Ethical considerations in social research
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Overview

- Research at ICMPD
- What is ethics all about?
- General ethical guidelines and standards
- Disciplinary challenges:
  - Ethics in online research
  - Ethics & migration research
- Resources
Research at ICMPD

ICMPD: http://www.icmpd.org/

- ...is an international organisation in Europe, Africa, Central Asia and Middle East
- 3-pillar approach: research, capacity building and migration dialogues

Research: http://research.icmpd.org

- Policy-relevant, interdisciplinary, empirical and comparative research
- Migration a. asylum policies, migration statistics, family migration, integration a. non-discrimination, irregular migration, migration and health
What is ethics all about?
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» Ethical problems arise...“when we try to decide between one course of action and another, not in terms of expediency or efficiency but by reference to standards of what is morally right or wrong.” (Barnes 1979 in Respect 2004)

“...ethics is a matter of principled sensitivity to the rights of others... Ethics say that while truth is good, respect for human dignity is better...” (Bulmer 2001 in Respect 2004)
Ethics as dilemma

- Variety of ethical codes
  - Focus on bioethics, Anglo-Saxon countries, qualitative research
- Guidelines can provide support, but...
  - there is no „how to do it right“, but rather a need for continuous reflection on arising dilemmas
- Go beyond rigid rules and guidelines
  - requires moral values, ideals, personal and professional standards, empathy and intuition, and flexibility. (see Bilger/ van Liempt 2009)
Ethical obligations of researchers apply to four levels:

- Society
- Donors & employers
- Scientific standards & colleagues
- Research participants

In case of conflict, which to prioritise?
1) Obligations to Society

- Social benefits and harms of the research
  - Effects of research questions and of the methodology chosen with regard to gender, race, ethnic, religious, cultural, and social groups and differences
  - Inclusion/exclusion, marginalisation, stigmatisation
  - Levels: Research design and composition of the team

- Balance concerns and interests of all relevant parties/groups

- Respect for inter/national laws
2) Obligations to Donors and Employers

- Increasingly important, in particular in migration research, which is largely policy-driven
- Independence of research? Clear and balanced roles
  - Balance between clients' interests, professional integrity, moral standards and laws and protection of participants (e.g. time and budget constraints impact on methodology)
  - Authorship in case of contradictory findings
3) Obligations to scientific standards & colleagues

- Selection of appropriate research method
- Professional expertise of the research team and composition, support (security of researchers)
- Factual accuracy (avoid falsification, fabrication, suppression or misinterpretation of data)
  » Referencing of previous research
- Transparency and openness regarding methodology and difficulties encountered
  Responsible dissemination
4) Obligations to Research Participants

- Participation must be voluntary and informed
  - Informed consent
- Confidentiality and anonymity
  - Collection, processing and dissemination of data
- Protection of undue intrusion, distress, indignity, or any other physical or psychic harm
- Access to participants
- Benefits & reciprocity; expectations of the researcher
Ethics & online research –
EU Data Protection Directive (95/46/EC)

- Quality of the data collected
  » Collection purpose legitimate, specific and explicit
- Data processing
  » Informed consent, options, tailoring to specific target groups
- Information on the purpose
  » Wider public? Intimate/ sensitive communications?
- Right to access data
  » Why? How? Correct errors
- Right to object
- Confidentiality and security of processing
  » Install protection mechanisms to avoid loss, misuse of data; analysis
- Right to a judicial remedy
Ethics & migration research

- Wider political context: Harms and benefits
- Asymmetries researcher – researched
- Access
- Avoid homogenisation
- Avoid a migration bias
Avoid a migration bias!

Factors linked to migration
- Reason for migration
- Time of migration
- Immigration status
- Nationality

Factors not linked to migration
- Sociodemographic characteristics:
  - Gender
  - Age
  - Education and qualifications
  - Civil status
  - Social status

Access to rights
Access to resources
Choices/opportunities
Vulnerability

The receiving context
- Immigration regulations
- Discrimination, stereotypes, xenophobia, racism
- Institutional settings
- Socio-political context

MASELTOV Kickoff Workshop, 30-31/01/2012
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Conclusions: Ethical questions continuously arise during the whole research process.

- Why is the research conducted?
  » Research interest and purpose, benefits
- How is the research conducted?
  » Methodology, representation
- Who benefits from research? Does research cause harm to society/participants?
- What are the implications of dissemination?

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To finish with:

“Ambiguity, uncertainty, and disagreement are inevitable” (AOIR, 2002)
Sources

- *Framework for Research Ethics (FRE)*, ESCR (Economic and Social Research Council), 2009