Research Ethics for Students in the Social Sciences

This book is a comprehensive guide to research ethics for students of the social sciences. It informs students about research ethics and raises their overall interest in it. It introduces a practice-based and problem-based learning approach presenting fundamental dilemmas, problems and choices embedded in location and situation-specific contexts one may encounter when researching. Further, it explains substantiated approaches to handling ethical issues and justifying moral decisions.

The book explains the four orientations of research ethics, such as theory, fraud, trust and formalities, in four sections: Perspectives, Ethics and Misconduct, Ethics and Trust, and Forms, Codes and Types of Regulations. The first section consists of two chapters, one provides a brief history of social science and its perspective on knowledge creation, and the other conceptualises research ethics and details on ethical theories, ideal and deplorable research behaviours, research integrity, code of conduct and imperatives of research practice. It views students in social science as co-constructors of knowledge and universities as learning communities. Further, this section introduces Institutional Review Board as a measure to safeguard research ethics and the Board of Complaints to protect research integrity.

The second section dedicates one chapter each to the significant research misconducts such as plagiarism, fabrication and cheating, and falsifying. The chapter on plagiarism explores the litany of issues surrounding plagiarism. It details all the related concepts such as appropriation, authorship, copy-pasting, inadvertent, paraphrasing, patchwriting and self-plagiarism. In addition, it explains legitimate forms of referencing, including quotations, paraphrasing and summarising. The second chapter in the second section deals with fabrication, a severe form of scientific fraud, which includes data, findings and results fabrication in various forms. Also, it discusses cheating among students as a fraudulent shortcut to knowledge. In addition, it discusses ghost-writing as a specific form of fabrication in the 'publish or perish' culture. The last chapter in this section discusses falsifying that threatens science's claims of objectivity, verifiability and other core values.

Section III is divided into three chapters: Confidentiality, Conflicts of Interest and Science and University Politics. It regards confidentiality as an essential tenet of scientific research ethics, and securing informed consent forms a necessary procedure in research to formalise a confidentiality agreement between researcher and participant. This chapter on confidentiality further details anonymisation in quantitative and qualitative research and breaches of confidentiality. The chapter on Conflicts of Interest looks at science from the perspective of competitive markets. It differentiates conflicts of interest and values, examining the emergence of academic capitalism. This chapter suggests that further restrictions and disclosure of a researcher's affiliations, external positions and financial ties may help address future conflicts of interest. The third chapter in this section examines research ethics in the social sciences from the perspective of a systems approach. It discusses the impacts of replication crises, weak research rigour, publication pressure and perverse incentives on scientific practices. This chapter further addresses three approaches to teaching research ethics, which enable students to grapple with ethical questions from a reactive, active and reflective perspective.

The chapter Research Ethics Step by Step in the fourth section follows a step-by-step approach to the ethical questions a social science researcher needs to answer when planning a research project. This chapter provides an in-depth look at ethics at each stage of the research journey. It discusses the ethical issues ranging from relevancy,

confidentiality, informed consent, briefing and debriefing, deception and data storage that a researcher may encounter while designing research design and the ethical approval process. Descriptions of potential ethical pitfalls in data collection, analysis, interpretation and results sharing can greatly assist researchers.

This well-designed and well-presented book enables social science researchers to understand research ethics in its most practical sense. A strength of this book is its inclusion of case studies as concrete examples of ethical dilemmas. It enables readers to become more sensitive to the ethical issues they encounter in their research and to address them appropriately. In addition, this is an open-access book. Therefore, this is a must-read for researchers in the social sciences, although it lacks discipline-specific explanations.

Sukanya Josy
PhD Scholar, Rajagiri College of Social Sciences
(Autonomous), Kalamassery, Kochi, Kerala
Email: sukanyatreesa@gmail.com