



Ethics: An Insight into Psychological Research and Practice

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Abstract

Ethics is an underlying principle that governs the directives of every profession. Like any other profession, psychology is governed by ethical principles and it is constantly faced with ethical conundrums. The main focus of this study is to highlight pertinent issues regarding ethics in the psychological line of work. Using a narrative review methodology, this article looked at some examples of unethical behaviour as well as guiding principles of the psychological profession. It was concluded that psychologists uphold the ethical principles governing their profession. Hence, the article recommended that the environment for practice be constantly monitored as well as the conduct of practice by both authorizing bodies and colleagues.

Subject Areas

Psychology, Sociology

Keywords

Psychology, Practice, Profession, Ethics, Research

1. Introduction

Psychologists' right from the beginning of time, has been faced with numerous challenges ranging from principles to practices. The challenges are mostly evaluated based on professional standards, ethical principles, and practices. An insight into ethical and professional issues associated with psychological theories and research will provide a panoramic and insightful understanding of the association between ethics and psychology to enhance their understanding in simple

parlance supported by significant psychological literature, and also the significance of this relationship in the day to day activities of a psychologist. The write-up will additionally provide an elucidative comprehension of real-life mind-boggling ethical and professional situations that occurred in the past: concerning ethical standards in psychological theory and research. Knowing precisely what research, ethics and psychological theories are all about, will eventually probe our understanding of the association between profession and ethics. This paper has the potential of influencing the current understanding of the issues that revolve around the relationship between the ethical and professional association of psychological theory and research of the general public.

Moral values in society keep the dignity of the people and provide a unique and indestructible force of attraction between the individuals of that society (Tribe & Morrissey, 2020) [1]. The inquiry into nature and using the understanding of nature to solve human and environmental problems are normal activities of a psychologist (Price, Chiang, & Jhangiani, 2018) [2]. The profession of a psychologist is interwoven with scientific research and the development of psychological theories. Researching to come out with theories and its applications needs to be subjected to moral standards, hence ethical considerations. Moral standards in professional settings are known as ethics, which plays a vital role in protecting human subjects, data fabrication, falsification, plagiarism, and other dishonest acts during the research (Han, 2015) [3]. Due to fraud, falsification, and fabrication, some practising psychologists can lose their jobs. This study is systematically structured into three sections: Section one consists of introduction, methods and organization of the study; Section two provides information on synchronizing the ethics of psychological research; Section three talks about issues that emanated from psychotically research their associations of ethics, this ends with analytical lessons, and finally conclusion and recommendations.

2. Methods

Using a narrative review approach, the paper looked at ethical and professional issues associated with psychological research and practices. Using some examples of scientific misconduct such as the Milgram's experiment, the paper is well structured to examine available psychological literature and unveil ethical issues associated with psychological research. Search terms and styles were employed in the search for information from Google Scholar, PubMed, SCOPUS, EMBASE, Institutional Repositories and many other databases. Boolean Operators were employed in the controlled search to narrow specifically to relevant psychological literature. The rest of the methods were modifications from (Balali, Yar, Afua Dela, & Adjei-Kusi, 2020) [4]. Their approach was used though this current paper is in a different field, their methods were good and hence its service.

3. Study Organization

This manuscript is alienated into five main sections, section one is the introduc-

tion; this introduces the readers to the panoramic view of the paper, followed by section two titled “Synchronizing the ethics of psychological research” this section explains the meaning of ethics in connection with psychological research and provided an understanding of ethics in philosophical view, psychological view and world view. It also ended with the introduction of entangled issues of ethics in psychological research. Section three provided “An insight into ethical concerns in Psychological research” this is sub-headed systematically based on the basic principles (a principle I to IV) and finally the analytical presentation of lessons from the review. Besides, the paper also concluded and provided some recommendations.

4. Synchronizing the Ethics of Psychological Research

In the area of philosophy, ethics are said to be directly concerned with what is called morality. So it requires individuals to behave ethically and also develop a conscious effort to archive the goals of morality in all their dealings. Ethics can also be called a “set of principles and practices that provide moral guidance in a particular field” (Price *et al.*, 2018) [2]. Ethics are in every field. However, this article focuses on related issues of ethics in psychological theories and research. There are numerous ethical problems especially when it comes to scientific research involving human subjects or participants (Bush, Connell, & Denney, 2020) [5]. Psychology as a discipline that deals with/develop theories which are most likely to evolve from scientific research is also faced with numerous professional and ethical problems (Tribe & Morrissey, 2020) [1]. So to this extent, ethics are the moral values upheld in the society to bring about fairness, dignity, justice, and all other morally acceptable principles.

Ethics refers to the right principles of conduct, vital to an experimental investigation or research (Price *et al.*, 2018) [2]. No matter how significant an issue under scrutiny is, clinicians need to recall that they must regard the rights and nobility of research participants. This implies that researchers in the field of psychology ought to follow certain ethical standards and rules. In England, moral rules for research are distributed by the “British Psychological Society” and in America by the “American Psychological Association”. The reason for these sets of principles is to avoid exploitation of members, the notoriety of brain science, and clinicians themselves (O’Donohue, 2020) [6]. Though some recent findings also pointed out some serious ethical issues associated with these ethical associations, this sounds quite interesting (Kryuchkov, 2020) [7]. Evidence points out some modifications of APA ethical guidelines to allow psychologist to conduct or perform some research, there is evidence of human torture in some studies where human subjects were directly exposed to danger (Price *et al.*, 2018) [2], and finally lab fraud (Han, 2015) [3], and fabrication of clinical laboratory data for a doctoral thesis (Carey, 2011) [8], Tuskegee Syphilis Study, Diederik Stapel data fabrication etc. Nevertheless, ethics in society help to uphold the moral standards of that society and therefore cannot be neglected.

5. An Insight into Ethical Concerns in Psychological Research

5.1. Basic Principles in Psychological Research

With regards to ethical concerns in psychological research, four main basic principles come into play. They include “weighing risks against benefits”, “acting responsibly and with integrity”, “seeking justice”, and “respecting people’s rights and dignity”. The four basic principles stated herein are adapted from the well-recognized international psychological association known as the “American Psychological Association (APA) code of ethics” (Chenneville & Gabbidon, 2020) [9]. Secondly, there are some groups of individuals that are most likely to be directly or indirectly involved in psychological research and hence needs to be protected. They include “research participants”, “the scientific community”, and “society in general”. The hint here is that there must at all cost be an in-depth deliberation of the ethics of any scientific or psychological research work. Ethics must be taken into consideration thoroughly. By that, each of the ethical principles applies separately to any group of individuals involved in psychological research studies. Be the society, scientific community or study participants. To better our understanding of this issue of ethics in psychological research, we need to probe into how each of the four principles applies to the three various groups.

Principle I: Weighing risks against benefits

The first one to look at is “weighing risks against benefits”. For research in psychology to be considered ethical, it must undergo this step. Considering the risk in scientific or psychological research, participants who are involved in the study might face issues such as “treatment may fail” or even become unsafe, a method which may bring about physical or mental damage, and the participant’s entitlement to security might be disregarded. Among the possible advantages are getting a helpful treatment, finding out about brain science, encountering the fulfilment of adding to logical information, and accepting cash or course credit for partaking. Like everyday situation, scientific research also has both good and bad side to the scientist and the people in the society at large (O’Donohue, 2020) [6]. An example of research disadvantage to science is when a research question is boring or probably the study is weakly designed, what it means is that the money spent, the time, and even the efforts exerted on that study could have been on different research which could have been productive. A societal risk of research can be when the findings of the study are misunderstood or misused conferring harmful outcomes. Also, a typical example is the unknowing linkage of mumps, MMR vaccine, and measles to autism which resulted in all these different kinds of damage (Burns, 2010) [10]. Not forgetting, scientific research surely contributes to the advancement of knowledge and contribution to the well-being of society.

In addition to the “weighing of risk and benefits”, this is certainly not easy, because the dangers and advantages may not be legitimately tantamount. For in-

stance, it is normal for the dangers of an examination to be essential to the psychologists yet the advantages principally for science or society. Consider, for instance, Stanley Milgram's unique investigation on submission to power (Milgram, 1963) [11]. The members were informed that they were participating in an investigation on the impacts of discipline on learning and were told to give electric stuns to another member each time that member reacted inaccurately on a learning task. With each inaccurate reaction, the stun got more grounded—inevitably, causing the other member (who was in the following space) to dissent, grumble about his heart, shout in torment, lastly fall quiet and quit reacting. If the main member dithered or communicated concern, the specialist said that he should proceed. The other member was a confederate of the specialist—an assistant who claimed to be a genuine member—and the fights, objections, and shouts that the genuine member heard were a sound account that was enacted when he flipped the change to oversee the “stuns.” The astounding aftereffect of this examination was that a large portion of the genuine members kept on directing the stuns directly through the confederate's fights, grievances, and shouts. Even though this is viewed as one of the most significant outcomes in brain science—with suggestions for understanding occasions like the Holocaust or the abuse of detainees by US fighters at Abu Ghraib—it came at the expense of creating serious mental worry in the exploration members (O'Donohue, 2020) [6].

Let us ponder over the ethics in Milgram's as to whether the scientific knowledge generated or gained from the study was worth the dangers or harm inflicted upon the study participants. We need an extract of Milgram's explanation to understand this.

“In a large number of cases, the degree of tension reached extremes that are rarely seen in sociopsychological laboratory studies. Subjects were observed to sweat, tremble, stutter, bite their lips, groan, and dig their fingernails into their flesh ... Fourteen of the 40 subjects showed definite signs of nervous laughter and smiling. The laughter seemed entirely out of place, even bizarre. Full-blown uncontrollable seizures [of laughter] were observed for three subjects. On one occasion we observed a seizure so violently convulsive that it was necessary to call a halt to the experiment (p. 375).”

Also, Milgram stated that another researcher who was also observing reported that within twenty minutes one of the research participants “was reduced to a twitching, stuttering wreck, who was rapidly approaching the point of nervous collapse” (p. 377).

Amazingly, he tried hard to question his members—including restoring their psychological states to typical—and to show that a large portion of them thought the exploration was important and we are happy to have partaken. In any case, this examination would be viewed as dishonest by the present norms.

Principle II: Acting Responsibly and with Integrity

Consider the second principle “acting responsibly and with integrity”. Scientists must act capably and with uprightness. This implies completing their ex-

amination carefully and capably, meeting their expert commitments, and being honest. Acting with respectability is significant because it advances trust, which is a fundamental component of all viable human connections. Members must have the option to believe that scientists are being straightforward with them (e.g., about what the examination includes), will stay faithful to their obligations (e.g., to look after classification), and will do their exploration in manners that amplify benefits and limit hazard. A significant issue here is the utilization of misdirection. Some examination questions, (for example, Milgram's) are troublesome or difficult to reply without misdirecting research members. In this way acting with uprightness can struggle with doing explore that propels logical information and advantages society. We will consider how clinicians by and large arrangements with this contention without further ado.

Mainstream researchers and society should likewise have the option to believe that specialists have directed their examination completely and skillfully and that they have provided details regarding it sincerely. Once more, the model toward the start of the part outlines what can happen when this trust is abused. For this situation, different specialists squandered assets on pointless follow-up exploration and individuals evaded the MMR antibody, putting their youngsters at an expanded danger of measles, rubella, and mumps (Price *et al.*, 2018) [2].

One consequence of this report was that numerous guardians chose not to have their kids inoculated (turning into a social marvel known as “anti-vaxxers”), which put them at higher danger for measles, mumps, and rubella. In any case, follow-up concentrates by different specialists reliably neglected to locate a factual connection between the MMR immunization and chemical imbalance—and it is commonly acknowledged now that there is no relationship. Moreover, a few more difficult issues with the first examination were revealed. Among them were that the lead specialist remained to pick up monetarily from his decisions since he had protected a contending measles immunization. He had additionally utilized one-sided techniques to choose and test his examination members and had utilized unapproved and restoratively pointless methodology on them. In 2010 “The Lancet” withdrew the article, and the lead scientist who conducted the study entitlement to practice “medicine” was repudiated (Burns, 2010) [10].

Principle III: Seeking Justice

The third principle “seeking justice” allow specialists to direct their research equitably. They should treat their members decently, for instance, by giving them satisfactory pay for their investment and ensuring that advantages and dangers are appropriated, overall members. For instance, in an investigation of another and possibly gainful psychotherapy, a few members may get the psychotherapy while others fill in as a benchmark group that gets no treatment. If the psychotherapy ends up being powerful, it is reasonable to offer it to members in the benchmark group when the examination the study closes.

At a more extensive cultural level, individuals from certain gatherings have

truly confronted too much of the dangers of logical examination, including individuals who are organized, are incapacitated, or have a place with racial or ethnic minorities. An especially awful model is the Tuskegee syphilis study led by the US General Wellbeing Administration from 1932 to 1972 (Reverby, 2009) [12]. The members in this examination were helpless African American men in the region of Tuskegee, Alabama, who were informed that they were being treated for “animosity.” Even though they were given some free clinical consideration, they were not treated for their syphilis. Rather, they were seen to perceive how the malady was created in untreated patients. Even after the utilization of penicillin turned into the standard treatment for syphilis during the 1940s, these men kept on being denied treatment without being allowed a chance to leave the examination. The investigation was, in the end, ceased simply after subtleties were unveiled known to the general by writers and activists. It is currently generally perceived that analysts need to think about issues of equity and reasonableness at the cultural level.

In 1997, 65 years after the Tuskegee Syphilis Study started and 25 years after it finished, President Bill Clinton officially apologized in the interest of the US government to the individuals who were influenced. Here is a selection from the statement of regret:

“So today America does remember the hundreds of men used in research without their knowledge and consent. We remember them and their family members”. “Men who were poor and African American, without resources and with few alternatives, they believed they had found hope when they were offered free medical care by the United States Public Health Service”. “They were betrayed”.

Principle IV: Respecting People’s Rights and Dignity

The fourth principle is “respecting people’s rights and dignity”. Scientists must regard individuals’ privileges and respect as people. One component of this is regarding their self-governance—their entitlement to settle on their own decisions and take their activities liberated from compulsion. The essential significance here is the idea of educated assent. This implies specialists get and report individuals’ consent to partake in an investigation in the wake of having educated them regarding all that may sensibly be required to influence their choice. Consider the members of the Tuskegee study. Although they consented to partake in the examination, they were not informed that they had syphilis yet would be denied treatment for it. Had they been educated this essential reality concerning the examination, it appears to be likely that they would not have consented to take an interest. Moreover, had members in Milgram’s investigation been informed that they may be “decreased to a jerking, faltering wreck,” it appears to be likely that a large number of them would not have consented to take an interest. In neither of these examinations did members give genuinely educated assent.

Another component of regarding individuals’ privileges and poise is regarding

their protection—their entitlement to choose what data about them is imparted to other people. This implies scientists must look after classification, which is a deal to avoid unveiling members' very own data without their assent or some proper lawful approval.

5.2. Lessons: Analytical Viewpoint

It might as of now be certain that moral clash in mental exploration is unavoidable. Since there is pretty much nothing, assuming any, psychological research that is hazard-free, there will quite often be a struggle among dangers and advantages. Exploration that is lucrative to one gathering (e.g., established researchers) can be unsafe to another (e.g., the examination members), making particularly troublesome tradeoffs. Additionally being honest with research members can make it troublesome or difficult to lead deductively substantial investigations on significant inquiries.

Numerous moral clashes are genuinely simple to determine. Almost everybody would concur that misdirecting research participants and afterwards exposing them to physical mischief would not be supported by filling a little hole in the exploration writing. Yet, numerous moral clashes are difficult to determine and skilful and good-natured analysts can differ about how to determine them. Consider, for instance, a real investigation on “individual space” led in a public men’s room (Middlemist, Knowles, & Matter, 1976) [13]. The scientists subtly watched their members see whether it took them longer to start peeing when there was another man (a confederate of the specialists) at a close-by urinal. While a few pundits discovered this to be an inappropriate attack on human nobility (Koocher, 1977) [14], the analysts had painstakingly thought about the moral clashes, settled them admirably well, and reasoned that the advantages of the examination exceeded the dangers (Middlemist, Knowles, & Matter, 1977) [15]. For instance, they had talked with some fundamental members and found that none of them was troubled by the way that they had been watched.

The point here is that even though it may not be conceivable to stop moral clash totally, it is conceivable to manage it mindfully and helpfully. All in all, this implies completely and cautiously considering the moral issues that are raised, limiting the dangers, and gauging the dangers against the advantages. It additionally implies having the option to disclose one’s moral choices to other people, looking for input on them, and at last assuming liability for them.

Once again let us look at data fabrication in psychological research. In 2011 Diederik Stapel, a conspicuous and very much respected social analyst at Tilburg University in the Netherlands, was found to have executed daring scholastic wrongdoing, creating data. Following a multi-college examination, Stapel admitted to having made-up the information for at any rate 55 investigations that he distributed in logical diaries since 2004. This disclosure came as a stun to specialists, including a portion of his associates who had invested energy and significant assets planning and directing examinations based on a portion of Stapel’s

deceitfully distributed discoveries. Much more heartbreakingly, Stapel uncovered that he had executed similar misrepresentation in 10 doctoral papers he supervised, activities that made damage the scholastic professions of his previous understudies. At a more broad level, notwithstanding, Stapel's activities incurred a genuine hit to the honour code that researchers comply with. Science is, all things considered, a mutual cycle of revelation that expects analysts to speak the truth about their work and discoveries, regardless of whether their examination speculations are upheld by the information they gather. Breaking this trust as genuinely as Stapel did subverts the whole establishment of this cycle. Stapel was suspended at Tilburg College. Furthermore, the American Mental Affiliation withdrew a Profession Direction Grant it had introduced to Stapel in 2009, and the Dutch government dispatched an examination concerning his abuse of exploration subsidizing. Stapel returned his "doctorate he received from the University of Amsterdam" and accepted that his "behaviour of the past years is inconsistent with the duties associated with the doctorate" and apologized by saying "I have failed as a scientist and researcher. I feel ashamed for it and have great regret" (Carey, 2011) [8].

A wide assortment of moral issues emerges in psychological research. Thoroughly considering them requires thinking about how every one of four good standards (gauging hazards against benefits, acting mindfully and with uprightness, looking for equity, and regarding individuals' privileges and respect) applies to every one of three gatherings of individuals (research members, society and science). Moral issues in psychological research are unavoidable. The psychologist must thoroughly consider the moral issues raised by their research, limit the dangers, gauge the dangers against the advantages, have the option to clarify their moral choices, look for input about these choices from others, and at last assume liability for them.

It is basic for psychological research to establish itself to propose a variation and to refresh the guideline for research with people to the attributes of humans and sociologies, customs, and advances. The allocation of assorted strategies, methods, and hypothetical models and the chance of making new different ones must be pictured.

The act of showing research morals is fitting to each analyst, experts, and understudies. It is likewise essential to building up their basic information about the access codes and requests for the execution of work. The hierarchical picture of college will be, like this, secured by the assurance that specialists follow moral standards. Not without talking about the potential outcomes of refreshing and transformation to new strategies. Analysts do their examinations since the start of the task until their distribution and input for social and mainstream researchers, not overlooking their individual and institutional members, for whom they have mentioned assent and arrangement.

Another significant perspective to be featured is the requirement of distributing and giving back procured information for the overall population being it

networks of intrigue or potentially the logical ones. This would be a demeanour which ought not to arrive at just the individuals who get public assets to play out their investigates, however to each individual that partake in research and share their time and vitality to create science. Giving back this information must be a need and considerably more underscored and requested than it is in the proposed goals. Public Relationship of Exploration in psychological science has a Morals Commission in Exploration, which is reading a proposition for the zone. It is trusted that the entire academic network may consider a portion of the focuses introduced in this write-up.

6. Conclusion

From the write-up, it is evident that ethical problems are very rampant in psychological research as well as research in general. Ethics play a role in the protection of subjects, falsification of data, plagiarism and malpractices. Hence psychological professionals must uphold all ethical codes and principles wherever they practice. Psychologists at all levels should realize that they have a responsibility in ensuring that they comply with ethical rules due to the direct influence of their work on their patients. It is also important to note that how ethical issues are handled affects the profession as well as individuals involved. Though the study was successful, it did not cover much literature concerning regional categorizations. Hence the need for a gigantic study to be conducted base on continent, regions, countries, etc. to unveil the particular parts of the world that practice most unethical research in psychology. Retraction watch was not also much considered in this current study, though it provided a list of retracted papers which could provide clues to fraudulent acts in psychological research, this should be considered in a newer study.

7. Recommendations

The environment is a major contributing factor to ethical problems if malpractices are continuously carried out and overlooked. It means that unethical practices thrive in particular environments that do not question certain practices. To salvage these problems, psychologists should actively participate in promoting ethical values, principles by scrutinizing data, methods of psychological examinations and various analytical techniques that can contribute to providing an ethically sound environment. Secondly, psychologists should consider reporting all unethical behaviour exhibited by their colleagues to their associations for appropriate actions to be taken. Any psychologist who condones such unethical behaviour should be disbarred along with the culprit and properly dealt with by the appropriate authorities.

Additionally, psychologists should consider constantly exchange ideas and psychological practices with their colleagues to listen to different perspectives of practice as well as ensure unethical practices are avoided.

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All data used for this manuscript are available upon a reasonable request.

Contributions

HDM conceptualized and drafted the manuscript, **BN** critically edited the manuscript, and **HDM** and **BN** reviewed and structured manuscript for publication, All authors finally read and approved the manuscript for publication.

Consent for Publication

We have all read the final manuscript and consented it for publication.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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