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Ethics in Research with Vulnerable Children

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The aim of the paper is to point out the importance of securing ethics in research in order to protect vulnerable children from psychological or physical harm during or after the research process. Numerous countries already have some regulations or guidelines related to human research and ethics committees are established to review and control are they sufficiently respected. However in the Republic of Macedonia there are not yet strict state regulations in this field. It is not obligatory to obtain parental permission for the child involved in research. Researchers in their master and doctoral thesis or other research reports sometimes present photos, documents and research results announcing the name and other personal information of children. Other ethical issues are related to the child willingness to participate in the research and the conditions that the child experiences before and after the intervention of the researcher.

Educational researchers should carefully assess the risks and benefits of children involved in research, to use approved protocols and to consider any potential conflicts of interests that might occur with publishing the results of investigation.

In the paper we recommend establishing of an ethics review committee as independent body that will monitor, review and approve educational research with vulnerable groups. The role of this committee will be to analyze the risks and benefits of the proposed research and to determine whether or not research should be done. In that way we will protect and ensure the rights and welfare of children participating as subjects in a research study.

Introduction

The aim of each research is to broad the scientific knowledge or to improve the practice and bring benefits to certain target group. But sometimes the research carries the risks of psychological or physical harm of participants during or after the research process. The aim of the paper

is to analyze what are the necessary conditions that should be fulfilled in order to secure ethics in research and to protect the children and other vulnerable population involved in research.

Ethical principles in educational and social research

Research ethics is related to implementation of basic ethical principles in any research, including scientific research. Research ethics can refer to the fabrication of data and/or plagiarism, but in this paper we are focused on ethics in designing, implementation and regulation of research that involve children. There are many ethical issues to be taken into serious consideration for this type of research.

Ethical principles in the social research are mostly related with: honesty, responsibility, trust, respect, beneficence, integrity and justice. Researchers should present results that are reliable, consistent and unbiased and others trust that they reported accurately. Educational researchers have the responsibility to ensure bona fide process and to obtain consent or actual permission from all participants involved in the study.

Researchers should not misuse any of the information discovered. There should be a certain moral responsibility maintained by the researchers towards the participants. They are obliged to protect privacy and confidentiality of the children involved, to keep their anonymity and sensitivity.

Ethical procedures for studies with human subjects were established as a result of research abuses in the last century, such as the Nazi experiments during the Second World War, radiation experiments with humans during the cold war or some controversial experiments of mind control made by intelligence agencies. The main documents which outlined the primary ethical principles and ethical standards in human research were Declaration of Geneva adopted by the General Assembly of the World Medical Association at Geneva in 1948 and amended several times, *Helsinki declaration* (1964), *Belmont Report for the Protection of Human Subjects of Research* (1978), and others. Mainly they are related to biomedical and behavioral research and most of the regulations refer to these types of research. But in the last decade more and more educational institutions and associations adopted Code of Ethics for their members.

Of course, some educational studies can be exempt of these procedures. For example, research that are focused on description of common educational settings, on use of various instructional strategies or classroom management methods, on evaluation of textbooks, curriculums or desk research based on secondary data or other materials that are already available in public, are not required to be treated by the ethical review boards.

Ethics in research in the Republic of Macedonia

In the Republic of Macedonia yet there are not strict state regulations regarding human research. It is not obligatory to seek for parental permission for the child involved in research. Researchers in their master and doctoral thesis or other research reports sometimes presents photos, documents and research results announcing the name and other personal information of children. Other ethical issues are related to the child willingness to participate in the research and the conditions that the child experiences before and after the intervention of the researcher.

Educational researchers should carefully assess the risks and benefits of children involved in research, to use approved protocols and to consider any potential conflicts of interests while publishing the results of investigation.

We recommend establishing of research ethics board in Macedonia as independent body that will secure ethics in research and protect the rights and welfare of children participating as subjects in a research study. Members of this board should review the research protocols and related materials used in research. They can require modifications in planned research prior to approval, or disapprove research if they find unsafe or harmful for the children. They should also control if children and their parents are well informed and voluntary participate in the research.

At least academic institutions such as Ss. Cyril and Methodius which is the biggest and the oldest university in Macedonia has to establish review board or committee to monitor research studies involving vulnerable children and other human participants, primarily to minimize or avoid ethical problems. Members of this committee (minimum five) should be selected with balance regarding gender and vocation. According to the practice from the other countries, those studies with minimal risks to the subjects go to expedited reviews and others to full reviews by convent meeting of the board members. Till now there is only Code of ethics as some kind of ethical regulation. In this document is stated that university researchers should: 'not manipulate scientific knowledge, nor used for inhumane and unethical purposes.' Furthermore, university workers should be responsible in 'the proper targeting of young people towards ethical, honorable and proper life science and professional activity' (Code of Ethics of Ss.Cyril and Methodius University, 6-7).

Conclusion

Research ethics is related to implementation of basic ethical principles in any research, including scientific research. Ethical principles in the social research are mostly related with: honesty, responsibility, trust, respect, beneficence, integrity and justice. Educational researchers should carefully assess the risks and benefits of children involved in research, and to

consider any potential conflicts of interests while publishing the results of investigation.

We recommend establishing of an ethics review committee as independent body that will monitor, review and approve educational research with vulnerable groups. The role of this committee will be to analyze the risks and benefits of the proposed research and to determine whether or not research should be done. In that way we will protect and ensure the rights and welfare of children.

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