

## **SUGGESTED FERCAP ETHICAL GUIDELINES FOR SOCIAL RESEARCH**

Social research aims to understand social phenomenon as this occurs in the context of individuals, groups, institutions or societies. One way of differentiation is by means of the method used: 1. Quantitative social research; 2. Qualitative social research; 3. Combination of both methods. Social science research should comply with both scientific and ethical standards.

1. Quantitative research aims to provide generalizable information/conclusions; makes use of statistical tools; and includes a data analysis plan in the protocol that would ensure validity and reliability of data. Often times, it makes use of simple random sampling or stratified random sampling techniques.
2. Qualitative research emphasizes a particular context or setting and makes use of methods (*i.e.*, ethnography, key informant interview, etc.) capable of providing sufficient detailed account or analysis and its findings/outcomes may be applied to other similar circumstances. There is no intention to draw generalizable conclusions and its rigor is not based on sample size but on quality and credible data collection techniques and analysis plan.

The scientific review of social research should look at the consistency of study objectives with the research methodology, analysis plan and research outcomes to ensure scientific soundness of the protocol. The protocol should also include literature review and an ethical consideration section.

Some types of social research (health related, research on vulnerable populations, etc.) are submitted to research ethics committee for review, while other types (public opinion surveys, observation of public behavior, etc.) are exempt from ethics review.

### **Ethical Guidance in Social Research**

1. The conduct of social research should generally comply with relevant international norms and standards (Declaration of Helsinki, CIOMS, and codes of conduct of professional organizations in social sciences) about human research.
2. Social research protocols should be scientifically sound to ensure that the study objectives are consistent with the choice of study methodologies that would achieve the desired research outcomes.
3. The inclusion/exclusion criteria should be appropriate and clearly stated in the protocol to ensure fair selection of participants and inclusion of vulnerable participants is justified.
4. Social research about sensitive topics that may involve emotional and other social risks should describe clearly in the protocol how distress will be managed.

5. Researchers should have training on what topics can cause distress and how to address them.
6. The researcher should explain in the protocol the ethical means of getting access to a database of probable research participants (persons with HIV, STD, etc.) and how recruitment will be done.
7. When the study involves vulnerable participants (HIV-AIDS patients, drug addicts, victims of disasters, sexual abuse, etc.), the protocol should explain how social risks will be addressed and how valid consent would be obtained.
8. The protocol, when necessary, should describe the confidentiality measures that will be adopted to address stigma and social risk issues.
9. Researchers should have training in confidentiality protection when the research involves topics that may cause stigma or other social risks.
10. Participants should be informed about any potential to be identified in the research results.
11. The researcher should provide opportunities for participants to comment on the accuracy or completeness of interview transcripts before completing analysis.
12. The individual and community benefits (counseling, knowledge sharing, access to social services, technology transfer, etc.) from study participation should be described in the protocol and researchers should ensure their compliance during the conduct of the study.
13. Debriefing sessions should be held with the study participants or community to validate data and share study results.
14. Publication about the study results should use pseudonyms when referring to names of persons or places and avoid any identifier that may cause stigma to the study participants.
15. The informed consent process (written, oral or waived) should be appropriate to study topic (sensitive issues) and the type of data collection method (questionnaire, interview, observation, etc.) that is used in the protocol.
16. The informed consent process should take into consideration relevant cultural contexts and values, as well as vulnerability issues of participants (tribal populations, children, elderly, etc.) who will be recruited into the study and adequate measures should be adopted to protect them.
17. When the protocol involves access to information about secondary subjects (persons about whom information is derived from primary participants), consent from secondary subjects may be necessary and may be required by the ethics review committee.
18. The informed consent form of protocols about sensitive issues should disclose confidentiality risks and identify who has access to coded information.

Prepared by:  
Cristina E. Torres, Ph.D.  
FERCAP Coordinator  
March 13, 2012

For comments and suggestions, please e-mail [cristina.torres@yahoo.com](mailto:cristina.torres@yahoo.com) (cc: [atoynavarro@yahoo.com](mailto:atoynavarro@yahoo.com)).