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# EDITORIAL

## RESEARCH DESIGN AND ETHICS IN RESEARCH

The existence of Committees on Ethics in Research are based on the need for an analysis of the adequacy of research projects involving human beings to the ethical directives and legal regulations. Within this adequacy there are two poles of concern. On the one side, the researcher with his creativeness and inexhaustible desire to seek answers for his questions. On the other side lays the object of research, the individual. Both need guidance and protection. Usually, the subject of research is the weak one, since he is the locus of the experimental intervention. In this connection, a key role of Ethical Committees is to assure the basic principle of individual rights, that is, to give the subject of research full condition to deliberate on his free participation in the study. More than that, it assures to the subject that no embarrassment will be imposed to him if he denies participation. Furthermore, the Committees represent protection to the researcher not only because they guarantee a multidisciplinary reading of his project but also that through the endorsement granted by a group that, following the recommendation of the National Commission of Ethics in Research (CONEP), freedom and self-determination in their report rest assured. In addition, its pluralistic and non-corporative character, with representatives of different segments of the society, give to it legitimacy and adhesion to the principle of social control (SOUZA, 2003).

In fact, progressively, research institution have adhered to the recommendations of the CONEP and, presently, Ethical Committees are a reality in most of these institutions and the submission of projects to the Committees is being incorporated as a mandatory step in the research process, that has also been incorporated as a routine by the researchers.

In what concerns the internal affairs of the Committees there is a topic that arises with certain relevance – their role facing the project design and its relation to ethics in research.

Taking into consideration that the role of Ethical Committees is to analyze the ethics of the research projects, it can be assumed that the methodological aspects pertain to the Scientific Boards or Research Committees. Their responsibility is to analyze the pertinence of objectives, definition of samples and methodological proposals, among others. It is important to stress that, from the ethical point of view, concern with the individual, the object of the study, should always prevail over the interest of science – this is a basic principle in the relation between methodology and ethical positioning. In this regard, in some instances, members of Ethical committees tend to focus their attention to the analysis of the structural aspects of the research, superimposing their role over that of the Scientific Boards and, most frequently, establishing equivocal connections of ethical aspects to pure methodological aspects.

This issue should be discussed with some caution since it poses two slopes of opposing relevance. First of all, it is important to stress that the ethical content of a project should be an early concern of the researcher himself. Thus, he should be the first to analyze the ethical aspects of his proposal. This positioning, once incorporated to his research routine, mainly by mean of including this topic in the curricula of under-graduated and graduated courses (OSSWALD, 2003), will make the work all the more easier to members of Ethical Committees.

In one side we face the aspect of the experiment's design linked to its objectives and justification. It should be a role of the Scientific Boards to analyze and purify this design. In addition, these boards study the pertinence of the proposal to the research lines of the institution. Certainly, an ethical glance is made but it is neither mandatory nor peculiar.

In the other side we meet this same design under a new prism – that of ethics. Now, it is a duty of the Ethical Committees to focus on the pertinence of the design to the proposed objective and to consider the cost-benefit relationship, taking as basic principle that, as mentioned earlier, the concern with the subject – the individual – should always prevail over the interest of science.

The duality of this question, centered in a double sight on the design, refers more properly to the point that the Ethical Committees have not, as their primary mission, to express opinion on the methodological preferences of the researcher, since it is a role of the Scientific Board. However, it has been observed that fre-

quently the methodological aspects have a closer connection to ethics than one can primarily perceive. In fact, a methodological inadequacy may be an ethical inadequacy. In this regard, it has been suggested to make joint meetings with member of both Ethical Committees and Scientific Boards (GOLDIM et al., 1998). However, it should be stressed that methodological preferences should also not be misinterpreted as methodological inadequacies. Here lays the need for certain separation on the ethical glance and the structural one. Thus, it seems that the proposal of conjoint meetings is the best choice. On the other hand, this duality calls the attention to the fact that members of Ethical Committees need enough background, although guaranteeing the multidisciplinary aspect, to face the great challenge of protect primarily the integrity of the individual without hastily preventing the potential benefits resulting from the proposal being analyzed. As a matter of fact, there are relevant topics that are specific to Ethical Committees and one, most relevant among others, is the ethical principle of justice in which basis should the research proposal be evaluated in terms of their social and scientific relevance, to warrant equity of the benefits coming out of the results (SPINETTI; FORTES, 2003).

If this is fully understood and incorporated by members of Ethical Committees their role will be improved and, simultaneously, increased protection will be granted to the subject of the research and there will be a reduction in equivocal interferences in the creative process of the researcher.

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