

Chapter 14

Ethical Issues



Do what you can where you are with what you have.

Theodore Roosevelt

The Homiletic Review, Vol. 83-84 (1922), Vol. 84, 380.

Empirical research generates questions about an area or topic of interest and ultimately whilst conducting research we aim to provide answers. In doing so, researchers aim at gaining scientific knowledge about an area of interest; to link theory with scientific research. For example, researchers may try to understand why people resort to criminal activity after all. The use of applied research turns out to be practical in criminal justice as well as other social sciences. Examples include 1) the relationship between drug use and crime 2) stress and the police 3) interviewing tactics during investigative interrogation 4) memory and eye witnesses 5) sentencing – judge vs. jury amongst other areas of interests. In other words, we are examining the criminal justice system (court, police prison), the individuals who infringe the laws, victims (rape, sexual abuse, domestic violence, assault, murder, fraud etc) and families of respective victims. Whatever the methodology the researcher decides to use (interviews, surveys, case studies, field studies, archival research etc), there are ethical considerations that need to be safeguarded. As researchers we need to adhere to this rule “Inflict No Harm”; the interests of the participants need to be protected throughout as participants have rights and human dignity (Dantzker and Hunter, 2000).

What is Ethics?

The field of ethics, or what is also known as moral philosophy, provides us with recommended guidelines of what is right and what is wrong (International Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2010) . These guidelines aim at securing the nature of human well-being. As researchers we are creating new knowledge, but in doing so we cannot adhere to the principle *the end justifies the means*. Ethics stands to be one of the most crucial areas of research. Two cases that attest breach of ethics are presented below.

Case 1: The Stanley Milgram experiment

The Stanley Milgram experiment was designed to explain the Nazi camp atrocities of World War 2. Milgram was after a particular research question, that is: to show how subjects obey morally wrong instructions whilst aware that in obeying such instructions (commands to give electric shocks whenever the learner made a mistake) they are inflicting physical harm and emotional distress, following the pain (Milgram, 1963). In the 1960s Milgram’s experiment seemed realistic but today critics of the Milgram’s experiment claim that this should have not been allowed in the first place. The main ethical concerns for the Milgram’s experiment arise from 1) deception – subjects were told that they were participating in a learning experiment 2) physical harm was inflicted 3) some sort of emotional distress could have been inflicted since *teachers* were aware of the harm inflicted to the *learners*.

Case 2: The Stanford Prison Experiment

The Stanford Prison experiment was carried out by the undergraduate Philip Zimbardo in 1971. In this experiment, with the prison guards and convicts as subjects, Zimbardo wanted to show how guards and convicts behave according to the perceived predefined roles whilst disregarding personal judgments and values (Zimbardo, 2010). The findings of this experiment were criticized for validity but also for the ethical issues including 1) adverts in newspapers promising rewards for participants 2) prisoners suffered humiliation and punishment 3) the use of forced exercise and physical punishment by guards increased 4) prisoners were made to sleep on cold floors since mattresses were withdrawn 5) toilet use became a privilege not a basic human need and right 6) prisoners had to clean toilets without the use of gloves 7) sexual humiliation – prisoners were often stripped 8) prisoners manifested signs of emotional distress.

Criteria for Ethical Research

1. Informed consent

All researchers need to carry out their studies after obtaining consent from participants. However, participants need to be provided with full information about the research (its aims and outcomes), before giving their consent to the researchers. Also, participants have the right to withdraw from the study at any stage of the research (British Psychological Society, 1997). In the case of children (legally defined as minors); people suffering from a learning disability or an impairment which hinders their ability to make judgments and decisions and the elderly or emotionally frail, researchers need to determine who has the legal capacity to give consent on their behalf. Example: you are interested to study the consumption of alcohol among youths so you opt to use questionnaires with students in form 3 and form 4 as participants in your study. To be able to do so by ethical means, you need to gain consent from Education Division as well as countersigned consent forms from parents of participants.

2. Confidentiality and Anonymity

All information acquired through research needs to be treated as strictly confidential. In addition, the identity of individuals and organizations/institutions needs to be kept anonymous (British Psychological Society, 1997).

Imagine this scenario; we are studying crime patterns in each locality in the Maltese Islands. The researchers need to make sure that the information provided does not deliberately or unintentionally reveal the identity of individuals. In the case of Comino, the results could yield sensitive information about the only few residents who reside on the small island. So, in this case, the researchers could make use of local council boundaries to counteract this ethical problem. This is done so as to protect the privacy of individuals and to avoid exposing subjects to psychological, social and economic harm.

Whilst conducting research, we can create a database, make use of audio visual recordings and photographs. Researchers need to take the necessary steps to ensure that the information remains identifiable as long as it is necessary throughout the course of the investigation and this should be done with discretion. Moreover, this information needs to be rendered anonymous when personal identification of data is deemed no longer essential. In circumstances where anonymity and confidentiality cannot be guaranteed, subjects need to be fully aware of this before consenting to participate (British Psychological Society, 1997).

3. Objectivity

Biases, beliefs and personal values do contaminate and compromise the validity of research. At this stage, one would ask how the social scientist can escape from his/her own mind. According to Weber (Gerth and Mills, 2001), the social scientist should be aware of his/her own values and perspectives and then would be in a position to conduct a value free investigation. The researcher needs to adopt a neutral stance. In other words, if two independent researchers were to conduct the same study separately, they should come up with the same results. Scientific research is interested in facts and unbiased interpretation of the data created, rather than the interpretation of facts (Wimmer and Dominick, 1991).

4. Deception

It is unacceptable to provide participants with misleading information or with partial information about the study they have consented to act as subjects (British Psychological Society, 1997). On the other hand, a researcher can decide to work *undercover* as a volunteer in a drug rehabilitation institute to study the effectiveness of drug rehabilitation programmes. This type of research turns out to be controversial since participants have been deceived and also informed consent was not granted.

Referencing

Scientific research distinguishes itself through the fact that knowledge provided by researchers is made public. The reviewing of existent literature (journal articles and books) and relevant theories is a key factor to producing a valid piece of work. This section in the research report summarises all other research work that has been carried out in the field (Wimmer and Dominick, 1991). All information provided here should be relevant to the area being investigated and also correct. Also understanding how to use and acknowledge the work of others is essential to learn how to avoid plagiarism. Researchers who fail to include a full and adequately presented reference section can be harshly penalised.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism is “the unauthorized use or close imitation of the language and thoughts of another author and the representation of them as one's own original work” (<http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/plagiarism>).

Plagiarism can occur not only in the use of text but also in the use of tables, illustrations, maps, diagrams ... etc ... The internet has become a popular and accessible tool for most of us. So you might be tempted to make use of paragraphs read on-line, edit and change a few verbs and present the paragraphs as if they were your own. This is a classical example of plagiarism. So make sure that every text cited is fully referenced and also any captions are fully referenced; remember any ideas that are not your own need to be fully referenced. Example: you are aware that in the Maltese Islands the population stands to be 404, 962. However, this data has been collected by the National Statistics Office in the last census exercise! Thus, you need to acknowledge and adequately reference studies so as to avoid plagiarism. Also, universities provide guidelines for students so, when they still plagiarise, they have no excuse! The University of Malta guidelines can be accessed through this URL addresses: <http://www.um.edu.mt/registrar/regulations/general>.

How to compile a reference section

In this section, guidelines are provided so as to help researchers compile a reference section that is requested at the end of a scientific report. All references should be arranged alphabetically by the surname of the first author. **The guidelines outlined in this chapter are based on the guidelines provided by the American Psychological Association (2002).** For a free tutorial about the use of APA style please go to:

<http://www.apastyle.org/learn/tutorials/basics-tutorial.aspx>

Two frequent questions posed by student researchers are: (1) What if the same author has different publications? (2) What if the same author has two or more publications in the same year? In the first case, the sources of evidence need to be arranged according to the year of publication – with the earliest one first. For example:

Wagstaff, G.F. (1981)

Wagstaff, G.F. (1982)

In the second case one needs to use the lower case letters just after the year of publication so as to distinguish between the two different sources.

Gelsthorpe, L. (1985a). *Gender Issues* ...

Gelsthorpe, L. (1985b). *Girls Crime and...*

Researchers want their hard work to be recognised, however may encounter sources where the author signs as anonymous or anon. This can still be used as evidence. Also, in consulting documents, such as the Census data mentioned previously, one would come across a document with no identifiable author. In this case, the data has been gathered by the National Statistics Office during the last Census exercise. When consulting documents compiled by institutions and organisations (government and NGOs), this occurs frequently. The following examples will guide you through referencing.

Anonymous, 2010

National Statistics Office, 2007

Federal Bureau of Investigation (1986). *Age- specific Arrest Rates and Race-specific Arrest rates for Selected Offences 1965-1985*. US Department of Justice. Washington DC: Government Printing Press.

Referencing books

The use of books is a valid research tool as it exposes one to theories, knowledge and also scientific findings. Also, these are readily accessible to students (books are provided to students on loan by most University libraries). However, one has to clearly distinguish between an edited book, a revised edition and books that have more than one edition.

One author book:

Ainsworth, P.B. (2000). *Psychology and Crime: Myths and Reality*. Essex: Pearson Education Limited.

A third edition book:

Wimmer, R.D., & Dominick J.R. (1991). *Mass Media Research: An Introduction* (3rd ed.). United States of America: Wadsworth Inc.

A revised edition book:

Bass E., & Davis L. (2003). *Beginning to Heal: A First Book for Men and women Who were Sexually Abused as Children* (Rev. ed). New York: Harpers Collins Publishers.

An Edited book:

Jackson, J.L. & Bekerian, D.A. (Eds.). *Offender Profiling: Theory, research and practice*. Chichester: Wiley.

However, we often make use of a chapter in a book rather than the entire book. Then referencing should be as follows:

Example:

A chapter in a book:

Gudjonsson, G.H. and Copson, G. (1997). The role of the expert in criminal investigation. In J.L. Jackson and D.A. Bekerian (Eds.), *Offender Profiling: Theory, Research and practice* (pp.61-76). Chichester: Wiley.

Sometimes researchers need to make use of legal sources to consolidate arguments. These sources need to be considered as works that have no identifiable author example:

The Probation Act: Chapter 446 (2002). The Laws of Malta.

Referencing Journal articles

Consulting and reading journal articles enriches the literature review and exposes one to findings of other researchers in the field. Referencing should follow this procedure.

Example:

Crombag, H.F.M. (1994). Law as a Branch of Applied Psychology. *Psychology, Crime and Law*, 1, 1-9.

However if a journal has more than six authors, use et al. The following example will help you.

Foley, D.L., Pickles, A., Simonoff, E., Maes, H.H., Silberg, J.L., Hewitt, J.K., et al. (2001). Parental concordance and Comorbidity of psychiatric disorder and associate risks for current psychiatric symptoms and disorders in a community sample of juvenile twins. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 42, 381-394.

Another frequent occurrence is the use of abstracts of journal articles and not the entire journal as these are provided free by universities' online libraries. In this case, one has to indicate clearly that the source is an abstract.

Example:

Kovandzic, T.V., Vieraitis, L.M. & Boots, D.P. (2009). Does the death penalty save lives? New Evidence from state panel data, 1977 to 2006 [Abstract]. *Criminology and Public Policy*, 8 (4), 803.

Information from secondary sources

This happens when you read about a study in a book, site or an article but you do not have the original source. Use the 'cited in' rule.

For example:

"In a study conducted by Moffit (1993, as cited in Farrington, 1995) found that.."

"Research shows that ... (Moffit, 1993, as cited in Farrington, 1995)"

However in the reference section only the details of the secondary source are to be listed.

Example:

Farrington, D.P. (1995). The Development of Offending and Antisocial Behaviour from Childhood: Key Findings from the Cambridge Study in Delinquent. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 36, 929-964.

Internet and Newspaper sources

The use of the internet has surged in the last decade. This information is public and easily accessible. However, all information, data, charts, imagery etc. derived from the net needs to be referenced, otherwise this would be a case of plagiarism. Referencing should be as follows and one needs to distinguish between a document provided by an organisation and online journals.

Example:

International Encyclopaedia of Philosophy (2010, July 14). *Ethics*. Retrieved July 14, 2010 from <http://www.iep.utm.edu/ethics/>

Example of a journal article retrieved online:

Kassin, S.M., Drizin, S.A., Grisso, T., Gudjonsson, G.H., Leo, R.A. & Redlich, A.D. (2010). *Police-Induced Confessions risk factors and Recommendations*. *Law and Human Behaviour*, 34, 3-38. Retrieved July, 17, 2010, from [http://www.williams.edu/Psychology/Faculty/Kassin/files/White%20Paper%20-20%LHB%20\(2010\).pdf](http://www.williams.edu/Psychology/Faculty/Kassin/files/White%20Paper%20-20%LHB%20(2010).pdf)

One may also consult local newspapers in collecting information about a topic of interest.

Example:

Chetcuti, K. (2010, August 29). Book lures readers like bees to honey. *The Sunday Times*, pp. 41.

Referencing Doctoral Dissertations; Encyclopedias and dictionaries

The use of dictionaries and reference books such as encyclopedias is useful, although one should be careful when to use them. Also the use of doctoral dissertations exposes one to knowledge and research carried out by other experts in the field.

Examples:

Waite, M. & Hawker, S. (Eds.). (2009). *Oxford Paperback Dictionary & Thesaurus* (3rd ed.). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Formosa, S. (2007). *Spatial analysis of temporal criminality evolution: an environmental criminology study of crime in the Maltese Islands*. Un-published doctoral dissertation, University of Huddersfield, United Kingdom.

Unpublished Paper presented in a Conference

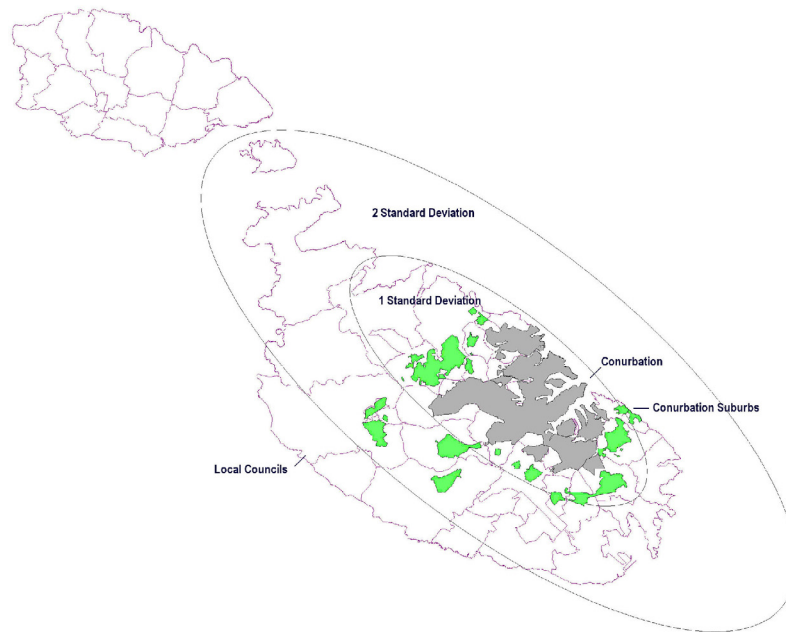
Attending conferences and symposia is also a good way of gaining knowledge and exposure to studies carried out in the field. The following is an example of referencing an unpublished paper presented in a conference.

Scicluna, S. (2010, April). The Development of Imprisonment for Women in Malta. *In Criminality in Island States*. National Crime Conference 2010 of the Malta Criminology Association, Malta.

Referencing drawings

All information that is not your intellectual property has to be referenced. This also applies to tables, figures, diagrams, photographs, maps and graphs. The following is an example of referencing a figure presented in a journal in an edited book.

Figure 1: Offence Standard Deviation Ellipse (SDe) at 1NNH and 2NNH¹



1 From "Maltese Criminological Landscapes – A Spatio-Temporal Case Where Physical and Social Worlds Meet," by S. Formosa, 2010, *Peer Reviewed Proceedings of Digital Landscape Architecture 2010*, p.115. Copyright 2010 by the Anhalt University of Applied Sciences. Reprinted with permission of the author.

Ethics and referencing form the backbone of any research study. One cannot conduct a study without first checking the ethical issues involved. On the other hand referencing gives your study a professional orientation. It is not acceptable for one to conduct research without keeping in mind these two very important notions. Throughout this book we have seen a variety of methodologies that could be adopted in a research study. These, together with referencing and ethics make a research study complete.

Questions (refer to Appendix for the answers)

1. What does ethics (or moral philosophy) provide us with?
2. Why are ethical considerations important for researchers?
3. Mention two cases of research studies that attest breach of ethics.
4. List the four main criteria for ethical research.
5. What is plagiarism?
6. In Criminology, referencing should be compiled on the guidelines provided by a particular association. Which association is this?
7. With regards to referencing: what needs to be done if the same author has different publications?
8. With regards to referencing: what does one need to do if the same author has two or more publications in the same year?