



ASWNet
Africa Social Work Network



African Research Ethics and Malpractice Statement (AREMS)

This document was prepared by ASWNet to help researchers to realize ethical research in an African context. This statement highlights our understanding of, and commitment to research ethics as well as our aim to remove, and respond to malpractice in research.

Table of Contents

| | |
|---|----------|
| <i>Ubuntu Research Ethics</i> | 2 |
| <i>Malpractice Statement</i> | 3 |
| Our response to malpractice..... | 3 |
| Summary of rights and responsibilities..... | 4 |
| <i>Table 1: Summary of rights and responsibilities</i> | 4 |
| <i>Research ethics statements</i> | 6 |
| <i>How to write an ethics statement?</i> | 6 |
| <i>Table 2: African Research Ethics and Malpractice Statement (AREMS) model</i> | 6 |
| <i>Other recommendations</i> | 7 |
| <i>African Independent Ethics Committee (AIEC)</i> | 8 |

How to cite this document:

African Social Work Network (ASWNET) (2021). African Research Ethics and Malpractice Statement (AREMS). Harare: ASWNET.

Ubuntu Research Ethics

The philosophy and practice of Ubuntu (also known as *Unhu, Botho, Ubuthosi, Bumuntu, Bomoto, Gimuntu, Umunthu, Vumuntu* or *Umuntu*) undergirds our research ethics. Ubuntu is a philosophy that shapes interaction of human beings with others and with the environment. In the practice of Ubuntu, humanity towards others is prioritised. Thus, Ubuntu values the welfare of others and fairness.

The eight basic ubuntu ethics that we are concerned with in research are:

1. Value for Family (*unhuri*, familyhood)- families are an integral part of African society. While research usually focuses on individuals, these individuals must be viewed as part of families. A full and trusted story usually involves the family.
2. Respect for Community (*ujamaa*, 'communityhood') - research should promote African 'communityhood', uniting people and using local resources and compensating communities adequately. Local protocols should be respected, recognized and followed.
3. Decolonising – for years research languages, ethics, methods, philosophy, epistemology and ontologies have prioritized western knowledge. Present day research must prioritize African perspectives.
4. Developmental and capacity building research – funders and researchers, including African governments must be seen to be promoting growth of African research capacity. This means strengthening the work of African researchers and research institutions. Knowledge transfer is a key element when we assess externally driven research.
5. Sustainable research – research must build capacity of African researchers and African institutions to research on their own and not to be dependent on people from outside perpetually.
6. Justice – adequate recognition of co-researchers, communities, assistants contributors, facilitators and guides. Compensations should be just.
7. Value for life – every component of research must not result in harm, disease, impairment or loss of life.
8. Protection of most vulnerable populations – these include children, people with disability, people who are unable to read the language of the research, people with a mental illness, people with adequate income, people from strong spiritual backgrounds, elderly people, people in rural communities, young women and poor people.

Malpractice Statement

Malpractice may constitute any or more of the following:

1. Data or research fraud (manipulation of data or reporting research that has not been done)
2. Contributor fraud (adding people who have not contributed significantly as co-authors or not recognizing those who contributed)
3. Plagiarism
4. Simultaneous submission
5. Undisclosed conflict of interest
6. Researcher, editor or reviewer bias (influencing the research process in any way that breaks research ethics)
7. Deceit or lack of informed consent
8. Harm
9. Lack of confidentiality and anonymity broken, where desired
10. Ignoring local protocols

We acknowledge the challenges African writers face in accessing review boards (e.g. it is at times costly and review board are not functional) and in accessing research funding but we emphatically deny that African research has to be inferior or be allowed to be done outside the perimeters of ethical practice or Ubuntu.

Our response to malpractice

We promote research ethics to prevent malpractice. Some of the actions that we recommend when ethics have been broken are:

1. Communication – informing authors or reviewers and discussing the issue at hand.
2. Clarify – a decision could be taken to clarify circumstances.
3. Corrections (erratum or addendum/corrigendum) – a decision could be taken to correct the paper.
 - Erratum – compile and disseminate a list of errors
 - Addendum (addenda) (also known as corrigendum (corrigenda)) – additional information added to a publication
4. Retractions – a decision could be taken to retract the paper.
5. Apologise – an apology could be offered orally or in writing.
6. Inform – the funder, the institution, the participants, other journals or relevant Ethics Review Board.
7. Compensation – where participants or contributors or communities were not adequately compensated, it is recommended to correct this by compensating appropriately.
8. Settlement – where harm has occurred, it is recommended to provide resources needed to address the harm presently and in future.

Summary of rights and responsibilities

Table 1: Summary of rights and responsibilities

| <i>Who?</i> | <i>Rights and responsibilities</i> |
|-------------------|---|
| Publishers | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The benefits of publishing must be very clear to the authors, including how the journal benefits from the input of publishers • Archiving to ensure that articles and data are not lost but can be availability perpetually • Be clear about copyrights • Using African values when publishing including using local languages, building capacity not dependence, respect for family, valuing indigenous knowledge and many others • Contribute to decolonisation of literature • Avoid tough language requirements that limit non-English speakers from publishing • If you receive and keep data, maintain confidentiality • Sustainable research – research must build capacity of African researchers and African institutions to research on their own and not to be dependent on people from outside perpetually. |
| Authors | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using African values when writing including using local languages, building capacity not dependence, respect for family, valuing indigenous knowledge and many others • Apply African protocols when researching • Contribute to decolonisation of literature y using African theories, approaches, literature and publishers • Do not manipulate data or results • Include only authors who have contributed • It is often easy to use other people’s ideas without acknowledging, avoid this • Contribute to any processes to investigate malpractice • Avoid simultaneous submission • Disclose any conflict of interest • Get informed consent from participants and respondents • Maintain confidentiality • Do research that has a developmental purpose • Adequate recognition and compensation of co-researchers, communities, assistants contributors, facilitators and guides |
| Reviewers | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using African values when reviewing • Contribute to decolonisation of literature • Apply your knowledge and skills to identify malpractice and contribute to any processes to investigate malpractice • Avoid tough language requirements that limit non-English speakers from publishing • Disclose any conflict of interest • Accept research that have developmental purposes |
| Librarians | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contribute to decolonisation of literature by ordering, purchasing and displaying works of African writers and publishers • Using local languages and valuing indigenous knowledge • Make researchers more accessible |

| | |
|---|--|
| Indexing, Ranking and Metric providers | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using African values when indexing, ranking or generating metrics • Be cognisant of the challenges African writers face in getting published, using foreign languages, getting cited and low online presence • Contribute to decolonisation of literature |
| Advisory or Management Boards | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using African values when advising • Contribute to decolonisation of literature • Avoid tough language requirements that limit non-English speakers from publishing |
| Editors and Editorial Boards or teams | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using African values when editing • Contribute to decolonisation of literature • Ensure that authors who have contributed have been listed • Disclose any conflict of interest • Contribute to any processes to investigate malpractice |
| Ethics Committees | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using African values when evaluating • Contribute to decolonisation of literature • Guide against research that do not have developmental purpose • Adequate recognition and compensation of co-researchers, communities, assistants contributors, facilitators and guides • Sustainable research – research must build capacity of African researchers and African institutions to research on their own and not to be dependent on people from outside perpetually. |
| Research Funders, Universities and Research institutes | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fund sustainable research in a sustainable manner, building capacity not dependence • Ensure researchers funded follow appropriate ethics and protocols • Ensure that research ethics are not dumped, or research is done without ethics especially with African populations • Contribute to decolonisation of research and literature including using local languages, respect for family, valuing indigenous knowledge and many others • Contribute to any processes to investigate malpractice • Compensation – where participants or contributors or communities were not adequately compensated or were harmed • Avoid over researching some populations • Guide against research that do not have developmental purpose • Sustainable research – research must build capacity of African researchers and African institutions to research on their own and not to be dependent on people from outside perpetually. |
| Readers and Research Participants | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contribute to decolonisation of literature by reading African literature • Participate in research with the knowledge that it will contribute to your life and that of others, and be wary of harmful research • Be clear about compensation before you take part bearing in mind that research generally does not provide income but compensates for any loss of income you incur because of your participation • Do not feel forced to participate in research especially by people with influence, money or foreigners |

Research ethics statements

How to write an ethics statement?

A research ethics statement is a detailed account of ethics that (1) will be followed when doing research (proposed or pre-research ethics statement) (2) was followed in research (post-research ethics statement). Statements must be written clearly, they must be appropriate or relevant and enough detail must be provided.

Pre-research ethics statement

It is written in the future tense to support a research proposal to a funder, research institution, other researchers, government, partners, community or ethics committee.

Post-research ethics statement

It is written in the past tense to report research to publisher, journal, funder, research institution, other researchers, government, partners, community or ethics committee and in publications for readers. It is a story that shows how ethics were applied.

What to include in ethics statements?

The table below shows major questions writers, reviewers and editors should expect to be in an ethics statement and the items to include in an ethics statement.

Table 2: African Research Ethics and Malpractice Statement (AREMS) model

| <i>Question</i> | <i>Items to include</i> |
|--|---|
| What is or was the gap or rationale or aim for this research? | Describe why this research is or was necessary. Describe benefit for the participants and larger community. Is or was there risk, did it outweigh doing the research? |
| How am I going to or did I engage the community? | Describe step by step how you will reach or reached your participants or respondents. Describe local protocols that will be followed or were followed? Describe the consent and permission seeking process including those who consented and did not consent. Show evidence, for example, attach a permission letter. If you are a researcher from outside Africa, what efforts have you made to ensure that you avoid potential exploitation, dumping of research ethics, power differentials, language and racial differences that may impact this research? |
| What will participants do or what did they do? How is or was harm, distress and burden managed? | Describe what participants are expected to do, step by step, or what they did. This includes how you collected data from them, the tools you. Identify risks and solutions. Describe how psychological, physical, economic or social harm, distress and burden are going to be avoided or how they were managed. |
| How is or was data managed? | It is important to protect the identity of researchers, show how this will be achieved or was achieved. This applies when engaging communities, collecting data, storing data and reporting. |
| How accessible are the research findings and publications? | How will community or participants know about the results? How will they get access to the publications? Include issues like reporting back to the community through a meeting or workshop, publishing research in local publications, publish summary in local languages, publish results using graphics or audios that are easy to understand and sharing results with policy makers. |

| | |
|---|---|
| Ethics approval from community and ethics committee | Provide evidence to show that the research process got approval from community leaders and ethics committee. Support letters from partners are also useful. |
| What is your personal reflection of the ethics applied and your own view of ubuntu ethics? | End your ethics statement by giving personal views or reflections and restating your ubuntu ethical principles. |

Other recommendations

- Write your statement as a story that flows.
- Use the correct tense, future or past but at times you use present tense if the ethics process is ongoing.
- Subheadings can be avoided for the story to flow, but at times other guidelines require you to use headings.
- Avoid repetition.
- Using first person language is ok.
- Adding your own reflection is ok.
- Avoid citing unnecessarily but you can cite other relevant researchers, ethics guidelines, laws and protocols. Non-written knowledge can be cited.
- Avoid citing ethics books or articles published from a non-African perspective but rather value and support African literature, ethics guidelines, laws and protocols.
- Avoid writing or defining ethics and other words related to ethics, the statement is about actions and why they were necessary.

African Independent Ethics Committee (AIEC)

Based on data collected between 2013 and 2019, most researchers in Africa do not have access to an Ethics Committee. As such, we have designed a platform to provide independent ethics advice to researchers. Before you apply, read information about African **Ubuntu research ethics, malpractice statement** and our **terms and conditions** of use. To apply, provide all the details required in the online application form and submit. The form is available at: <https://africasocialwork.net/african-independent-ethics-committee/>

For researchers wanting to or already doing research in Africa, it is important to get ethics advice or ethics approval. This is important so that you protect our communities, and that you also get protected. At times external researchers dump research ethics in Africa, an unethical practice on its own. Others only get ethics approval from an external country yet local ethics are very important.

Revised June 2021