community, but also the members of the research team in charge of conducting research activities. Researchers are therefore responsible for organizing relationships and assigning tasks among the members of a team, whether they are students, researchers, or academics who have been recruited into the research team. Team leaders or principal investigators also have a responsibility for the ethical behavior of their team members. For example, on the issue of data confidentiality, team members, such as consultants, research assistants, translators and transcribers, who are involved in gathering data and analyzing the findings, may want to have them sign confidentiality agreements.

Another important aspect in relation to working in teams, is that team leaders should help members of their team negotiate their safety (Israel 2015). Team members should be appropriately briefed about the aims of the research study and should be provided training and guidance to conduct their assigned task (whether it is data collection, data analysis, transcription or any related research task). Principal investigators need to ensure that members of their team do not exploit research participants or coerce them into participating in the research study. It is also important to note that sometimes team members may be vulnerable to exploitation by their team leaders. Additional issues such as financial remuneration and co-authorship come into play in research teams. Agreements between members of a research team as to who will be listed as co-authors must be made as early as possible in the research process.

Appendix 5: Important Ethical Considerations

The Ethics of Formulating Research Questions

In any setting, there are ethical implications of how researchers frame and formulate their research questions. Research questions often reflect power relations between the researcher and the research participants, and researchers need to understand and address the power balance of conducting research. An uncritical formulation of research questions may perpetuate or reinforce discourses harmful to the participants and their community (Masterson and Mourad 2019). Research participants have the right to define the questions asked, to determine their needs and have them fulfilled, rather than have the researchers do it for them. Researchers need to seriously take into account how their interlocutors understand and explain their situations.

Furthermore, in defining subjects of inquiry, researchers need to be mindful not to adopt and reproduce categories, such as “refugees” for example, without reflecting on whom they exclude from the uncritical use of a category. They should use precise language that does not perpetuate prejudiced and harmful images of populations under study and stay away from categories that view these populations as a homogeneous group, undifferentiated by diverse experiences. Different populations may experience similar social phenomena differently according to various distinctions related to class, urban/rural background, gender, and sexuality. Falling into that trap means eliding and obscuring the diversity of human experiences under study. In defining research questions, researchers should honor the agency and self-determination of populations.

The Ethics of Conducting Fieldwork

Conducting ethical fieldwork starts with adopting a methodological design that is ethically sound, appropriate, and feasible and proceeding with implementing it to the highest standards. Ethical research pays attention to the local setting, responds to the needs of the population under study, understands and respects their circumstances, places the research participants’ best interests at the forefront, and critically takes into account the limitations and strengths of the specific research. Some scholars (for example, Khushnood et al. (2017)) recommend a methodological approach that is built on a human rights framework and participatory action research principles, which are grouped under the rubric of “reciprocal research” This methodology aims at conducting research “with” participants rather than “on” them and positions them as the leading voices of the research process. Central to this reciprocal approach is a confidentiality agreement to ensure that all data and materials collected from participants will not be used for purposes other than the research at hand.

A central issue for conducting ethical fieldwork is obtaining consent from research participants. Upon arriving at their various field sites, researchers bring with them forms of social and institutional power, even with their best attempts to disclose their intentions and

affiliations (Masterson and Mourad 2019). Some communities may be facing hardships in the form of social, economic, and legal vulnerability, which may compromise their ability to make informed, voluntary decisions to participate in research. Some situations may include people who have power over potential participants' well-being during the consent process (local authorities or IO/NGO staffers or a camp boss/shaweesh or when first interactions are mediated through local contacts). Such situations require that researchers have repeated conversations with their research participants to ensure they have sufficient freedom to refuse participation. If consent is given in the presence of those figures, it should be considered provisional. The same applies to data collected in the presence of those figures; it should be minimal and non-sensitive. Meaningful consent should be sought in a follow-up meeting or interview, where participants have the relative freedom to decide on their participation while considering how their decision might affect their relationships with local authorities. Researchers must also be mindful of how their presence will likely be monitored by local authorities, security services, local informants, or undercover intelligence agents.

In all these situations, it is crucial to avoid sidelining the agency of research participants. It is imperative to treat them as individuals who have agency and can understand and actively engage in discussions about consent and trust that they know their situation (Masterson and Mourad 2019). They should not be regarded as individuals with amputated voices, unable to tell their own stories, or who must have their stories told for them by researchers or other actors. In most cases, participants are aware of what particular sets of questions or interventions they would like to participate in and how.

The Ethics of Disseminating Research Findings

Researchers must be attentive to how their research and data are vulnerable to access and subpoena by state and local authorities even after data collection. Issues around participant confidentiality and the protection of their anonymity are critical in the publication and dissemination stages. The dilemma of balancing their respondents' safety and anonymity with transparency and richness requirements in the descriptive analysis is a huge responsibility (Masterson and Mourad 2019).

Standard anonymization procedures require changing the names of research localities and research participants. Researchers also need to acknowledge that whatever they choose to publish cannot be guaranteed to stay anonymous and that there is a considerable risk of de-anonymizing their data by state authorities and intelligence agencies (Masterson and Mourad 2019). There is also the issue of sustained contact with participants after the data collection phase over social media or electronic communication, which may compromise participant anonymity and confidentiality, mainly when the number of participants within a specific area under study is relatively small.

The Ethics of Collaborative Team Research

Leaders of research teams may exploit the labor of members of their teams, and tensions may arise over the attribution of authorship. Co-authorship is related to the distribution of responsibilities among different research team members that have significantly contributed to the write-up of a research publication (NESH 2016). Contribution means a combination of conception and design of the research project, data acquisition, analysis and interpretation, drafting of the manuscript, critical revision of intellectual content, and approval of the final version before publication (NESH 2016). Therefore, co-authorship must be limited to members of a research team whose individual efforts and intellectual input significantly helped produce the research product. Honorary authorships are unacceptable. General guidance, provision of funding, or data acquisition do not, in themselves, qualify for co-authorship (NESH 2016). Other contributors must be credited or thanked in the footnotes or the acknowledgments section. Further issues related to co-authorship and other tensions that arise when working in teams are explored in Appendix 4. Appendix 4 also discusses emerging issues in research ethics; researching during the pandemic, the ethics of visual research and the use of big data.

Appendix 6: Limits of Procedural Ethics

Despite its many benefits, ethical review procedures or procedural ethics only focus on the initial stages of research concerned with obtaining approval from a REC (Research Ethics Committee) or IRB (Institutional Review Board) and have little impact on the actual ethical conduct of research (Guillemin and Gillam 2004). Researchers have learned to develop ways to maximize their chances of gaining approval from a REC or IRB by using reassuring and appropriate language that the committee will understand, and may sometimes intentionally hide issues that may cause committees' concerns. This is to say that ethical research is much more than research that has gained the approval of a research ethics committee. The responsibility of ethical research conduct rests on the researcher, as ethics committees do not intervene beyond the early stage of ethics approval.

Thus, ACSS guidelines on research ethics do not offer a universally defined code to be applied to social science research in the Arab world or what might be called a top-down regulatory model followed by university-based IRBs or RECs. Instead, the guidelines serve as a tool for social scientists in the Arab region to help them identify relevant factors they should take into account, all the while acknowledging that they often have to weigh those factors against each other, as well as other requirements and obligations.

Rather than prescribing a top-down regulatory framework with universal rules, ACSS recommends ethical reasoning and decision-making throughout the research process from beginning to end and places the responsibility to act ethically on the researcher first and foremost. This is not to clear other sides from the responsibility of ethical conduct. The responsibility also rests on research governance structures such as IRBs and RECs, funding agencies, and peer-reviewed journals. But ethical research starts with researchers who will only act ethically out of conviction because there is rarely someone watching over them during the research process, for example, when they are collecting data, conducting interviews, or soliciting informed consent from research participants. The guidelines provided in this document thus stress the role of researchers in identifying ethical dilemmas, assessing the risks they entail, and adopting actions that attenuate these risks.

Appendix 7: The Ethical Decision-Making Process

The decisions that researchers make about the ethical dilemmas they encounter during the research process are influenced by several factors: legal regulations, their own ethical or moral outlook, professional guidelines, and disciplinary norms, in addition to ethical frameworks (see Appendix 1). Figure 1 provides an illustration of factors shaping the ethical decision-making process in research.

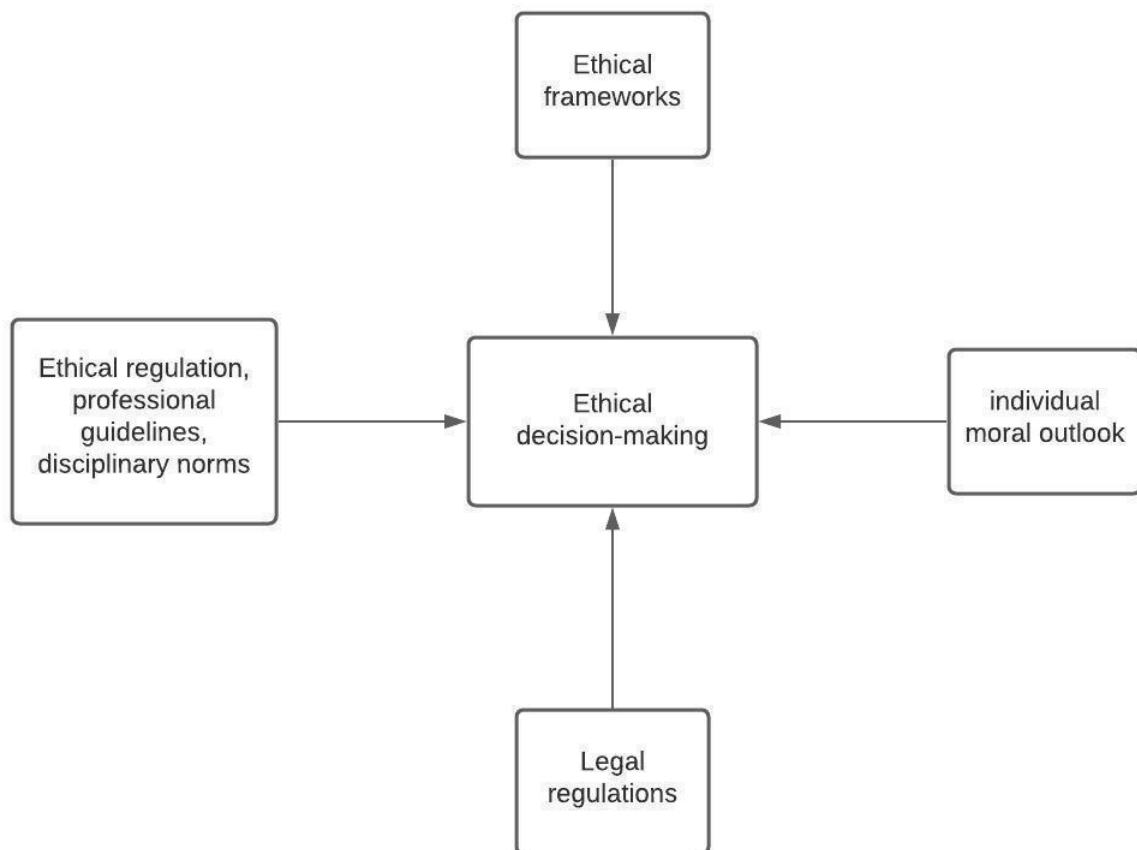


Figure 1: *Factors Shaping Ethical Decision-Making in Research (Wiles 2013)*

This section will explore each of the above factors in an effort to provide an overview of the ethical decision-making process.

Researcher's Individual Moral Outlook

In essence, ethical dilemmas are moral dilemmas. They involve researchers making moral judgments about the right course of action in a given situation. All individuals have a moral outlook about what is right and wrong that guides their behavior, which is shaped by an individual's experiences and interactions. These specific moral beliefs are inevitably individual. These morally "right" courses of action arise from a researcher's "gut feeling." Ethical frameworks help researchers to think through, explore and justify these gut feelings or

what an appropriate and defensible course of action might look like. Such actions may differ according to the ethical framework used and an individual researcher's moral views. The important issue is that researchers understand the different approaches to research ethics and use a framework that fits their moral and intellectual views.

Legal Regulations

Research is subject to several legal regulations that researchers must adhere to. Specific laws bearing on research vary across countries (Wiles, 2013). Researchers need to be aware of these laws before embarking on a research study and to be fully prepared before entering the field for data collection. There may be instances when researchers should seek prior permission from some authority in the country where the fieldwork is to take place (Glasius et al., 2017). Some countries may require a research visa. This applies to researchers who have to travel to another country for research. For example, to do research in Morocco, one is formally required to ask for permission (Glasius et al., 2017).

Professional Ethics Guidelines

Professional organizations have developed ethical codes and guidelines for their members, providing frameworks to help researchers think through the ethical challenges they may face. These guidelines help inform decisions about procedural and emergent ethical issues. These guidelines and codes are very general and do not provide answers to how researchers should manage the specific situations arising in research. Instead, they outline principles to enable researchers to think through particular conditions that might occur (Wiles 2013). They address principles such as the rights and well-being of research participants, informed consent, privacy, confidentiality, and anonymity.

Many associations in Western countries have formulated guidelines, such as the American Sociological Association (1999), the Association of Social Anthropologists (2011) British Sociological Association (2009), the British Sociological Association (2002), the European Science Foundation (2011), the Social Research Association (2003) and many more. Specific guidelines and codes on particular methods were also developed, such as recommendations for online research by the Association of Internet Researchers (AoIR 2012) and visual methods, such as the British Sociological Association Visual Sociology Group's statement of ethical practice (2006). Some existing ethical guidelines in the Arab region are included in Appendix 5.

Appendix 8: The Governance of Research Ethics in the Arab Region

In the Arab region, the governance of research ethics varies widely across countries. There is a clear division between the well-funded research structures of the Gulf countries and most of their Arab neighbors. Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Bahrain, Kuwait, the UAE, and Jordan all have national research ethics guidelines governing biomedical research. In contrast, Syria, Iraq, Oman, Palestine, and Yemen have none (Alahmad et al. 2012 in Israel 2015).

Qatar's Guidelines, Regulations, and Policies for Research Involving Human Subjects were established by its Supreme Council of Health (2009). Saudi Arabia's System of Ethics of Research on Living Subjects was established in 2010 and is one of the few documents to refer to respect for Islamic perspectives, albeit at the level of a general statement.

However, social science research does not garner much attention in these national efforts of research ethics governance structures. While the Qatar Supreme Council of Health guidelines established a set of rules and a review mechanism to cover all research, it offered exemptions to some low-risk social science research (Israel 2015). The KSA 2010 law defined research as a "systematic experimental survey that aims at achieving advancement of research or enrichment or development of general knowledge" (Art 1). This definition does not depict social science research.

Other Arab experiences include but are not limited to the Tunisian Ministerial decree on the procedures of experimentation with medicines (1990); the Jordanian Medical Research Law (2001); the Kuwaiti Ethical Guidelines of Biomedical Research (2009); the Saudi Code of Ethics of Research on Living Creatures (2010); the Moroccan Act on the Protection of Persons Participating in Biomedical Research (2015); and the Mauritanian law on the donation, cutting, and transplant of human organs and tissues (2016).

In addition, the Egyptian experience has culminated in the establishment of the Council of Scientific Research Ethics at the Academy of Scientific Research and Technology (2005); the Sudanese guidelines for ethical conduct in scientific research involving human experimentation (2008); and the Qatari experience in the preparation of guidelines, controls, and policies for research on human experimentation (2009), which explicitly stated their applicability to both medical and behavioral sciences; and the Algerian ministerial decree on the Prevention and Control of Scientific Theft (2016).

The most recent experience was in Lebanon, where the "Charter of Ethics and Guiding Principles of Scientific Research in Lebanon" (2016) was developed, identifying responsible practices in scientific research in general, including research ethics in the social and human sciences and medical sciences. Another recent experience is the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Charter of Ethics of Science and Technology in the Arab Region (2019). This charter is general and not specific to any field of knowledge.

However, even when they exist, these institutional bodies may not be effective. Fifteen countries in the World Health Organization's Eastern Mediterranean region (Abou-Zeid et al. 2009) reported that they had national ethics committees that met infrequently, had members lacking formal ethics training, and lacked financial and administrative resources (Israel 2015). Only four of these committees included a social scientist among their members. Several committees reported that it was possible to conduct even medical research without any prior ethics approval.

Appendix 9: Ethical Challenges in Conflict Settings

Avoiding the “Therapeutic Misconception”

Avoiding the “therapeutic misconception” (Khoshnood et al. 2017) is concerned with balancing the needs of the conflict-affected populations with the logistical realities of research. These populations often have high expectations for improvements due to their involvement in research endeavors, whether in the form of an increase in humanitarian aid or alleviation of regulations affecting their socio-economic rights. However, these high hopes clash with the realities of research practice due to the time it takes to conduct research and see the results translated into potential programs and policies. The desperation among conflict-affected populations may cause them to confuse researchers with humanitarian aid workers and conflate research activities with actual humanitarian work, thus fostering a “therapeutic misconception” (Khoshnood et al. 2017). This notion is intertwined with the question of “giving back” to research participants. From this, ethical questions emerge around whether researchers must deliver and promise benefits to research participants beyond the objectives of the research study itself. However, if researchers want to avoid the charge of exploitation, they must be attentive to the contrary concern of undue inducements that might emerge from these benefits.

The Moral Hazard of the “Dual Imperative”

Social Scientists conducting research activities in conflict-ridden settings often face a “dual imperative” (Khoshnood et al. 2017) of the need to respond to the immediate needs of the populations and produce research that improves policy and advances the interests of these populations. Researchers are often under pressure to be able to make a difference in the lives of the researched populations on one hand, and meet the demands and expectations of the researchers’ academic disciplines and peers on the other (Khoshnood et al. 2017, Masterson and Mourad 2019).

Over-Researched Communities in Conflict Settings

Some communities are frequent subjects of research. This problem of over-research needs to be brought to the forefront in discussions about social science research ethics. Examples well-known to the Arab region are research on Palestinian and Syrian refugees. Over-researched communities are growing increasingly distrustful of researchers and harboring a sentiment of strong research fatigue. The fact that such groups continuously and frequently receive influxes of researchers exacerbates their frustration, leading to their reluctance or refusal to participate in research. While engaging with over-researched groups, researchers should reconsider basic ethical research practices and implications for their work (Omata 2019). First, it is imperative to be transparent, open, and honest about research projects’ limitations in making policy changes to the studied communities. Second, the issue of reciprocal and fair rewards should be given more thought. More consideration should be given to the provision of more direct ways of benefits such as material compensation. Of course, researchers will need to be mindful of undue inducements that may emerge from these benefits, such as not persuading participants to decide to be involved in a study without proper judgment of undue risks.

Arab Council for the Social Sciences
John Kennedy Street, Ras Beirut
Alamuddin Building, 2nd Floor
Beirut Lebanon

T. +961 1 370 214
F. +961 1 370 215
E. info@theacss.org
www.theacss.org



لمجلس العربي للعلوم الاجتماعية
شارع جون كينيدي، رأس بيروت
ناية علم الدين، الطابق الثاني
بيروت-لبنان