



**WOMEN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCHERS OF
KENYA**

RESEARCH ETHICS POLICY

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Introduction

The purpose of the WERK Research and Ethics Policy & Procedures Guidelines is to provide a reference point for research work. They provide a framework within which consistent decisions are made and promote research ethics in the way researchers are treated and should work. These policies are subject to modification or further development in response to changing circumstances. In this regard, WERK reserves the right to delete, change, and add any other policy. All employees and members will be subject to the policies and procedures contained in these guidelines without exception.

Rationale

The WERK Policy on Research Ethics aims to ensure that

- An ethical and scientific intellectual culture prevails among its employees and members
- The rights and interests of human participants are protected. This is particularly important where information gathered has the potential to invade the privacy and dignity of participants, and where participants are vulnerable owing to their youth, age, poverty, disease, ignorance or powerlessness.
- Research is ethical in increasingly diverse research areas. Examples are qualitative and quantitative research, and collaborative research between international researchers and host country institutions. Such collaboration raises particular ethical issues, which include the possible exploitation of vulnerable populations, intellectual property rights of indigenous people and benefit for the host country.
- Ethical and scientific soundness of research is not compromised where lack of funding limits opportunities for research and force cost-saving procedures

Objectives

The Policy on Research Ethics is not intended to restrict or discourage research at WERK. On the contrary, this policy aims to enable researchers to:

1. Provide an enabling environment for making ethics an integral part of the planning and methodology of research.
2. Preserve and promote the autonomy, quality, legitimacy and credibility of research especially when confronted with undue influence or pressure which may compromise their integrity or that of their research.
3. Protect and promote the rights of research participants and honour their trust in researchers and research.
4. Strengthen the research ethics review system in the organization where research involves human participants, animals, or other living or genetically modified organisms.

WERK promotes the following four internationally established and accepted moral principles of ethics as bases for research:

1. **Autonomy** (research should respect the autonomy, rights and dignity of research participants)
2. **Beneficence** (research should make a positive contribution towards the welfare of people)

3. **Non-maleficence** (research should not cause harm to the research participant(s) in particular or to people in general)
 4. **Justice** (the benefits and risks of research should be fairly distributed among people)
- These principles are not ranked in any order of preference. In disputes a balance between the four principles should be pursued.

General Research Ethics Principles

In addition to, and expanding on, the above moral principles, the following ten general ethics principles should be adhered to by all WERK researchers. Again, the ethical principles may not, by themselves, resolve all ethical problems and dilemmas which confront researchers. Researchers may be required to balance the demands made by moral principles of research and to privilege one principle over another, depending on the context and circumstances of the research involved.

1. Essentiality and relevance

Before undertaking research adequate consideration will be given to existing literature on the subject or issue under study, and to alternatives available.

2. Maximization of public interest and of social justice

All research will be carried out for the benefit of society, and with the motive of maximizing public interest and social justice. All efforts will be made to make public in an appropriate manner and form, and at an appropriate time, information on the research undertaken, as well as the results and implications of the completed research.

3. Competence, ability and commitment to research

Researchers will be professionally and personally qualified to undertake specific research. Commitment to research in general and to the relevant subject in particular remains an essential prerequisite for good and ethical research.

4. Respect for and protection of participants' rights

Researchers shall respect and protect the dignity, privacy and confidentiality of participants and shall never expose them to procedures or risks not directly attached to the research project or its methodology. Research and the pursuit of knowledge will not be regarded as the supreme goal at the expense of participants' rights.

5. Informed and non-coerced consent

Autonomy requires that individuals' participation should be freely given, specific and based on informed consent. Direct or indirect coercion, as well as undue inducement of people in the name of research shall be avoided as this acts as a barrier to autonomous decision making and may result in people consenting against their better judgment to participate in studies involving risks.

6. Respect for cultural differences

Researchers shall treat research participants as unique human beings within the context of their community systems, and shall respect what is sacred and secret by tradition. Research shall preferably be undertaken with, and not merely on, an identified community. In some situations the consent of community may have to be obtained in addition to that of research participants.

7. Justice, fairness and objectivity

Criteria for the selection of participants of research should be fair, besides being scientific. Easily accessible individuals or groups should not be inordinately burdened with research being carried out repeatedly on them.

8. Integrity, transparency and accountability

The conduct of researchers shall be honest, fair and transparent. The contribution of other researchers or members of the research team shall be properly acknowledged. Researchers shall not abuse their positions or knowledge for personal power or gain.

9. Risk minimization

Researchers shall ensure that the actual benefits to be derived by the participants or society from the research clearly outweigh possible risks, and that participants are subjected to only those risks that are clearly necessary for the conduct of the research. Researchers shall ensure that the risks are assessed and that adequate precautions are taken to minimize and mitigate risks.

10. Non-exploitation

There shall be no exploitation of research participants, researchers (including student and junior members), communities, institutions or vulnerable people. There shall be benefit to a community in which research is conducted. As far as possible, communities shall receive feedback on research carried out on them.

Relationship between researchers and participants

1. Participants shall be seen as indispensable and worthy partners in research. Researchers shall respect and protect the rights and interests of participants at every stage and level of research.
2. The risks and benefits of the research to the prospective participants shall be fully weighed. Research that could lead to unnecessary physical, social and/or psychological harm shall not be undertaken. Researchers shall identify potential risks to participants and make provision for their avoidance. When risks form part of the conduct of the study, efforts shall be made for mitigation or protection.
3. In case harm, injury or loss of opportunity is incurred by participants, provision shall be made for compensation or payment for treatment with clear guidelines on how to obtain this. In the event of significant harm, participants shall be entitled to claim compensation regardless of whether or not there was negligence or legal liability on any other basis.
4. The criteria for selecting research participants shall be fair. Repeat studies shall not be done on the same group because of their easy accessibility, as this will make them bear an unfair share of the burden of participation. At the same time, it shall be borne in mind that no particular group(s) shall be unfairly excluded from research, as this could result in their unfair exclusion from the direct, indirect or potential benefits of research.
5. The relevant social, cultural and historical background of participants shall be taken into consideration in the planning and conduct of research.
6. Researchers shall not infringe on the autonomy of participants by resorting to coercion, undue influence or the promise of unrealistic benefits. Coercion may include taking undue

advantage of individuals or abusing the authority and influence of research. Inducement may include a promise of material or financial rewards, services or opportunities. No financial or other inducement shall be offered to participants, whether children or adults, parents or guardians of children taking part in research. Reimbursement of expenses (e.g. transport costs, meals) or compensation for time or effort expended or opportunity lost is allowed, on condition that all participants are offered similar rewards and that such rewards are aimed at recompensing only.

7. Researchers shall ensure that reimbursements or compensation to participants does not cause conflict in the group or community.
8. Research shall not unreasonably burden or exploit participants or communities, and shall not unnecessarily consume their time or make them incur loss of resources, opportunities or income.
9. Participants are autonomous agents who have the right to choose whether or not to be part of the research.

Informed Consent

1. Personal information shall only be collected and processed with the specific informed consent of the individual(s) involved. Only information that is relevant and necessary (i.e. not excessive) shall be collected.
2. Consent need not be obtained where personal information is involved.
3. The participation of individuals shall be based on their freely given, specific and informed consent. Researchers shall respect their right to refuse to participate in research and to change their decision or withdraw their informed consent given earlier, at any stage of the research without giving any reason and without any penalty.
4. Participants shall give their consent in writing. They, in turn, shall be given written information containing adequate details of the research.

Non-disclosure of all information

In some situations the methodology or practicalities of a research project may necessitate the concealment of information. This may be due to the possibility that behaviour changes may result or responses be affected when such details are revealed to participants. In such a case the researcher shall, before conducting the study, determine:

- (a) Whether the use of such a methodology is justified by the scientific, educational or applied benefits
- (b) Whether alternative procedures which do not require the concealment of information could be used instead .

If the use of such methodology is deemed justified by the researcher, the following shall be done:

1. A detailed justification for not revealing all necessary information and obtaining informed consent shall be provided in the research proposal and methodology and it shall be subject

to scientific and ethical reviews. Only after approval in both reviews, shall such research be undertaken.

2. The participants' right to privacy, anonymity and confidentiality gains additional importance in such cases as they do not know the real purpose or objective for which they provide information.
3. Even if both scientific and ethical reviews would allow that some of the information about the study need not be revealed, participants shall be provided the rest of the information. Under no circumstance however, shall researchers withhold information regarding risks, discomfort, unpleasant emotional experiences, or any such aspect that would be material in making the decision to participate.
4. Participants shall be given the reasons for not providing full information as soon as is possible after completion of the research. Where needed, services such as counselling and referral shall be offered.

Vulnerable participants

1. Researchers should be concerned particularly about the rights and interests of vulnerable participants, such as children (i.e. those individuals under the age of 18 years), the elderly, pregnant women, people with mental impairment, prisoners, students and persons in dependent relationships, the disabled, indigenous people and indigents.
2. Research results that can be obtained if carried out on adults should never be done with children. Children should participate only when their participation is indispensable to the research. The protection and best interests of children are of prime importance.
3. Therapeutic research or experimentation on a child under the age of 18 years may be conducted only if it is in the best interests of the child, and if the consent of both the child (if he or she is capable of understanding) and of his or her parent or guardian, has been obtained.
4. Non therapeutic research or experimentation may only be conducted on a child under the age of 18 years with the consent of the following persons: the teacher responsible for the child, the parent or guardian of the child, and the child if he or she is capable of understanding. The teacher may not give consent if the research or experimentation poses a significant risk to the health of the child.

Privacy, Anonymity and Confidentiality

1. All research participants have the right to privacy to the extent permitted by law (e.g. child abuse cases shall be reported to the appropriate authorities in terms of the law).
2. Privacy includes autonomy over personal information, anonymity and confidentiality, especially if the research deals with stigmatizing, sensitive or potentially damaging issues or information. When deciding on what information should be regarded as private and confidential, the perspective of the participant(s) on the matter shall be respected.
3. All personal information and records provided by participants shall remain confidential. When conducting interviews it shall be made clear that confidentiality and anonymity

will be safeguarded. Whenever it is methodologically feasible, participants shall be allowed to respond anonymously or under a pseudonym to protect their privacy.

4. All personal information obtained directly or indirectly on or about the participants (e.g. names obtained by researchers from hospital and school records), as well as information obtained in the course of research which may reveal the identity of participants, and shall remain confidential and anonymous. This guarantee shall also be given when researchers ask consent to use data which is not already available within the public domain (e.g. classified data on prisoners held by the Department of Correctional Services).
5. In the case of covert observation (e.g. of a public scene) steps shall be taken to ensure that the information will not be used or published in a form in which the individuals could be identified.
6. Researchers shall maintain privacy, anonymity, and confidentiality of information in collecting, creating, storing, accessing, transferring and disposing of personal records and data under their control, whether these are written, automated or recorded in any other medium, including computer equipment, graphs, drawings, photographs, films or other devices in which visual images are embodied.
7. Researchers shall make appropriate arrangements for the preservation and confidentiality of research records for one year after the submission of the report or the results.
8. Risk minimization shall be applied to research records. The possibility of a breach of confidentiality and anonymity should be anticipated, addressed and explained to the participants as an attendant risk.
9. Codes or other identifiers shall be used to break obvious connections between data and individuals/organizations/institutions where possible. Where there is a mixture of information obtained from the public domain and information obtained with the participants' informed consent, no traceable link shall be left between the two sets of information.
10. Confidentiality and anonymity of participants and their localities shall be maintained when reporting to clients/sponsors/funders. Participants shall not be identified or made identifiable in the report unless there are clear reasons for doing so. If the researcher or institution intends to identify participants or communities in the report, their informed consent allowing such disclosure shall be obtained in writing.
11. Research findings published in the public domain (e.g. theses and articles) which relate to specific participants (e.g. organizations or communities) shall protect their privacy. Identifiers which could be traced back to the participants in the study shall be removed. However, public interest may outweigh the right to privacy, and may require that participants be named in reports (e.g. when child labour is used by a firm).
12. Participants' consent shall be sought where data identifying them are to be shared with individuals or organizations not in the research team. They shall be provided with information about such individuals or organizations (their names, addresses etc).
13. The obligation to maintain privacy, anonymity and confidentiality extends to the entire research team, other researchers at WERK, WERK administrative employees, and all

those (members of WERK) not directly associated with the research who may possibly have access to the information.

International collaborative research involving communities

In international collaborative research the parties are host country institutions, collaborating country institutions, researchers from both, research participants and/or communities.

There shall be clear justification for collaborative research and why it needs to be carried out in a particular community. Unless there is clear justification, no research shall be done in a host country that could just as easily be done in a collaborating country.

1. There shall be clear potential benefit to the community being researched
2. Research involving human participants may not commence without ethics approval by the WERK Executive Officer.
3. Research may not commence without informed consent from participants and/or communities.
4. There shall be no exploitation of WERK, researchers, research participants or communities.
5. Funders, sponsors and clients shall accept responsibility for payment of compensation for research injury, if agreed to in writing.
6. Institutions and researchers shall assist indigenous communities and traditional societies to protect their knowledge and resources, and shall respect what is sacred and secret by tradition.
7. Those involved in international collaborative research shall have some understanding of, and be sensitive to, the social, economic and political conditions in which the research is carried out. This will alert them to the need to protect research participants who are, for example, subject to deprivations through poverty