

## NIAS RESEARCH ETHICS POLICY

### PREFACE

A research ethics statement or protocol is an essential part of every proposal for research involving human and/or animal subjects, and must be submitted to the NIAS Ethics Committee for review and approval. This document contains the Principles and Guidelines on Research Ethics adopted by NIAS.

Section 1 outlines the ethical principles that should guide research involving human subjects, in controlled as well as ‘natural’ settings. Section 2 lists ethical guidelines for research with animals in the field and in captivity. Section 3 concerns the responsibilities of researchers to the public and to the research community, and explains various kinds of research misconduct. Section 4 outlines the current procedures for obtaining Ethics Clearance for a research proposal at NIAS.

Given the complexity and diversity of research projects and contexts, the principles and guidelines outlined below are meant to help researchers to maintain an ethical framework for their research, rather than to operate as a rigid set of rules. As it is not possible to develop guidelines or procedures that would apply to every possible research setting, researchers are urged to consult the research ethics policies and sample protocols developed by professional bodies or relevant institutions in their own areas of research, and to tailor their protocols to address whatever ethical issues may arise due to the objectives and methods of their particular projects. Each section provides references to resources for further information.

### Section 1: ETHICAL PRINCIPLES AND GUIDELINES FOR RESEARCH WITH HUMAN SUBJECTS

- 1.1. **Respect for the autonomy, rights and dignity of participants:** In conducting research, disseminating results, or performing other professional activities, researchers must ensure that they do not harm the safety, dignity, or privacy of the people with whom they work, or those who might reasonably be thought to be affected by their research. The autonomy and rights of participants must be respected and protected.
  - 1.1.1. Participation in the research process must be voluntary, and based on informed consent and a non-exploitative research relationship.
  - 1.1.2. Participants must be informed that they may withdraw from a research project at any time.
- 1.2. **Protection of privacy, anonymity and confidentiality of subjects:** The privacy of subjects must be ensured and protected. Information about participants and information provided by them, including information obtained indirectly, must be kept confidential. Subjects’ permission is needed to share such information, and their anonymity must be maintained unless specifically requested otherwise.

- 1.2.1. In fieldwork situations in particular, the researcher should determine in advance whether their providers of information wish to remain anonymous or be recognised, and make every effort to comply with those wishes.
- 1.2.2. Potential subjects should be informed about the measures taken to ensure the anonymity, confidentiality, and security of all types of data collected (digital, visual, material, etc).
- 1.3. **Risk minimisation:** Adequate precautions should be taken to minimise risk and protect the well-being of participants. The researcher has a duty to maximise benefits and minimise risks to human subjects.
  - 1.3.1. Techniques used as part of methodology need to be examined with regard to social risks.
  - 1.3.2. Research, whether experimental or observational, should always be carried out with respect for the dignity of the individuals, for their beliefs, for their privacy, especially in situations involving special groups such as the young, the old, accident victims, the ill or prisoners.
  - 1.3.3. Compensation for the time and efforts of the participants could also be considered, where appropriate.
- 1.4. **Professional responsibility:** A researcher must be both responsible and socially accountable. To avoid confusion and conflicts of interests, professional boundaries of competence should not be crossed, especially in the context of multidisciplinary research where the boundaries may be unclear.
  - 1.4.1. Researchers must maintain professional boundaries *vis-à-vis* research subjects.
  - 1.4.2. Researchers should be sensitive to the gender and socio-cultural nuances during interaction with human participants, and conduct themselves with personal integrity.
  - 1.4.3. Researchers must make good-faith efforts to identify potential ethical claims and conflicts in advance when preparing proposals and as projects proceed.
- 1.5. **Informed consent:** Prior oral or written informed consent should be taken; special care needs to be exercised with regard to oral consent.
  - 1.5.1. Researchers have a responsibility to be both honest and transparent with all stakeholders about the nature and intent of their research. They must not deceive the people they are studying with regard to their research goals, funding sources, activities, methods, findings, or expected impacts of their work.
  - 1.5.2. Standard research ethics protocols for clinical, experimental and survey settings require advance informed consent of subjects in writing, in which the subject signs a consent form which details the objectives and methods to be employed in the research project, the nature of their participation, and possible negative effects.
  - 1.5.3. In fieldwork situations where obtaining signatures on consent forms is difficult or impossible, oral consent may be obtained through other methods. For example:

- 1.5.3.1. Make participants aware of your presence and the purpose of the research whenever possible.
  - 1.5.3.2. Discuss with potential research subjects how participation in the study may affect them.
  - 1.5.3.3. Take permission from participants to record interviews or interactions (including note-taking, audio, video, and photographic recording).
  - 1.5.3.4. Engage in an ongoing discussion with collaborators or human subjects during fieldwork, about the nature of study participation, its risks and potential benefits.
  - 1.5.3.5. When observing public events or in other contexts where the researcher is not known to outside participants, the researcher should take all practicable steps to be introduced by local participants and be identified as a researcher. However, not everyone observed or photographed will be known to the researcher. Studies of large-scale events should be guided by standard ethical considerations, such as protecting the privacy and dignity of participants and risk minimisation.
- 1.6. **Recording, storing and managing data and publication of results:** The protection of human subjects requires that data be used, stored, and disclosed in a way that ensures the privacy of individual research subjects.
- 1.6.1. All original research records, notes, recordings, and other material collected must be protected from unauthorised access by others. Researchers must ensure that nothing that they publish or otherwise make public would permit identification of individuals that would put their welfare or security at risk.
  - 1.6.2. In publishing or otherwise disseminating their research results, researchers must ensure that the safety, dignity, and privacy of their research subjects are not compromised.

### **References and resources:**

Ethical Guidelines for Good Research Practice. Association of Social Anthropologists of the UK and the Commonwealth (ASA), 2011. Available at:

<http://www.theasa.org/downloads/ASA%20ethics%20guidelines%202011.pdf>

Code of Ethics of the American Anthropological Association, February 2009. Available at:

<http://www.aaanet.org/committees/ethics/ethcode.htm>

Ethical Guidelines for Social Science Research in Health. National Committee for Ethics in Social Science Research I Health CEHAT (Centre for Inquiry into Health and Allied Themes), Mumbai, 2004. Available at:

<http://www.cehat.org/go/uploads/EthicalGuidelines/ethicalguidelines.pdf>

Ethical Guidelines for Biomedical Research on Human Participants. Indian Council of Medical Research, New Delhi, 2006. Available at: [http://icmr.nic.in/ethical\\_guidelines.pdf](http://icmr.nic.in/ethical_guidelines.pdf)

Ethics and Code of Conduct of Clinical Psychologists. Guidelines 2012-2013. Indian Association of Clinical Psychologists, 2014. Available at: <http://www.iacp.in/node/159>

## **Section 2: ETHICAL GUIDELINES FOR RESEARCH ON ANIMALS IN THE FIELD AND IN CAPTIVITY**

- 2.1. The investigator should first address some basic concerns before conducting behavioural research on animals, namely:
  - 2.1.1. Does the purpose of the research justify the use of animals?
  - 2.1.2. What criteria must be met for the observations or experiments to be acceptable?
  - 2.1.3. Is the extent of pain/distress/suffering that the animal may experience acceptable?
- 2.2. Three fundamental concepts for improving the welfare of animals used for scientific research are known as the Three Rs:
  - 2.2.1. *Replacement* of animals with other methods;
  - 2.2.2. *Reduction* of number of animals used; and
  - 2.2.3. *Refinement* of techniques used to reduce the impact on animals.
- 2.3. Using animals for scientific purposes is only acceptable when the physical or psychological harm done to animals is outweighed by the benefits of the research to humans and other species, as can be potentially justified by the researcher to the maximum extent possible.
- 2.4. When a species is chosen for research, two main ‘-isms’ must be avoided as far as practicable:
  - 2.4.1. Sizeism, where smaller species are judged as less capable of suffering; and
  - 2.4.2. Speciesism, where some species are thought to be less capable of experiencing suffering because we find their appearance or behaviour unattractive, or because, in the wild, they are a pest species or live in an environment we consider undesirable.
- 2.5. Pain, distress or suffering to animals during the course of research should be minimised both in duration and magnitude to the greatest possible extent.
- 2.6. Investigators should consider the quantity and quality of space and care, which they provide for their animals, and remain appraised of best practices in the current relevant literature.
- 2.7. Wherever possible, non-invasive methods of biological sample collection should be used. Mutilatory forms of identification (e.g., toe-amputation), or those which injure

substantial amounts of tissue, should be assumed to cause substantial acute and perhaps chronic pain, and should generally be avoided.

- 2.8. Even when study methods are non-invasive, human presence can have a considerable effect on the behaviour of animals, ranging from causing stress in the study species to the transmission of diseases to the animals. Hence, investigators must be always try and minimise their intrusion in animal habitats.

### **References and resources:**

Sherwin, C.M., et al. (2003). Guidelines for the ethical use of animals in applied animal behaviour research. *Applied Animal Behaviour Science* 81: 291-305.

Cuthill, I. (1991). Field experiments in animal behaviour: methods and ethics. *Animal Behaviour* 42: 1007-1014.

Kirkwood, J.K. and Sainsbury, A.W. (1996). Ethics of interventions for the welfare of free-living wild animals. *Animal Welfare* 5: 235-243.

MacClancy, J. and Fuentes, A. (2013). *Ethics in the Field: Contemporary Challenges*. Berghahn Press, New York.

## **Section 3: RESPONSIBILITIES OF RESEARCHERS TO THE PUBLIC AND RESEARCH COMMUNITY**

The credibility of the scientific enterprise with the public and with the academic community depends on the maintenance of the highest ethical standards in research. This section discusses general principles regarding ownership and sharing of data and research results, authorship, giving due attribution and acknowledgements, and scientific misconduct.

- 3.1. **Sharing of research results:** Every investigator has an obligation to the general scientific community to cooperate to publish and share research findings and data with others. Publication of research results is important as a means of communicating to the scholarly world so that readers may be informed of research results and other researchers may build on the reported findings. However, the following cautionary remarks apply:
  - 3.1.1. Researchers – especially those working with human subjects – have an ethical obligation to consider the potential impact of the communication, publication, or dissemination of their research results on all directly or indirectly involved.
  - 3.1.2. Results of research should be made public and shared with participants and the research community in an appropriate manner, subject to the ethical commitment to protect the anonymity and confidentiality of research participants.
  - 3.1.3. Researchers should not withhold research results from research participants when those results are shared with others.
  - 3.1.4. Publicly funded research should be open to review by the academic community and the public, subject to the requirement of protecting the privacy of subjects.

- 3.2. **Research misconduct:** Research misconduct is defined as fabrication, falsification, or plagiarism, including misrepresentation of credentials, in proposing, performing, or reviewing research, or in reporting or publishing research results.
- 3.2.1. It is a primary responsibility of a researcher or writer to avoid making either a false statement or an omission that distorts the research record. Any intentional or reckless disregard for the truth in reporting observations may be considered to be an act of research misconduct.
- 3.2.2. False or deceptive public statements about one's research must be avoided.
- 3.2.3. Reporting suspected research misconduct is a shared and serious responsibility of all members of the academic community. All reports are treated confidentially to the extent possible, and no adverse action will be taken, either directly or indirectly, against a person who makes such an allegation in good faith.
- 3.2.4. It is unethical to release to the media scientific information contained in an accepted manuscript prior to its publication.
- 3.3. **Authorship:**
- 3.3.1. As defined by ICMJE\*, authorship of a research publication is based on the following four criteria:
- 3.3.1.1. Substantial contribution to the conception or design of the work; or to the acquisition, analysis, or interpretation of the data for the work, AND
- 3.3.1.2. Drafting the work or revising it critically for important intellectual content; AND
- 3.3.1.3. Final approval of the version to be published; AND
- 3.3.1.4. Agreement to be accountable for all aspects of the work in ensuring that questions related to the accuracy or integrity of any part of the work are appropriately investigated and resolved.
- 3.3.2. If more than one person contributes significantly to the work, the decision of which names are to be listed as co-authors should reflect the relative contributions of various participants in the research and in the writing for the publication. A person whose contribution merits co-authorship should be named even in oral presentations, especially when abstracts or transactions of the proceedings of a conference at which a paper is presented, is published. Those who do not meet these four criteria should only be acknowledged. These criteria are intended to reserve the status of authorship for those who deserve the credit and can take responsibility for the work.
- 3.3.3. Both 'ghost' authorship and 'guest' authorship should be avoided. Ghost/guest authorship occurs when an individual makes/does not make a substantial contribution to the research OR to the writing of the paper, but is not listed/listed as an author.
- 3.4. **Acknowledgements, due credit, and plagiarism:** The work of others should be cited or credited, whether published or unpublished and whether it is written work, an oral

presentation, or material on a website. Authors who present the words, data, material, or ideas of others with the implication that they are their own, without attribution in a form appropriate for the medium of presentation, may be guilty of *plagiarism* and/or *research misconduct*.

3.4.1. The same definition of plagiarism that applies to publications also applies to student submissions for coursework, dissertations in draft and final form, and applications and proposals (including the background and methodological sections).

3.4.2. A biographical sketch incorporated into a proposal or a curriculum vitae used in an application for a fellowship or any other position must follow the same standards of accuracy as a research publication.

3.5. **Maintenance of records and data:** In order to preserve accurate documentation of observed facts with which later reports or conclusions can be compared, every researcher has an obligation to maintain a clear and complete record of data acquired.

3.5.1. The intentional destruction of research records or the failure to maintain and produce research records supporting a questioned research publication or report may be considered to be circumstantial evidence of research misconduct.

3.5.2. In some disciplines, such as anthropology, field notes are viewed as the product of the researcher rather than as data, and are not customarily made available to others for ethical reasons. To the contrary, they must be stored carefully to protect the privacy and confidentiality of subjects. If funding agencies or researchers' institutions require the archiving of such material, it must be redacted to protect the anonymity of subjects.

### **References and resources:**

\*Recommendations for the Conduct, Reporting, Editing, and Publication of Scholarly Work in Medical Journals, International Council of Medical Journal Editors, 2014. Available at: <http://www.icmje.org/icmje-recommendations.pdf>

Guidelines for Responsible Conduct of Research, Office of Research Integrity, University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh, 2011. Available at: <http://www.provost.pitt.edu/documents/GUIDELINES%20FOR%20ETHICAL%20PRACTICES%20IN%20RESEARCH-FINALrevised2-March%202011.pdf>

## **Section 4: PROCEDURE TO OBTAIN ETHICS PROTOCOL CLEARANCE**

4.1. All research proposals developed at NIAS for submission to funding agencies or to Universities for Ph.D. registration, and that include work with animal and/or human subjects, must incorporate an ethics statement based on the above guidelines and ethical principles that are standard in the researcher's discipline or area of research. The ethics protocol should refer to the methodology section of the proposal and address all the relevant points outlined above, e.g., how informed consent will be obtained, how

confidentiality will be assured and data protected, how the well-being of animals will be ensured, and so on.

- 4.2. The research proposal and ethics protocol should be submitted by the Principal Investigator to the NIAS Research Ethics Committee, with a request for review, at least one month prior to the planned date of submission. The Committee will meet with the Principal Investigator, who will present their ethics protocols and respond to any issues of concern raised by the Committee with regard to maintaining research ethics. Once satisfied, the Committee will issue the Ethics Clearance Letter.
- 4.3. For **Ph.D. proposals**, the ethics review will take place at the same time that the students present their proposals to the Institute for approval. The following procedure should be followed:
  - 4.3.1. Research proposals should include the ethics protocol / statement as part of the methodology section, or as a separate attachment.
  - 4.3.2. When the 'ad hoc' committee to review the doctoral proposal is appointed, the student should also send the draft proposal to the Research Ethics Committee along with the ethics protocol. Members of the Committee will attend the student's proposal presentation, during which they may raise questions about the ethics protocol.
  - 4.3.3. After reviewing the proposal and ethics statement, the Committee will provide their feedback/ suggestions to the student, which should be considered when revising the proposal for submission to the University. In case the Committee has any concerns about the ethics protocol, they will call the student for a discussion.
  - 4.3.4. After finalisation of the proposal, the student must submit it to the Library for plagiarism check, and forward the similarity report to the Committee along with the final proposal and ethics statement. Duplicate content (excluding the reference list) should not exceed the maximum specified by the University to which the proposal is being submitted.
  - 4.3.5. The Committee will review the revised proposal and other documents. When the protocol and similarity report are found to be satisfactory, an ethics clearance letter signed by the Committee members will be issued.
- 4.4. **Quorum:** A quorum of four members should be present at any review meeting. The signatures of four out of the six members is sufficient for issuing the clearance letter.

#### **Members of the NIAS Research Ethics Committee:**

1. Prof. Carol Upadhyaya - Chairperson
2. Prof. Anindya Sinha - Member
3. Prof. Malavika Kapur - Member
4. Prof. Sundar Sarukkai - Member
5. Prof. Sindhu Radhakrishna - Member
6. Dr. Shoibal Chakravarty - Member