

# Ethical Considerations in Post-Disaster Housing Research

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**Abstract:-** Research ethics involves standard requirements for its workability, protects the dignity of the subject(s). In post-disaster housing research this can be categorised into three aspects; the occupants/users of the facilities, the type of building/structure provided for the victims, and the kind of environment which it is situated. The paper reviewed various ethical consideration of research in post-disaster housing. The research approach adopted for this study was based on an in-depth literature review. The study examined different code of ethics, conduct and literary standards and how it relates to research in post-disaster housing, because literature on the post-disaster housing research repetitively reveals ethical questions, conflicting values, and ambiguity in decision-making. The research concludes that there is lack of clarity in ethical standard in post-disaster housing research and encourages researchers, professionals, and government agencies to develop more awareness and efficient framework in post-disaster housing research to address the issues of human rights. It recommended that research ethics must receive special attention in the post-disaster housing studies. Any form of criticism should be attended to and not suppressed.

**Keywords:-** Ethics, Housing, Post-disaster, Research.

## I. INTRODUCTION

There are different forms of ethical considerations in the world of research. These ethical issues surface because of externalised research works from human cause. Some personalise their works for self-gain, while others are coerced. A good example is Hitler's architect Speer whose works were devoted to praise Hitler [1].

In the field of ethics (or moral philosophy), concepts of right and wrong conduct are regulated, defended, and advised. [2]. Ethics for social research is about building a trust-based relationship between the researcher and the researcher. To establish trust, it is important to plan and manage communication attentively and to minimize risks and to maximize benefits. Researchers must respect a few ethical principles in developing a sustainable relationship, including benefits, autonomy, non-maliciousness, justice, truthfulness, and privacy [3]. The participation agreement must be voluntary, coercion-free and without unnecessary influence. The emphasis must be on the protection of the subjects involved in carrying out the research and the promotion of the well-being of people [4].

Ancient Greek philosophical ethics examines moral life, referring to a system of principles that could change previous considerations of choices and actions significantly. Ethics is said to be the philosophical branch that deals with decisions on the right and wrong aspects. In all human activities, scientific work in research is governed by individual, community, and social values [5,4]. The study highlights some of these salient ethical issues.

## II. MEANING OF ETHICS

A field of moral philosophy that addresses the standards that govern behaviour. In relation to social researchers' ethical issues, most knowledgeable societies and relevant professional entities have code of ethics that provide guidance on which is an unacceptable practice and what is not [6,7,8].

### 2.1 What are Research Ethics

The concept of research ethics is widespread. It goes beyond thinking of issues arising from human research. While these issues are indeed a key component in research ethics, the importance of publishing findings transparently, the work of another person not plagiarism and not counterfeiting etc. also arises in wider questions regarding standards of conduct [3,9].

### 2.2 The Importance of Ethical Research

For several reasons, research ethics are important.

- i. Encourage research goals such as knowledge expansion.
- ii. Support the necessary values of mutual respect and fairness for collaborative work. This is crucial because scientific research depends on researchers and groups working together.
- iii. The researchers can be held responsible as many researchers receive public funding. Conflict of interest regulations and misbehaviour must be addressed carefully.
- iv. Ensure that the public has confidence in research and donors have confidence in it to support and finance research.
- v. Encourage important social and moral values such as the principle of not harming others, especially in housing research after disasters [4].

## III. HISTORICAL OVERVIEW – ETHICAL CODES IN POST-DISASTER HOUSING

In general, research on humans even before the 18th century has been done in science as well as in post-disaster household studies. The ethics of researchers, however, only drew social interest in several cases after the 1940s as a result of human exploitation. Since then, professional codes and

laws have been introduced to prevent scientific human life abuse. The Nazi experiments led to the Nuremberg Code (1947) which became the main code for the protection of human rights in science for all subsequent codes. The code is focused on voluntary informed consent, freedom to withdraw from research, physical, mental or death protection. It also highlights the balance between risk and benefits [10]. These also apply to post-disaster housing studies.

### 3.1 Informed Consent

The best way to understand informed consent is to consider what it means to be informed and to give consent. Being informed means that all the events during the study can be understood and explained to the participants. Giving consent implies that.

- i. The participation agreement is voluntary, free of coercion and excessive influence and
- ii. That the individual who gives his consent is competent to judge rationally and maturely. When the criteria for informing and consenting are met, informed consent will be granted [11,12,13].

#### 3.1.1 The Practice of Consent Writing

In post-disaster housing research, written consent is a good practice. However, this may not always be the case for example when undertaking focus groups in post-disaster housing research. Consent forms should be secured with attached personal identity information to avoid confidential infringements [14].

#### 3.1.2 Which information on a good Consent Form should be included?

According to [3] the following information should be included in a consent form.

- i. A title heading, the research organization, and the name of the researcher.
- ii. Participation declaration of agreement.
- iii. An indication that indicates the duration of an activity.
- iv. A declaration that shows what will happen to the collected information.
- v. Confidence and anonymity statement.
- vi. Confirmation that participants are not obliged to participate and have the right to withdraw or not reply to questions.
- vii. A declaration that the data was read and understood.
- viii. A declaration that the re-contact participants on the project were permitted.
- ix. A statement to state if permission to add your name to a database has been granted
- x. Signatures and date

### 3.2 Ethical Considerations for Research on Post-disaster Housing

Post-disaster housing research is carried out to assess housing quality including health threats, crime rate, overcrowding, building methods and materials. Ethical considerations are expected to relate more on housing occupied by victims of disaster who are characterised as being vulnerable in the society. Targeting this group raises numerous ethical concerns. An example is the 'Baltimore Housing Case' where parents of two children enrolled in a study sued the

researchers for negligence towards their children [15]. In the final court decision, various questions such as were raised.

- i. If the process of consent was satisfactory.
- ii. If the parent misunderstood the study.
- iii. Whether the Institutional Review Board (IRB) failed to protect the children.
- iv. Is it inappropriately targeted at vulnerable children? and
- v. Whether children should participate in research that is not intended to benefit them directly.

In response the U.S. government requested that the National Academies in collaboration with some agencies conduct a study of the ethical issues related to housing health hazards research.

The following were observed.

- i. Research in houses interferes with residents' privacy.
- ii. Low-income community research often involves community issues such as local security and housing quality.
- iii. Parents of potential subjects may erroneously believe that research is intended to test and intervene to remove the danger.
- iv. The housing risks which persist after the research is complete may concern parents of potential subjects and community residents.
- v. Research involving the misrepresentation of children in low-income families may raise issues regarding the inequitable choice of subjects.
- vi. The economic and educational disadvantage of low-income parents and limited literacy can make informed consent difficult.
- vii. Financial or other material incentives can impact parental choices to allow their children to participate in a research project [16].

## IV. ETHICAL PRINCIPLES APPLICABLE TO POST-DISASTER HOUSING RESEARCH

Researchers' codes of conduct or codes of ethics are published regularly by government agencies that finance or commission research. For example, in the US, National Institute of Health (NIH) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) have both published codes of ethics. Some code of ethnicity may come under law, while others may be recommended. An unethical act can end in a research career, even if it is not illegal. Most and many codes/principles cover different areas [3].

### 4.1 Non-maleficence (do no harm)

Researchers must not harm others or risk others in the face of unnecessary risks under the principle of non-maleficence. Harm can come in many forms: loss of money, boredom, frustration, time wasted etc. from shock to self-esteem, to the bad looking of others. It is good practice to suppose that research involves some harm and to consider how to deal with it beforehand [17].

### 4.2 Justice (Fairness)

It means that all are treated fairly and equally when conducting research.

#### 4.3 Beneficence (be of benefit, do not harm/doing good)

Research should be conducted only if there can be some kind of advantage or good (i.e., contribution to knowledge or better service and human health). Therefore, the researchers should always bear in mind whether or not a research project is worthwhile. If there is no benefit or good act, the project may be said to be unethical.

#### 4.4 Privacy

Privacy is about respecting limited access to others (physically, emotionally, or cognitively). Participants may, for example, decide to refuse to talk or answer certain issues and should not be pushed or coerced to do so.

#### 4.5 Autonomy (Self-rule)

Researchers must disclose information to the participants at any level of the study so they can refuse or consent to participate. In essence, the concept of informed consent deals with autonomy, which means that those who agree to participate in the research know already what they agree to collect information without any form of coercion and authorize it.

#### 4.6 Veracity (Truth Telling)

This principle relates to the fact that the investigator must provide a complete and accurate information in a way that improves understanding. For example, a researcher that allocates 15 minutes to complete the questionnaire must have first carried out a pilot test to ensure the accuracy of completing at 15 minutes and not more. Researchers should be honest and keep every promise that they make.

#### 4.7 Confidentiality

This is an extension to the privacy of researchers and participants but specifically refers to agreements on what can and cannot be accomplished with data collected during a research. This is determined and legally restricted in most cases. Anything that has been provided in confidence must be respected. For example, guidelines must be followed on protection of sensitive information like a victim personal or health records.

#### 4.8 Honesty and Integrity

This requires the reporting of honesty for research, which includes data collection methods and results and if it has been published beforehand. Data should not be collected, or any information interpreted as trying to mislead someone, including extrapolation of unreasonable results. Agreements must be kept with sincere act while working with others.

#### 4.9 Objectivity

Avoid any bias in research aspects such as research design, data analysis, interpretation, and peer review. For example, never recommend someone who is known or worked with and try to ensure that no groups are excluded from a research inadvertently. Disclose any interest in personal or financial research.

#### 4.10 Carefulness

Take care when conducting research in order to avoid faultlessness and carefully and critically review research work

to ensure the results are credible. Full records of research are also essential. Take the time to perform the job effectively and fully when asked to be a peer reviewer.

#### 4.11 Openness

Prepare to share your data and results together with any new tools developed to advance science and knowledge [18]. Be open to critique and new ideas as well.

#### 4.12 Respect for Intellectual property

Do not plagiarize or copy the work of others and try to spread it as your own. Always ask for permission before using the tools, methods, data, or outcomes of people. respect the rights of the copyright and patents in conjunction with other forms of intellectual property.

#### 4.13 Legality

Always understand and ensure compliance with laws and regulations that govern research.

#### 4.14 Human Subjects Protection

Research involving individuals should avoid potential damage and maximize the benefits for participants and others. This means that people are never tested/researched more than they needed. Always respect human rights, including privacy and independence. For instance, in post-disaster housing research consider care with vulnerable groups such as children, older people etc.

## V. CONCLUSION

The literature review on housing research after disasters reveals recurrent ethical issues, conflicting values and uncertainties in decision making. As ethical standards are unclear, researchers need to become aware of these questions and have an effective framework for dealing with human rights problems. This is required to address the value of the researcher in relation to the rights of the individual versus the interests of society. Professional codes, laws, regulations, and ethics commissions can provide some guidance, but the final determining factor in conducting research depends on the researcher's value system and moral code. Research ethics must receive special attention in the study to prepare future researchers on housing following the disaster. The criticism and uncertainties that arises in post-disaster housing should be rather encouraged than suppressed.

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